

Marx and Lukács: Reason and Revolution in the Philosophy of Praxis

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Table of Contents

Preface

1. The Philosophy of Praxis
2. The Demands of Reason
3. Reification and Rationality
4. The Realization of Philosophy
5. History and Nature
6. Reconciliation with Nature

Preface

It is one of the great ironies of intellectual history that Marx and Lukács failed to appreciate the significance of their own early works. Marx's *Manuscripts* were written in 1844 but had to wait nearly 100 years to see the light of day. Since its publication this unfinished early work has come to rival *Capital* as the text of reference for Marxists. During the first half century after the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács's book became an underground classic, rejected by its author and known only to a few European scholars. The seminal importance of this early work was only widely recognized in the 1970s.

The long eclipse of these books, left to what Engels once called "the nibbling of the mice," can be explained by their transitional position in the intellectual biographies of their authors. Both were trained as philosophers and steeped in romantic revolutionism. Marx's *Manuscripts* and Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* were written at similar turning points in their authors' spiritual trajectories, at times when they felt the need to move beyond these intellectual origins and believed they could do so without violent rupture through a dialectical transcendence. Later, they judged this transcendence inadequate, still internal to positions they uncompromisingly rejected in elaborating their mature outlook. There is little doubt that after the break their judgment on their early work was too harsh, that it contains more of value and had more impact on the later work than the authors were willing to concede.

The romantic influence is undoubtedly present in these early writings. By romanticism is usually meant that trend in modern culture which exalts subjectivity against objectivity, life against rationality, concreteness against abstraction. Certainly the antagonism of Marx and Lukács toward the oppressive formalism of capitalist social

life, analyzed and condemned in parallel critiques of "alienation" and "reification," is to some degree tributary of that trend. And yet it would grossly distort the theories of alienation and reification to reduce them to a romantic protest against reason as is frequently suggested by contemporary critics.

While Marx and Lukács were influenced by the romantic critique of capitalism, they were still more profoundly influenced by the Hegelian critique of that critique. For Hegel, as for a number of other major figures in modern thought, romanticism has the value of a transcended moment, playing a propaedeutic role in the development of a rational outlook on the world that is not merely philistine and complacent but critical and rich in inwardness. It was Hegel who first systematically elaborated this "post-romantic" reconciliation with rational necessity and human finitude that is defining for the "mature" personality of modern men and women.

The difficult and ambiguous program of the early Marx and Lukács involved preserving the moment of revolt in romanticism without recapitulating the subjectivistic errors so effectively criticized by Hegel. I will show that they are only partially successful in this task, but also that the task itself was well chosen and indeed still an obligatory one for any critical theory. Marx and Lukács approached this task with a similar method, which I will call "cultural" because of its orientation toward the most general patterns of meaning and purpose of entire societies. Just such a pattern is signified by the concepts of alienation and reification which they employ to analyze capitalist society. At the same time, these concepts are derived from reflection on the philosophical tradition and function in the context of the authors' discussion of philosophical problems. This unity of cultural, philosophical and political concerns is the distinctive trait of their early method.

For Marx and Lukács, philosophy is the discipline in which the operative horizon of everyday life is raised to consciousness and subjected to rational criticism. On this basis they argue that the conceptual dilemmas or "antinomies" of philosophy are symptomatic of deep cultural contradictions of the philosopher's society. Their most challenging conclusion is the demand for a "transcendence" of philosophy as such through the practical resolution of these contradictions in social life. This is perhaps the least well understood aspect of the early "philosophy of praxis" of Marx and Lukács, and the study of it will be the major theme uniting the various investigations which make up this book.

Both the early Marx and Lukács take up the philosophical tradition's fundamental moral-political values, freedom and equality, the realization of which they transpose from the speculative to the social domain. They depart from the tradition in arguing that under capitalism freedom and equality cannot be achieved by isolated individuals subject to the laws of the market. This argument is the bridge between philosophy and social theory for, once the individual subject is dismissed only a collective subject can realize the values of philosophy. But a collective subject is an object in the world, a phenomenon among others. As such it cannot be understood on the model of the cogito or transcendental subject of the philosophical tradition but requires an entirely different approach. And yet, Marx and Lukács are still bound to that tradition by its values, which they rethink in social terms.

This hybrid approach leads to complications. The freedom of a collective subject is limited by its needs. These expose it to determination by nature on the one hand, and the economy on the other. The abstract individual subject of bourgeois philosophy

transcends both sources of determination. It is purified of its materiality and enabled thereby to know the truth and even, in an idealistic framework, to constitute reality. But such a transcendence is unthinkable for a social group. Purified of materiality a collective subject is an impossibility since it is only through material ties of one sort or another that this subject can form. Abstract from geography, race, language, or technical networks and nothing remains to hold the individuals together in a group. But include those factors in its definition and it is inescapably bound by needs. The objectivity of the collective subject situates it squarely within the real world.

Both common sense and the philosophical tradition would argue that collective subjects, should they exist at all, have therefore no ontological significance. They are simply contingent assemblages of separate individuals with political powers and rights, perhaps, but no fundamental reality. If they had accepted this view, Marx and Lukács would have made a contribution to political philosophy but beyond that they would have had to rely on one or another traditional philosophical approach. But neither Marx nor Lukács did accept this conclusion. Rather, they argue, the collective subject of political philosophy must take over all the same powers the individual subject enjoyed in the old philosophy. Somehow nature and the economy are to be understood as constituted by a subject situated within them and dependent on them. Is this not a vicious circle? Why choose such an improbable position?

I will argue that they brave the paradoxes that result from the move to a collective subject out of fidelity to the ambition of traditional philosophy to explain nature starting out from human being, for example, from innate ideas, sensation, or the forms and categories of transcendental subjectivity. These traditional explanatory schemes depend on an individual contemplative subject. But Marx and Lukács argue that the individual is derivative of one or another community in which it necessarily has its roots. The individual subject cannot therefore resolve the ultimate problems of philosophy and the attempt to do so results in the antinomies philosophy fails to resolve. Thus they propose to substitute the activity of a collective subject performing its same functions. With this they believe they have the key to a resolution of the antinomies in practical life.

The fact that Marx and Lukács share this conclusion, is all the more remarkable since Lukács was unaware of the existence of Marx's *Manuscripts* when he wrote *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács found in *The German Ideology* and *Capital* traces of Marx's early philosophy of praxis. This suggests a theory of the continuity of Marx's intellectual development which I elaborate in a specifically Lukácsian interpretation of the early Marx. Lukács himself I approach from the standpoint of the two major schools of Marxist thought on which his early work had a profound influence. The Frankfurt School of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse seized on Lukács's concept of reification which, in combination with other sources, became the basis of its critique of positivism and its dialectical reformulation of Marxist theory. Somewhat later, in the period after World War II, French Marxism came under the influence of the early Lukács as a whole generation of social theorists sought radical alternatives to the dominant Stalinist orthodoxy. The most famous text of this trend is Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Adventures of the Dialectic*, which first introduced the term "Western Marxism" to describe the tradition stemming from *History and Class Consciousness*. The French were primarily interested in Lukács's theory of class consciousness. They saw in this theory an alternative to the official Marxist dogma of the party as surrogate subject of the revolution. With Lukács they reaffirmed the primacy of working class "praxis,"

articulated ideologically by the party but not replaced by it.

I had the good fortune to study with representatives of both these schools of thought, with Herbert Marcuse and Lucien Goldmann. Starting out from the disparate traditions and emphases they represent, I propose a new interpretation designed to reestablish the unity of Lukács's early Marxism. This background may help to explain the difference between my approach to Lukács and that of English and American scholars such as Gareth Stedman Jones and George Lichtheim, who condemn the theory of reification as irrationalist and in the theory of class consciousness as Stalinist. These very negative evaluations square neither with the content nor the intellectual impact of Lukács's text.

When Lukács is compared, not with Bergson or Stalin, but with Marx's early philosophical works, a very different picture emerges. Like the early Marx, the early Marxist Lukács is a critic of the "alienation of reason" in modern capitalist society. But that critique is by no means irrationalist; rather, it aims at the establishment of a dialectical paradigm of rationality suited to the task of social self-understanding and human liberation. Such a dialectical rationality can be of no service to authoritarian regimes, but only to a socialist culture of self-rule. Not the least important dimension of the early Marx and Lukács is the contribution they make to defining the broad outlines of such a culture.

* * *

The writing of this book has placed me in the debt of many people. Lucien Goldmann and Herbert Marcuse introduced me to Marxist philosophy and to the work of Lukács. My wife, Anne-Marie Feenberg, and Jerry Doppelt read chapter after chapter and frequently convinced me to make changes for the better. Many others read portions of the manuscript and offered criticism and encouragement. I recall with pleasure long and often fruitful exchanges with Al Gouldner, Stanley Aronowitz, Doug Kellner, Bill Leiss, Stanley Rosen, and Mark Poster.

Chapter 1 **The Philosophy of Praxis**

Marx and Lukács

In this chapter, I will discuss the method of the early Marx from a Lukácsian perspective, as a background to the exposition of Lukács's own parallel attempt to resolve the problems first posed by Marx. There are, of course, considerable differences between these thinkers, and there is always the risk that in comparing them in this manner the identity of the one will be submerged in that of the other. I will naturally do my best to avoid an artificial identification of the two positions where they do actually differ; however, I will argue that in spite of real differences we are dealing here with a specific philosophical doctrine, which might be called "philosophy of praxis," and which is shared by a number of thinkers.^[1] The identification of such doctrines, which ultimately are defined in ideal-types such as "empiricism" or "idealism," is an important, even if necessarily inconclusive contribution of philosophy to the history of ideas.

The method of Marx and Lukács in their early philosophical works is very different from the "scientific socialism" erected later on the basis of historical observation and

economic theory. In 1843 and 1844 Marx developed a philosophy of revolution which he seems to have intended as a foundation for economic studies such as those he presented in his later works. From 1919 to 1923 Lukács elaborated a philosophical approach supplementing Marxist economics with a theory of revolution. For both the early Marx and Lukács, such central Marxist concepts as the proletariat and socialism were not first developed through empirical research. Instead, as philosophers they set out from a critical discussion of the philosophical tradition in the course of which they *deduced* the characteristic historical concepts of Marxism. Included in this deduction is the concept of revolution, which plays a pivotal *methodological* role in the philosophies of Marx and Lukács.

In interpreting Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* as a philosophy of praxis, I have been obliged to choose positions in some of the numerous debates over this early work. It will be useful at the outset to make these positions explicit by situating this interpretation with respect to some others. I will not review the enormous literature on the *Manuscripts*; only two facets of it are relevant here, the debates over the *ontological* and the *normative* character of social categories in the *Manuscripts*.^[2] At issue is more than a matter of textual exegesis. The larger question concerns whether the *Manuscripts* are a philosophy of praxis, as I am engaged in defining that term, or, on the contrary, a far less ambitious methodological preliminary or ethical complement to economic research within the framework of the traditional concept of reason.

I have done my best to show the former, that Marx founds a new concept of reason in revolution through an *ontological* treatment of *social* categories. This approach brings to the fore all that links the project of the early Marx to that of Lukács. 1923 Lukács was of course unaware of the existence of Marx's *Manuscripts*, which had not yet been published when he wrote *History and Class Consciousness*. The similarities I will identify are all the more significant as indicating the inner connection of the philosophy of praxis with Marxism.

In fact, *Capital* is the basis of Lukács's philosophy of praxis and not the early work of Marx. Now, *Capital* is a quite self-consciously unphilosophical work, in spite of Marx's prefatory acknowledgment of Hegel's influence. In it Marx is careful to minimize the use of philosophical terminology and to avoid the exploration of properly philosophical problems. Yet we now know on the basis of extensive textual evidence just how complex were the philosophical considerations behind *Capital*. The link between the *Manuscripts* and the published writings of Marx's maturity is supplied by his own draft of *Capital*; but the publication of this text, the *Grundrisse*, was delayed until the Second World War.^[3] These textual absences, combined with the image Marx wished to project of his work in *Capital*, seemed to authorize a scientific interpretation of Marx's later doctrine Lukács first challenged from a dialectical perspective.

Lukács made the connection between Marxism and philosophy (that is to say, between Marx and Hegel), primarily through a reflection on Marx's methodology in his economic writings, and only secondarily on the basis of those of Marx's comments on philosophical matters with which he was acquainted. This is possible because, as Ernest Mandel remarks, "the concept of alienation . . . is part of the mature Marx's *instrumentarium*."^[4] Lukács was in fact the first to show this, to notice and explain not merely the influence of Hegel on Marx's early political essays, or on the general Marxian "worldview," but on the concepts and method of *Capital*. He reevaluated Marx's famous "coquetting" with Hegel, and showed that in that work, "a whole series of categories of

central importance and in constant use stem directly from Hegel's Logic.”[5]

Lukács reconstructed a philosophy of praxis from the methodological traces of Marx's own philosophical position visible in his economic writings. The result of this effort is not identical with the position of either the *Manuscripts* or the *Grundrisse*; nevertheless, it is impressive to what extent Lukács's somewhat speculative extrapolations from Marx's published work can find support in these unpublished ones. Most important, Lukács's philosophy of praxis has remarkable structural similarities to that of Marx, notably insofar as Lukács develops an original critique of philosophy paralleling Marx's own. A large part of the reason for this convergence between them may be biographical. Like Marx, Lukács was deeply schooled in Hegelian dialectics and so when he sought to develop a Marxist philosophy, he returned precisely to the Hegelian doctrine from which Marx set out. Yet this biographical coincidence does not quite explain the similarity of the transformation undergone by Hegel's dialectic at their hands. It is this link, mediated by the supposedly “scientific” work *Capital*, which bespeaks an affinity of Marxism for philosophy of praxis.

The Antinomies

The defining trait of philosophy of praxis is the attempt to show that the “antinomies” of philosophy can only be resolved in history. The concept of “antinomy” employed here is derived from Hegel, for whom it signifies the ever widening gap between subject and object in modern culture. Ever since Descartes distinguished the two substances, philosophy and life had become more and more sharply sundered in accordance with this distinction. Rich and complex theories of the subjective dimension of being pondered the meaning of freedom, value, political ideals, while equally powerful and encompassing theories of the objective dimension of being explained the laws of necessity in nature and history. From his earliest to his last works, Hegel saw his task as cataloguing the resulting contradictions in modern culture and transcending them in a dialectical conception of being that would take into account both its subjective and objective dimensions.

For Hegel the transcendence of the antinomies was a theoretical task, although he did believe that the theory could only be brought to perfection under specific historical conditions which happened to be those of his own time and place. Philosophy of praxis begins with a critique of the conservative implications of this resolution of the antinomies. Marx argued that because Hegel could not conceive of really radical changes in modern culture, he treated temporary historical conditions as though they were eternal necessities. Lukács's claimed that the antinomies would be transcended by social revolution and not by philosophical speculation.

Had Marx confined himself to arguing this position in relation to the antinomies of moral and political life, he would have arrived at a new philosophy of value based on the demand for social change. This new philosophy would have been compatible with a traditional ontology and might have been formulated as a “left” variant of Hegel's philosophy. Marx's startling innovation was to include *all* the antinomies, those relating to epistemology and ontology as well as the moral and political ones, in his theory of revolution. Marx thus arrived at the astounding proposition that social change could not only accomplish such goals as reconciling individual and society, moral responsibility and self-interest, but that it could also unite subject and object, thought and being, man and nature.

This proposition has a number of paradoxical corollaries from which we must not shrink in interpreting the early Marx. As we will see, Lukács too shares a similar approach. When philosophy of praxis contends that human action is philosophically pertinent not just in ethics or politics but in all domains, it is asserting a wholly original *ontological* position. For this philosophy, human action touches being as such, and not simply those special domains we usually conceive as affected by our activities. In somewhat different terms, essentially this same requirement can be formulated as the transcendence of the antinomy of value and fact, “Ought” and “Is.” For, if human action can affect being, then values do not confront a normless and humanly indifferent reality, but rather represent its highest potentialities.

This position is a coherent one only where being is interpreted through a special sphere in which human being is actually able to transform the objects on which it acts. Then the apparently humanly indifferent spheres, such as nature, can be ontologically subordinated to those spheres within which human being can affect the substratum of reality. Hence Marx writes that “nature too, taken abstractly, for itself, and rigidly separated from man, is *nothing* for man.”[6]

The attempt to understand being in general through human being is a kind of inverted philosophical anthropology. Marx and Lukács share this approach with philosophers such as Feuerbach and Heidegger, with this difference: the latter conceive human being metaphysically, and so construct speculative philosophies with moralistic overtones. For Marx and Lukács, on the contrary, history is the “paradigmatic order” for the interpretation of being generally.[7]

Thus, for this philosophy, “reality” is history, and history itself is to be understood as in essence an object of human practice. The ontologically significant relation between human being and being in general is now social action because history is constituted in such action. As Lukács puts it, “We have . . . made our own history and if we are able to regard the whole of reality [*Wirklichkeit*] as history (i.e. as *our* history, for there is no other), we shall have raised ourselves in fact to the position from which reality can be understood as our ‘action.’”[8]

Because the philosophy of praxis conceives being as history and history as the product of human action, it can *mutatis mutandis* conceive of human action as pertinent to being. Action takes on a universal significance, going beyond the social world to affect being as such. For philosophy of praxis, history is ontology and the becoming of the human species is the privileged domain within which the antinomies of philosophy can finally be resolved. As Marcuse writes in an early essay on Marx's *Manuscripts*: “The history of man is at the same time the process of ‘the whole of nature’; his history is the ‘production and reproduction’ of the whole of nature, furtherance of what exists objectively through once again transcending its current form.”[9]

Throughout this book, I will be concerned with the implications of this remarkable proposition. These implications can be considered under two main headings. First, there is the dimension of philosophy of praxis concerned with the resolution of social antinomies through the disalienation or dereification of social life. The discussion of this social dimension of the theory will occupy the major portion of this book. As I have argued above, the philosophical ambition of Marx and Lukács goes beyond social theory, for they claim that all objectivity can be disalienated starting out from the disalienation of society. This wider claim indicates a second dimension of the theory concerned with

the ontological generalization of results of the social analysis. This most daring dimension of the philosophy of praxis will be treated separately in the concluding chapter of this book. There I will consider objections to the philosophy of praxis and attempt to formulate an original response drawing on the resources of philosophy of praxis itself. Before turning to the social issues that will be the concern of the larger portion of this book, I would like to consider briefly some of the objections to viewing Marx's philosophy of praxis as a contribution to ontology.

Ontology or History

The interpretation of Marx's *Manuscripts* as a philosophy of praxis is contested by the Frankfurt School. Alfred Schmidt's careful study of Marx's concept of nature attempts to situate the *Manuscripts* at an equal distance from a materialist ontology and a radical historicism such as that described above. Jürgen Habermas also rejects the interpretation of Marx's *Manuscripts* as a philosophy of praxis. Habermas argues that the early Marx distinguishes between nature as such, and nature as it enters the historical sphere through labor, and which therefore has a social character. This would restrict Marx's conclusions to society, in the larger framework of some traditional ontology in which being is essentially independent of humanity. Within this same tradition, however, it is customary to interpret Lukács's early Marxism critically as a philosophy of praxis. Thus the similarities I identify between these two basic sources of Marxist philosophy are denied.

It is interesting to note that the other highly influential school of Marxist thought, that founded by Louis Althusser, makes no such distinction. Rejecting equally the early Marxist thought of both Marx and Lukács, the Althusserians see in them both a romantic refusal of scientific objectivity and the independence of nature. There is thus a certain unwitting convergence of Frankfurt School and Althusserian interpretations in that both emphasize the autonomy of nature as against philosophy of praxis and condemn as idealistic any doctrine that attempts to understand nature through history. I cannot consider these convergent critiques in detail. Here I would like simply to sketch the Frankfurt School's attempt to "save" the early Marx from historicism.

In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas does admit that Marx's text is ambiguous. He claims that the ambiguities have given rise to a "phenomenological strain of Marxism" which overlooks Marx's naturalism and for which, therefore, "the category of labor then acquires unawares the meaning of world-constituting life activity in general."^[10] Although Habermas includes Marcuse in this phenomenological tendency, in *Reason and Revolution* he formulates a position close to Schmidt's and Habermas' in denying the ontological status of social categories. Marcuse too notes the ambiguities of Marx's text; he writes of it: "All this has an obvious resemblance to Hegel's idea of reason. Marx even goes so far as to describe the self-realization of man in terms of the unity of thought and being."^[11] But, in fact, "Marx . . . detached dialectic from this ontological base. In his work, the negativity of reality becomes a historical condition which cannot be hypostatized as a metaphysical state of affairs."^[12]

Such an interpretation may explain Marx's later Marxism but it does not account for the *Manuscripts*. It is particularly significant that in the formulations of Habermas and Marcuse, the antinomies Marx attempted to transcend reappear as alternatives between which he is supposed to have chosen: naturalism or humanism, history or ontology. But Marx himself writes:

Communism as a fully developed naturalism is humanism, and as a fully developed humanism is naturalism. It is the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution.[13]

Marx would not have defined his own advance over Hegel as the demonstration that alienation is a historical category rather than an ontological one. Rather, his advance was to show that all ontology is historical in essence and that the dichotomy between being and history is therefore false. The idea that history, properly understood, has ontological significance is the main philosophical claim of philosophy of praxis. Marx did not choose between an ontological and a historical interpretation of the social categories; he chose both. Only such an understanding of the text can make sense of Marx's most striking utterances, such as the one just quoted, or the following: "Society is the accomplished union of man and nature, the veritable resurrection of nature, the realized naturalism of man and the realized humanism of nature." [14]

The Normative Dimension

The interpretation of the *Manuscripts* as a philosophy of praxis contributes to clarifying the debate concerning the "ethical" moment in Marx's early work. Marx's claim that the "human essence" is "alienated" under capitalism is frequently interpreted as implying an ethical ideal. Others see in the *Manuscripts* an attempt to transcend the opposition of value and fact presupposed by this interpretation. The debate over the *Manuscripts* is of course related to the larger debate over Marxism and ethics.[15] Considered as a philosophy of praxis, Marx's theory is unquestionably normative in some sense, but I argue that it is not based on an ethical conception.

What is at stake here is the dialectical character of Marx's theory, hence also his relation to Hegel. Were Marx to accept the dichotomy of value and fact, ethical and social reality, he would regress behind Hegel to a utopian-moralistic position like that of Bruno Bauer and Moses Hess. In his essay on Hess, Lukács showed that these Left Hegelians attempted to recover revolutionary possibilities by positing ethical values as the basis for knowledge of the future. They thus rejected Hegel's concrete analysis of and reconciliation with the present moment. But in the process, they lost Hegel's great advance over Kant and Fichte, his concept of being as continuous becoming. As Marcuse explains it, "Every state of existence has to be surpassed; it is something negative, which things, driven by their inner potentialities, desert for another state, which again reveals itself as negative, as limit." [16] It is through this conception that Hegel relativized ethical ideas as a moment in the real process of becoming of what is, and so went beyond utopian moralism. This Hegelian conception of development is also the philosophical basis of the Marxian idea of a "transition" to socialism, in contrast with utopian schemes of reform.[17]

Lukács discovers in this Hegelian dialectic of "Ought" and "Is" the basis of the Marxian critique of political economy as revolutionary science. He writes that

In contrast to Fichte with his revolutionary Utopia, Hegel developed very early on in his work the tendency to "understand what is," a tendency which originally pointed energetically in the direction of the future. His concern to comprehend the present as at once become and becoming is . . . the germ of a true historical

dialectics (the dialectics of history translated into thought). For it is precisely in the present that all forms of objectivity can be revealed quite concretely as processes, since it is the present which shows most clearly the unity of result and starting point of the process. Given that, the rejection of all “Oughts” and futuristic utopian thinking, the concentration of philosophy on knowledge of the present (grasped dialectically) emerges precisely as the only possible epistemological method of knowing what is really knowable about the future, the tendencies within the present which impel it really and concretely towards the future.[18]

On these terms, were Marx to posit the “human essence” as an ethical ideal, Hegelian philosophy would already have transcended it theoretically through the demonstration of the relative rationality of what is. Alienation might, like the police courts Hegel deduces from the Idea, remain as an unpleasant fact of practical life. But then so are fleas and measles. The indifference of philosophical reason to such matters, essentially to human happiness and fulfillment, is not arbitrary but expresses the actual limits of the social world. The demand for the abstract ideal is a moment of romantic negation necessarily frustrated by an objectivity which transcends it, that is to say, by reason itself. This philosophy is not overcome by the renewed positing of the ideal, but rather anticipates the latter and refutes it in advance.

Hegel's critique of Kant and of abstract ethical idealism influenced Marx to seek a basis for revolutionary theory in the tendencies of social reality, in a dialectic of ideal and real in history. In his early writings, Marx attempts to transfer the ideal concepts of political philosophy from the domain of pure thought to the domain of reality, where they can be treated as potentialities awaiting realization. The contradictions between philosophy and reality are reformulated as immanent contradictions in reality itself. The new method is neither speculative nor empirical, but synthesizes these contrary approaches in a reflective ideology-critique. This ideology-critique relativizes what is and what ought to be as contradictory tendencies actually inhabiting the real-in-process.

Thus Marx does not set out from a philosophically elaborated concept of the state, that might be immediately contrasted with the institutions he wishes to criticize. In fact, he dismisses this method contemptuously in a letter to Ruge: “Until now the philosophers had the solution to all riddles in their desks, and the stupid outside world simply had to open its mouth so that the roasted pigeons of absolute science might fly into it.”[19] Instead, the philosophical deduction of what ought to be must proceed from actual struggles in which the living contradiction of ideal and real appears. The appropriate role for the new philosopher consists in “explaining to the world its own acts,” showing that actual struggles contain a transcending content that can be linked to the concept of a rational social life. “The critic,” Marx writes, “therefore can start with any form of theoretical and practical consciousness and develop the true actuality out of the forms inherent in existing actuality as its ought-to-be and goal.”[20]

In these earliest “Marxist” writings, Marx can be seen struggling to release new grounds for revolution from the conservative Hegelian formulation of political philosophy. A generation later Engels summarized Marx's conclusion with admirable simplicity. Where Hegel had claimed that “All that is real is rational; and all that is rational is real,” for Marx:

The Hegelian proposition turns into its opposite through Hegelian dialectics itself: all that is real in the sphere of human history becomes irrational in the process of time, is therefore irrational by its very destination, is tainted beforehand with

irrationality; and everything which is rational in the minds of men is destined to become real, however much it may contradict existing apparent reality. In accordance with all the rules of the Hegelian method of thought, the proposition of the rationality of everything which is real resolves itself into the other proposition: All that exists deserves to perish.[21]

In sum, the only way *beyond* Hegel is *through* him. This passage Marx makes in the *Manuscripts*, where he is finally able to “develop the true actuality out of the forms inherent in existing actuality as its ought-to-be and goal.” There Marx identifies reason (true actuality) with the historically and socially mediated process of satisfying human needs and on that basis developing human individuality. Then the “existing actuality,” alienated capitalist society, is shown to be reason’s “unreasonable form,” which must be further mediated and overcome through revolution. The critique of political economy, which begins already in the *Manuscripts*, appears here as the derivation of socialist potentialities from the contradictions of the given capitalist forms. The “ought-to-be and goal” emerges from the dialectic of existence and essence as a demand of reason, a methodological precondition of rationality, and not as an ethical ideal.

As a philosopher of praxis, Marx attempts to reconstruct the concept of reason so that capitalist alienation appears as reason’s essential problem, a problem to be resolved through historical action. Marx takes what for Hegel and earlier philosophy is a mere social contingency, human suffering, and dignifies it with ontological status, not in order to attribute it to the human condition generally, but rather the better to comprehend the presuppositions of its historical transcendence. These presuppositions are preserved ideally in philosophy, in the concept of reason, and therefore Marx insists, against the reformers of the “practical political party,” that “You cannot abolish philosophy without realizing it.”[22]

The concept of an “*Aufhebung*” of philosophy also has a methodological side, with which we will be focally concerned in this book. Once again, it is by reference to the Frankfurt School that I will attempt to clarify the project of the early Marx and Lukács.

Meta-Theory as Ideology-Critique

The terms “meta-theory” and “meta-critique” have entered philosophy through Habermas’ use of them to refer to the study of the various forms of theory in the light of their intrinsic dependence on specific “knowledge-constitutive interests.”[23] These interests Habermas distinguishes from those of everyday practical affairs by their enormous generality. They are quasi transcendental conditions of possible objectivity for the spheres of knowledge they determine. Thus, for Habermas scientific knowledge is not really value-free, but is based on an interest in technical control that first generates for human thought the type of object studied by science.

The term “meta-theory” in this sense bears a useful resemblance to the method of Lukács and Marx in certain of their studies of the philosophical tradition. There is, however, a considerable difference between what I will call the “meta-theoretical” approach of philosophy of praxis and Habermas’s approach. His knowledge-constitutive interests are anthropological in their generality. The (relative) truth of knowledge is conserved in contact with these interests by reason of their very generality. Reductionism is thus avoided at the high price of a loss in sociological concreteness. Marx and Lukács offer no such theory of general anthropological interests. Instead, their meta-theory moves in the opposite direction, toward a domain of concreteness which is

claimed to be founding for the theoretical abstractions constructed on its basis. We might better compare this approach with that recommended by Whitehead in a different context:

I hold that philosophy is the critic of abstractions. Its function is the double one, first of harmonizing them by assigning to them their relative status as abstractions, and secondly of completing them by direct comparison with more concrete intuitions of the universe and thereby promoting the formation of more complete schemes of thought.[24]

In Marx and Lukács, of course, the aim of such criticism of abstractions is not to found a speculative metaphysics, but rather to achieve what might be called a *sociological desublimation* of the concepts of philosophy.

To some extent this difference in orientation, as compared with Habermas, may be due to the fact that the latter is primarily concerned to refute a supposedly value-free positivism, while Marx and Lukács reflect on social theory in a cultural climate deeply imbued by Kantianism. In Kantian philosophy the formal properties of rationality are abstracted as completely as possible from the particular contents on which the faculty of reason exercises itself. The Kantian system consists in the derivation of these formal properties as they relate to epistemology, ethics and aesthetics, as general preconditions for any and all knowledge and action in the corresponding domains of real life.

In their Kantian cultural climate, both Marx and Lukács follow in the footsteps of Hegel in attempting to resolve the antinomies of form and content that arise from this formalistic paradigm of rationality. To Hegel they owe dialectics as the method through which the opposites can be reconciled in a higher unity, a totality. The application of the concept of totality to the study of the historically given forms of rationality provides the basis for a social theory of knowledge which is not reductive, an ideology-critique in the most interesting sense of the term. The juxtaposition of the abstract theoretical concepts of philosophy with a specific social background both explains the impasses and antinomies of theory on a social basis, and shows a path to resolution through social action. Philosophy is not regarded as a mere rationalization of covert interests, nor as a merely passive reflection of production relations. Rather, it is the form in which the actual contradictions of social life are raised to consciousness *under the horizon* of the given society.

Susan Buck-Morss argues that Adorno's cultural criticism was deeply influenced by this method, as he discovered it in Lukács. She summarizes Lukács's approach lucidly as follows:

Instead of reducing bourgeois thought to the economic conditions of its production, Lukács argued that the nature of those conditions could be found within the intellectual phenomena themselves.... Once these thinkers accepted given social reality as the reality, they had to come upon a barrier of irrationality which could not be overcome (and which had led Kant to posit the thing-in-itself, because that barrier could not be removed from theory without being removed from society. Conversely, if theorists could see through the reified appearances, they would recognize that the antinomies of philosophy were due not to the inadequacies of reason, but to those of the reality in which reason tried to find itself.[25]

Much the same analysis could be made of Marx's early critique of political philosophy.

What makes the approach taken by Marx and Lukács unique and distinguishes it

not only from Kant but also from Hegel, is their belief that the primary antinomy to be overcome is that of traditional philosophy and social reality. Here the term “meta-theory” applies in a double sense. Not only do Marx and Lukács attempt to relate philosophical abstractions to the social lifeworld, but they claim to identify the intrinsic limitation of the method of abstractions in traditional philosophy. This limitation, they argue, is due to the tradition's systematic refusal to consider the philosophical implications of really fundamental social change. Because traditional philosophy assumes that the alienated foundations of the social order are rooted in the very nature of reality, it concludes that the antinomies can only be resolved speculatively, in thought, and formulates them in view of a conceptual resolution. The criterion of philosophical adequacy that guides concept formation in the tradition thus reflects an implicit sense of the limits of social change which Marx and Lukács challenge. For them, the resolution of the antinomies requires a radical social transformation unimagined or rejected as impossible by the tradition. Marx and Lukács defend their point of view by arguing that this transformation is possible, and on this basis they claim to offer an entirely new interpretation of the antinomies, freed from the limitations of the tradition.

Nevertheless, neither Marx nor Lukács simply dismiss philosophy. Rather, they proceed from the assumption that the split between the concept of reason, as elaborated in philosophy, and its concrete social substratum reflects contradictions in social reality and points the way toward the practical resolution of the latter. Despite its limits traditional philosophy was able to identify social potentialities, even if only in a speculative form. The problem now consists in reconstructing the insights of this philosophy in a new context, oriented toward practical social change. Marcuse summarizes this conclusion as follows: "The philosophical construction of reason is replaced by the creation of a rational society. The philosophical ideals of a better world and of true Being are incorporated into the practical aim of struggling mankind, where they take on a human form."[\[26\]](#)

In sum, the meta-theoretical approach in the sense the term will be used here consists in dialectically relativizing philosophical form and social content, and correspondingly, theory and practice. Marx and Lukács do not philosophize within the historically given tradition, presupposing the continuing validity of philosophy as such, and *eo ipso* of its forms of evidence and its problematics. Rather, they consider the tradition as essentially completed, and then proceed to study it from "outside," as a relative moment in a larger social process in which action can intervene. It is in this light, and not in some merely pragmatic sense of urgency, that we are to understand Marx's thesis: "Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is, to *change* it."[\[27\]](#)

A Note on Theory and Practice[\[28\]](#)

Within the tradition of Western Marxism, these rather opaque formulations of the theory-practice relation have a quite definite meaning. One of the aims of this book is to clarify that meaning as it is understood within that tradition. Since I am writing within that tradition myself, I will continue to use terms like “philosophy,” “theory,” “practice,” and phrases like “the unity of theory and practice,” “the realization of philosophy,” in much the sense that Marx and Lukács use them. Before proceeding on this basis, I would like to step briefly outside that framework to anticipate some objections to this usage. These objections might be put in the form of questions that implicitly challenge

the very idea of a unity of theory and practice or a realization of philosophy in Marx's and Lukács's sense. Here are some examples:

1. Marx and Lukács claim that they are “realizing” philosophy, putting theory into practice. How does this differ from “applying” theory to the solution of a practical problem?

2. Marx and Lukács claim that the philosophical tradition is finished, which would seem to mean that they themselves are not philosophers contributing to that tradition. Yet surely Marx's *Manuscripts* and Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* are philosophical works. Are they then philosophers, and if so how can they elaborate a philosophy on the basis of the proposition that philosophy is dead?

3. Marx and Lukács seem to say that only the revolution can “solve” philosophical problems, and yet they propose solutions to these problems in philosophical works written before the revolution. Does this not imply that the revolution is after all irrelevant to the solution of philosophical problems?

These questions arise largely from problems in understanding Western Marxism's special terminology. When this terminology is understood it becomes clear that Marx and Lukács are not making quite such wild and radical claims as they at first appear to be making. The chief difficulties stem from ambiguities in the terms “philosophy” and “theory.” I will therefore treat these first.

In its usual meaning “philosophy” refers primarily to the activity of reflecting on the basic assumptions and ideas of a culture. In this sense Marx and Lukács are obviously still doing philosophy, and they would not deny it. But for them, “philosophy” refers to a specific historical tradition of reflection that develops common themes from the Greeks to Hegel. They regard this tradition as “completed,” and they would deny that they are merely continuing it in their own work. The unity of the tradition consists in certain paradigmatic concepts and methods which run through it from the beginning to the end, in spite of major variations and innovations. It is this paradigm which has been exhausted, not the activity of reflection *per se*.

However unfamiliar this approach to understanding philosophy may be in the Anglo-American context, it is a well identified tendency in Continental philosophy since Feuerbach. The early Marx and Lukács, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida have all proposed general theories of the unity of the philosophical tradition, and on that basis have announced its end. Reflection continues, and indeed it has no original concepts to substitute for the old ones. But the philosopher's relation to these concepts is no longer immediate, naive; the “death” of philosophy means no more than that thinkers become conscious of the historical limits of the cultural system on the basis of which these concepts arise.

For Marxists, this consciousness is specifically social. They trace the origin of philosophy's eternal truths, its constants and paradigms, back to social causes that are in the process of disappearing. There is a particularly clear statement of this position in the *Communist Manifesto*.

The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms, antagonisms that assumed different forms at different epochs. But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, viz., the exploitation of one part of society by the other. No wonder, then, that the social consciousness of past ages, despite all the multiplicity and variety it displays, moves within certain forms, or general ideas, which cannot completely vanish

except with the total disappearance of class antagonisms. The Communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations; no wonder that its development involves the most radical rupture with traditional ideas.[29]

If we accept the limitation of “philosophy” to a specific tradition bound up with the history of class society, then we need a wider term with which to refer to the general process of reflection on basic assumptions of which this “philosophy” would be an instance. This more general term is “theory.” Now we need to distinguish between two types of theory, a type which is identified with traditional philosophy and a new type which is identified with the sort of reflection in which Marxism engages. This is precisely the distinction between “traditional” and “critical” theory that Horkheimer introduced in a famous essay[30]. Like the Frankfurt School, Marx and Lukács argue that traditional theory has been superseded by a new critical theory. In the works with which we will be concerned they do not suggest that philosophy should be abandoned for practical activity or simply “applied” in the usual technical sense of the term. The point, then, is not that reflection should cease, but that a new kind of reflection is needed.

This new kind of reflection differs from the old at two levels. On the one hand, it treats many assumptions which the philosophical tradition took for granted as problematic. On the other hand, it treats these assumptions as relative to the social causes from which they arise. For example, instead of accepting the eternal necessity of the antinomy of public and private interest, critical theory would show that this antinomy has a specific social cause that can be removed. Critical theory still works with the concepts of public and private interest elaborated in philosophy, but it problematizes the social background against which these two forms of interest arise as antinomial opposites.

The critique of abstract or “pure” theory is to be understood in this context. It is, once again, not that Marx and Lukács reject conceptual generality for empirical specificity, but rather that the process of abstraction in which philosophy detaches its concepts from their social basis gives rise to a bias they reject. This is a bias toward treating philosophical issues as though they rested on eternal facts of nature or ontologically necessary dimensions of the human condition. But once conceived in this way, the social background of these issues is occluded and it becomes impossible to imagine human action changing it. Marx and Lukács thus do not return to the empirical so much as show the inseparable connection between the most abstract concepts of philosophy and a concrete social context, which can be changed. This type of reflection resembles what Douglas Hofstadter has called a “strange loop”: at the very top of the conceptual hierarchy, at the point at which one reaches the most general and abstract concepts, one finds oneself suddenly plunged down to the lowest rung of the conceptual ladder.[31]

Let me return now to the example of the antinomy of public and private interest cited above to illustrate how practice can contribute to resolving a theoretical problem. Plato sets up the problem as philosophy has treated it ever since. Plato's guardians are qualified to rule by the complete elimination of their private lives; they cannot even know their own children. (For the Greeks the abolition of the family is the abolition of the private sphere itself.) The lower classes of the *Republic* pursue private interests but this disqualifies them from rule. The antinomy is evident here. It does not disappear in as different a philosophical doctrine as Rousseau's. Rousseau distinguishes the general

will from the will of all as two opposed types of interest. It is true that he does not conceive of a special class as the bearer of the general will, but instead projects the antinomy into the individual. The measure of the split in the individual this produces is the degree of “virtue” required to participate in citizenship. Even Mandeville, who claims that “private vices are public benefits,” readily admits that the intention of the individuals in pursuing private interests has nothing to do with social welfare and only increases it by a paradoxical reversal.

For a Marxist the limitation of this type of thinking is clear. The unquestioned assumption that lies behind the antinomy is the permanency of privately owned means of production the administration of which places the individuals in an antagonistic relation to each other. Public interests then arise alongside the private ones insofar as the community has needs which are not identical with the mere summation of these antagonistic private interests. But what if this assumption were false? What if historical conditions arose in which private ownership of means of production could be replaced by the rational administration of both the economy and the state in the interests of the whole community? Of course some forms of personal “private” interest would remain, but these would not stand in an antinomial relation to the public interest of the community. Instead of dedication to public interest requiring renunciation of private interests, the two could support each other harmoniously. The traditional philosophical construction of the issue would no longer apply.

The point I want to make is not that such a Marxist reform of society would work—that is another problem—but rather that once one envisages it as a real possibility, social action appears to play a central role in resolving a philosophical problem that has traditionally been treated as purely theoretical in character. It is this new role for social action that is intended by the concept of a “realization” of philosophy. Philosophy is realized in the sense that its old ideal of somehow reconciling public and private interest is finally achieved. The new element is that this realization involves a radical social change, and not a purely conceptual mediation such as Plato's utopia, Rousseau's “virtue,” or Mandeville's equivalent of the “invisible hand.”

Note that the revolution need not already have succeeded for this new type of theoretical reflection to proceed. Reflection can always go beyond the given achievements of its era toward ideal outcomes. This is true of Marx as much as it is of Plato. But what appears as a real possibility to anticipatory thinking differs drastically with time and place. Even in his wildest speculations, Plato saw no way to abolish slavery. Aristotle once made the fantastic suggestion that slavery could be abolished if tools would activate themselves without human agency. Marx writes in a time when this idle fantasy of the ancients appears as an imminent possibility. On the basis of this changed historical situation, he imagines a wholly different practical context for philosophy than the one prevailing in all previous class societies. Thus Marxists do not need to wait for the revolution to propose theoretical solutions to problems it is supposed to solve practically. However, they do generally insist that only by struggling against capitalism has the working class been able to shake up the dominant assumptions of a millennial class culture so that these assumptions can finally be problematized and new solutions to old problems anticipated[32]. Later chapters will explain this connection between theory and practice in more detail.

Chapter 2 The Demands of Reason

Deontological Grounds for Revolution

The ambition of philosophy of praxis is to link the fulfillment of what Marx called the “demands of reason” to revolutionary political goals. The establishment of this link implies that the practice of a rational life includes revolutionary political action, and that revolution itself can be rationally justified. These are in fact fundamental conclusions of the early Marx and Lukács. In his early works Marx develops a meta-theory of political philosophy and derives a rationale for revolution from it. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács constructs a meta-theory of classical German philosophy from which he too derives a rationale for revolution. This chapter will be primarily concerned with Marx’s early justification of revolution, while a later one will take up Lukács’s related argument.

By way of introduction to their concept of revolution, it will be helpful to consider the traditional idea of the right of revolution. Of course throughout most of its history political philosophy has been more concerned with rational grounds for obedience to government than with the right of revolution. Usually obedience has been justified by reference to functions performed by the state that benefit the individuals. However, the expectation of a fair return for obedience may be disappointed. Then, when the state fails to fulfill its function, grounds for obedience may become grounds for revolution. Similarly, most justifications of revolution imply a theory of obligation to the post-revolutionary state. This dialectic of obedience and revolt is not a sign of inconsistency in political philosophy, but on the contrary results from its consistent commitment to rationality in a world of contingencies. These observations are confirmed by the early revolutionary theories of Marx and Lukács. In both cases conservative political doctrines, taken as the basis of a meta-theoretical critique, are transformed into their revolutionary opposites precisely in the name of reason.

We can gauge their originality by comparison with earlier political theory. The classic ground for revolution, formulated for example by Locke, is teleological or utilitarian in character. Locke believes that “the end of government is the good of mankind.”^[33] Although Marxists only rarely offer utilitarian arguments for revolution, a vaguely utilitarian concern for human happiness constitutes the moral aura of most Marxist discourse. Marxists add to Locke’s critique of political relations a parallel critique of property relations, both of which, in their view, should be instrumental to human happiness. Locke’s main point is conserved: society, as a common creation of human beings, should serve their interests and not the contrary.

Socialism undoubtedly originated in some such sense of revolution as a legitimate collective means to happiness. But it is not enough for Marx to show that revolution is a means to happiness, since Kant and Hegel question the ethical status of happiness itself. Kant shows that as a rational being man has higher interests than those discovered through a utilitarian calculus, including duties of obedience to the state regardless of “material” consequences. By conceptualizing this “higher” sphere of duty in terms of a dialectical theory of individuation and mutual recognition, Hegel succeeds in basing similar conclusions on a far more sophisticated social theory. Thus in Kant and Hegel traditional speculative philosophy takes a conservative turn, denying the pertinence of

the utilitarian grounds for revolution put forth in progressive theories such as Locke's.

Marx revives revolutionary theory not by a "regression" to utilitarianism, but rather by developing a new deontological ground for revolution, based on the intrinsic nature of rationality. Deontological grounds for revolution flow from the demand for rational political action, independent of the use to be made of the freedom won by that action, whether it be the pursuit of happiness, morality, or any other end. The chief previous representative of this position is Rousseau. He assumes that the citizens of a rational society would use their freedom to achieve happiness, but for him freedom as the actual exercise of self-determining rationality is an end in itself.

The difference between teleological and deontological grounds for revolution is especially clear in Locke and Rousseau's discussions of slavery. Both are against it, of course, but for very different reasons. Locke argues that slavery is illegitimate because "this freedom from absolute arbitrary power is so necessary to, and closely joined with a man's preservation, that he cannot part with it but by which forfeits his preservation and life together."^[34] Rousseau, on the contrary, makes no appeal to the right to life, but claims an obligation to moral self-responsibility incompatible with slavery. He argues that "when a man renounces his liberty he renounces his essential manhood, his rights, and even his duty as a human being. . . .It is incompatible with man's nature, and to deprive him of his free will is to deprive his actions of all moral sanction."^[35]

Deontological grounds for revolution are usually explained as Rousseau does here, by reference to an absolute value placed on human dignity, the right of each individual to determine himself freely, to secure respectful treatment from others. It is argued that where political conditions prevent this they ought to be overthrown. Here we pass from the mere *right* of revolution, which flows from a concern with human happiness, to an *obligation* to revolution in the name of dignity and freedom. This is very much the sort of problem that preoccupies the young Marx. He writes in one early essay: "To be radical is to grasp things by the root. But for man the root is man himself. . . .The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the supreme being for man. It ends, therefore, with the categorical imperative to overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being. . .."^[36] For the young Marx, a revolution "*à la hauteur des principes*" is a revolution for freedom and dignity.^[37]

Basic to this theory of revolution is the idea that the rational subject is not fulfilled merely in thought, nor even in private morality, but also requires a sphere of public activity. But where rationality must be deployed, there freedom too is necessary, for "Freedom is the 'formal element' of rationality, the only form in which reason can be."^[38] Thus for Marx, as for Rousseau, revolution is a condition for the full exercise of reason. It is comparable with Cartesian doubt or the Enlightenment struggle against superstition as an attack on contingent obstacles to rationality, as a methodological preliminary to the flowering of humankind's highest faculty.

Marx's concern with the problems of revolutionary rationality is formulated explicitly in some of his earliest writings. He tries to show that revolution can satisfy "the demands of reason," that through it reason, or philosophy, can be "realized" in social reality.^[39] This terminology is of course Hegelian. It was Hegel who first proposed to show that "reason" was "realized," that the contradiction between the rational concept of the state and its historical reality had finally been overcome. This philosophical *tour de force* was intended to lay the revolution to rest, to deprive it of the

halo of rationality with which the eighteenth century had surrounded it. Starting from such premises, Marx's task is laid out for him: to demonstrate that reason is *not* in fact realized, that it continues to produce "demands" transcendent to the given state of affairs, that revolution is therefore still a rational act.

But after Kant and Hegel, it is impossible to renew revolutionary theory by returning to the speculative methods of a Rousseau. Kant's conservative political philosophy is based precisely on the implicit grounds for obedience to government contained in the Rousseauian revolutionary theory. This theory itself must therefore be submitted to a radical critique in order to discover how political philosophy had been reconciled—prematurely—with an unjust society, and to find in it elements that can be reformulated to again ground a revolutionary struggle against this society. The core of this effort consists in overcoming the antinomy of need and reason Marx identifies as constitutive of the entire tradition of political philosophy. Marx subjects the concepts of need and reason to a critique and a revision in the course of which he develops his meta-theoretical approach. I will show later that the antinomy of need and reason in Marx is only a particular instance of the antinomy of fact and value with which Lukács is centrally concerned in his early work.

Marx's meta-theory of political philosophy is based on a specific construction of the relation between need and reason that derives largely from a rather Kantian interpretation of Rousseau. This of course limits the bearing of Marx's analysis, which simply assumes that the essence of the whole tradition is revealed in what is presumably its highest stage. Nevertheless, the analysis is at least an interesting hypothesis about political philosophy in general; furthermore, Marx's approach is sociologically justified because it is the doctrine of Rousseau-Kant that underlies the democratic ideology of the French Revolution and later German liberalism.

Marx assumes with Rousseau and Kant that freedom is not whim but "obedience to self-given law."[\[40\]](#) With them he also assumes that the rules of conduct cannot be *derived* from happiness as an end, but must be derived from the concept of autonomy: the rational individual owes it to himself to maintain his autonomy from both his own needs and the power of other men. Happiness is not, however, a matter of indifference for Rousseau, nor even for Kant. In Rousseau, for example, freedom is essentially the right and the power to do what is in one's own interests as a member of the community. Freedom is a value in itself, but it is also bound up with the pursuit of collective self-interest in the higher sphere of politics.

It has been argued that in Kant too right conduct establishes general forms of social interaction that maximize the freedom of each individual to follow his merely "natural" end, which is happiness. Kant does not so much to reject the pursuit of happiness as reduce it to an "anthropological" or empirical consideration, thereby clearly delineating the boundaries between deontological and utilitarian grounds for political action.[\[41\]](#) The basis of this philosophical distinction is the praxeological one between ethics and economics. In the ethical form of action, the behavior of all subjects is intrinsically compatible and harmonious, while in economics behavior may be conflictual and competitive. Only ethical action, which achieves harmony through conformity to a universal rule, can be granted the dignity of reason. The pursuit of material welfare is mere "content" of experience, determined by nature and therefore contingent. It is compatible in principle, Kant would argue, with ethical behavior but subordinate to it by right.

Marx sees that this construction of the relation of reason and need results in a split between the ideal of freedom and the actual motives which, in real life, freedom serves. This split is particularly significant because it undercuts the protest against poverty in a formally “rational” society, reducing such protest to a marginal concern of merely empirical interest. Life becomes, in fact, a means to rationality in a topsy turvy vision likely to satisfy only those for whom the means of life are assured. What is required is a reformulation of political theory to establish the intrinsic rationality and universality of the pursuit of happiness and the satisfaction of the needs on which happiness depends.

Marx worked out this program in three stages, to which correspond three important early works. In the first part of the essay “On the Jewish Question” he attacks the problem of need, in order to show that the conflictual form of action associated with it is not natural and necessary, but historical and subject to revolutionary change. This essay culminates in a new formulation of the concept of freedom compatible with the revision of the concept of need. The second stage of the analysis is developed in the “Introduction” to the “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.” There Marx “deduces” the political and social conditions for a realization of his new concept of freedom. This argument leads to the proletariat, which he identifies as the agent of a revolution that will abolish philosophy in realizing it. The last stage is reached in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844. There Marx follows the thread back to its beginning in the concept of reason, which he now sets out to revise.

The Antinomy of Reason and Need

Marx’s essay “On the Jewish Question” is an attempt to overcome the antinomy of the ideal democratic state and the facts of capitalist social life. Marx conceptualizes this antinomy through the split between moral-political rationality (the basis of the state) and utilitarian-anthropological goals (the basis of the economy) as it appears in Rousseau and the French Revolution, filtered through Kant and Hegel. He argues that this split is reflected in the distinction between “man” and “citizen” in French revolutionary theory, which corresponds with the distinction between civil society, the sphere of private activity, and the state, the sphere of cooperative activity.

The state accumulates all the functions of rationality: consciousness, reflexivity, morality, universality, and “species-life”, this last being a term derived from Feuerbach which signifies the consciously social and cooperative nature of man. The merely empirical functions of natural human existence are then consigned to the sphere of civil society, where the individual lives his “real” life, as opposed to his ideal life as a rational citizen in the state. In civil society the egoism of private individuals creates a hell of competition in the pursuit of happiness through economic aggression. There human action does not achieve rational universality, but is rather mere nature. Marx writes:

The perfect political state is, by its nature, the species life of man as opposed to his material life. All the presuppositions of this egoistic life continue to exist in civil society outside the political sphere, as qualities of civil society. Where the political state has attained to its full development, man leads, not only in thought, in consciousness, but in reality, in life, a double existence—celestial and terrestrial. He lives in the political community, where he acts simply as a private individual, treats other men as means, degrades himself to the role of a mere means and becomes the plaything of alien powers.[42]

In presenting the problem in this manner, Marx is not simply criticizing the egoism

of bourgeois society. There is that, but more important is the fact that “species life” is decisively linked to reason in the concept of the state. Rationality in the political domain is exemplified by the cooperative, communal aspect of human nature, which takes refuge in the state once it has been driven from the intensely competitive civil society. As Marx put it in his letter to Ruge: “Reason has always existed, but not always in a rational form. . . . As far as actual life is concerned, the political state especially contains in all its modern forms the demands of reason, even where the political state is not yet conscious of socialistic demands.”[43] The problem now is to criticize the “irrational” and contradictory form in which reason exists in the modern state in order to understand why reason has been confined to a limited domain, why actual life persists as an empirical and natural residue in a civil society alongside the state.

Marx seeks a solution through a critique of the limits of the concept of political revolution, which at this point is equivalent for him with the French Revolution.[44] Political revolution aims to maximize individual freedom in private life while accepting uncritically its given basis in private life as received from the *ancien regime*, namely private property purified of feudal restrictions. “This revolution,” Marx says, “regards civil society, the sphere of human needs, labour, private interests and civil law, as the basis of its own existence, as a self-subsistent pre-condition, and thus as its natural basis.”[45]

Civil society appears essentially as a sphere of “nature” because it lacks the two most important determinations of rationality, *reflexivity* and *universality*. On the one hand, the political revolution does not conceive of civil society as a historical result, as the outcome of a process of mediation, hence as a self-reflected and self-developed sphere of reason. Instead, it is seen as the product of the egoistic individuals whose natural inclinations govern it. These egoistic individuals are simply received by the revolution as “the passive, given result of the dissolution of society [of the *ancien regime*], an object of direct apprehension and consequently a natural object.”[46]

On the other hand, as a “natural” man, the merely given product of instinct and need, the egoistic individual of bourgeois society is plunged into a *bellum omnium contra omnes*. The activity of this egoistic individual can consist only in competitive strife. Its form is not universalizable and no process of mediation can raise it to rational universality. The contradiction between reason and need, the one necessary and universal, the other contingent and particular, cannot, Marx claims, be resolved on the ground of capitalist society.

Marx goes on to show that the bourgeois split in the individual between need and reason, man and citizen is a dialectical one in which each polar opposite requires the other for its existence. The polarity of man and citizen reflects a split in human nature inevitable in capitalist society, a split between its empirical content and its rational essence. The empirical man of civil society is the really existing human being, an egoistic individual standing in perpetual contradiction with its own rational instantiation as citizen. But only through the citizen can the man exist, that is, can the individual freely pursue private interests in private life under the protection of the state. Meanwhile, the ideal citizen, as a rational political animal is the essence of what it is to be human. Yet the citizen is there only to protect and defend the rights of man. Existence and essence require each other and also stand in contradiction. Marx says, “Man as he really is, is seen only in the form of egoistic man, and man in his true nature only in the form of abstract citizen.”[47]

Political revolution founders on this antinomy. It confines itself to liberating a pregiven “nature” that bears within it the irrationality of private competition. In the face of this nature, reason has a bare “artificial” existence as an “allegorical, moral person” in the citizen.[48] Most abstractly formulated, the dilemma is an example of the fundamental antinomy of form and content: *rational form here presides over empirical content not by mediating it and raising it to rational universality, but by leaving it be in its given condition.*

At this very abstract level, Marx’s critique of formal democracy is structurally similar to Lukács’s critique of Kantian ethics. In Lukács’s terms, the antinomy of reason and need is an example of the more general antinomy of value and fact, of “ought” and “is”, that arises from the formalistic concept of reason. This concept of reason is based on the acceptance of “immediacy,” that is to say, on the failure to discover in the given facts those potentialities and tendencies embodying rationality and driving them toward a rational end. Instead, the given is *defined* as indifferent to reason and value, as the merely empirical, factual residue of the process of formal abstraction in which the concept of reason is constructed. As Lukács puts it, “Precisely in the pure, classical expression it received in the philosophy of Kant it remains true that the ‘ought’ presupposes an existing reality to which the category of ‘ought’ remains *inapplicable* in principle.”[49] This is the dilemma of bourgeois democracy as Marx explains it: political rationality presupposes as its material substratum an irrational social existence which cannot be made to conform to rational principles.

Marx and Lukács, then, arrive at similar solutions to the problem they have identified. For Marx, it is necessary to transform civil society into a sphere of rational interaction. Mere political revolution is not adequate to the task. Marx writes, “The political revolution dissolves civil society into its elements [egoistic individuals] without revolutionizing these elements themselves or subjecting them to criticism.”[50] What is required is precisely the “revolutionizing” of private and individual existence so that it too conforms with the demands of reason. The content of free activity must no longer stand in contradiction with freedom itself. In the more abstract terms of Lukács, this solution “consists in annulling [*aufzuheben*] that indifference of form toward content . . . which is the basis of reified rationality.”[51]

At this point Marx derives what might be called a new “concept” or *Begriff* of free society from the *Aufhebung* of the contradictions he has identified between the concept and the object of traditional democratic political theory. He does not yet know concretely in what rational social activity would consist, but he knows the condition for such activity, namely, the transcendence of the opposition between private egoism and rational common action. For this it is necessary that collective action in the common interest, action based on the reciprocal recognition of the humanity and needs of all individuals, transcend the narrow boundaries of politics and extend to economic life as well. Economic activity must have a rational form and human needs partake of rational universality through their reciprocal recognition by all. Marx concludes:

Human emancipation will only be complete when the real individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a species-being; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (*forces propres*) as social powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as political power.[52]

This new condition for the fulfillment of the “demands of reason” is contained already in abstract form in the modern state. It is the new basis for deontological grounds for revolution and for the realization of philosophy.

In sum, Marx has shown that political philosophy accepts the irrational form of the pursuit of happiness (civil society) as a natural fact, and so applies the demands of reason only to the state. These demands concern, among other things, the establishment of a true community through the reconciliation of antinomial opposites such as individual and society, private interest and common good, and all the similar displacements of the antinomy of content and form in the political domain. Marx demonstrates that community cannot be realized in a partial domain, such as the state, alongside a civil society based on a conflictual form of action. To fulfill the demands of reason, then, it will be necessary to extend them to civil society. To accomplish this, in turn, it is necessary to overcome what Lukács calls the “immediacy” of the sphere of need, its philosophically naturalized form. This Marx succeeds in doing with the concept of a social revolution that does not just change the state, but that also bring about the “revolutionizing of the elements themselves.” Community can be realized at all levels of society, including the material level of the sphere of need, when the system of practice governing the pursuit of happiness in class society has been transformed.

The Agent of Revolution

The next step in Marx’s analysis consists in finding a possible agent for the radical transformation of man and citizen. This proves to be a more delicate matter than first appears. On the one hand, Marx must base his new concept of freedom on some actual social force to escape the merely abstract ethical relation of philosophy to reality he has already rejected in his letter to Ruge. On the other hand, in attempting to base his philosophy on a real social force, there is the danger that he will reduce historical action to a mere instrument of philosophy, which later would then be the real “subject” of the revolutionary process.

Marx first approaches this problem in a speculative form in the “Introduction” to the “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.” There he arrives at an undialectical construction of the relation of theory to practice that does not so much overcome the abstract character of ethical demands as impute this very abstractness to the demands of an entire social class. Lucien Goldmann suggests that this failure is not of merely biographical interest, but that the undialectical conclusions of this text anticipate the later undialectical construction of the theory-practice relation in the socialist movement: “In fact, it suffices to replace the word philosophy in the ‘Introduction’ with the word Party (and at bottom in the two cases we are concerned with an ideology-elaborating group) in order to obtain a position very close to that expressed by Lenin in his work *What is To Be Done?*”^[53]

Marx’s failure in this essay is due in part to his method, which differs radically from that of his later sociological and economic work. He does not start from an analysis of society but from philosophy. He takes his new philosophical concept of freedom and tests it against the various classes of society to find one that can serve as its representative in practice. As he puts it, “Revolutions need a passive element, a material basis . . .”^[54] Or again, “Theory itself becomes a material force when it has seized the masses.”^[55] Marx’s essay looks like a class analysis and indeed some features of it anticipate his later theory of class. Marx tries to prove that previous, merely political

revolutions have failed to achieve human emancipation because they have liberated not man but particular classes from oppression. The French bourgeoisie, for example, was oppressed by the nobility as a class that is, in terms of its particular interests. The wrongs done to the bourgeoisie appeared to all other classes to exemplify the general injustice of the society and so they supported its revolution. But the liberation of the bourgeoisie from these wrongs was not human emancipation but only bourgeois emancipation. It did not free man but the bourgeoisie to pursue its interests, which in turn came into conflict with the interests of society as a whole.

Thus it is the very principle of class which is the source of the limits of political revolution. Marx concludes, and this distinguishes his method from that of the later works, that his philosophy cannot be realized by a social class in the usual sense but only by “a class in civil society which is not a class of civil society, a class which is the dissolution of all classes”.[56] What he is seeking, in other words, is a class that is not a class, a “universal” class in something like Hegel’s sense of the term, with no particular interest at all, hence none opposed to that of society as a whole. Having arrived at a rather Hegelian formulation of the problem in his earlier essay, it is not surprising that he here reaches a variant of the Hegelian solution.

Marx argues that the proletariat alone of all classes can go beyond a limited, merely political revolution to a general human revolution, a social revolution, for it has no status within the existing system at all. It is, Marx claims, and here he was right for his time if not for ours, the product of the “disintegration” of other social strata, with no traditional status of its own to defend. For this reason its project can be truly universal in character, and can bring down the system of class which Marx now identifies as the source of egoistic individualism and the basis of civil society.

The proletariat, Marx concludes, can alone “revolutionize the elements themselves,” that is, transform what it is to be an individual in society, for it has no interest in conserving a particular status opposed to the whole, hence no interest in perpetuating the split between civil society and the state. The proletariat thus appears as the appropriate instrument of Marx’s philosophy and the demand for revolution is now addressed to this class. Marx writes, “Philosophy is the head of this emancipation and the proletariat is its heart. Philosophy can only be realized by the abolition of the proletariat, and the proletariat can only be abolished by the realization of philosophy.”[57]

In spite of the elegant symmetry of this solution, it falls far short of resolving the problems Marx has posed for himself. Here theory and practice are seen to arise independently, and if social revolution satisfies essential demands of theory, it is by no means clear that the proletariat intends this result in revolting. Lukács remarks:

The issue turns on the question of theory and practice. And this not merely in the sense given it by Marx when he says in his first critique of Hegel that “theory becomes a material force when it has seized the masses.” Even more to the point is the need to discover those features and determinations both of the theory and the ways of seizing the masses which convert the theory, the dialectical method, into a vehicle of revolution. We must extract the practical essence of the theory from the method and its relation to its object. If this is not done that “seizing the masses” could well turn out to be a will o’ the wisp. It might turn out that the masses were seized by quite different forces, that they were in pursuit of quite different ends. In that event, there would be no necessary connection between the theory and their

activity, it would be a form that enables the masses to become conscious of their socially necessary or fortuitous actions, without ensuring a genuine and necessary bond between consciousness and action.[58]

Lukács goes on to point out that in the same text Marx briefly lays down the basic condition for achieving real unity of theory and practice. Marx writes, “Will theoretical needs be directly practical needs? It is not enough that thought should seek to realize itself; reality must also strive toward thought.[59] Both Marx and Lukács thus arrive at the conclusion that it is not only the “indifference of form towards content” that must be overcome, but also the indifference of content towards form.

Marx has so far seen the necessity of creating a form of rational interaction in the pursuit of happiness and to this end he has identified an agent capable of implementing the “demands of reason.” But still the form-content distinction persists, because the pursuit of happiness itself has not been raised to rational universality, only its form. The proletariat appears as a passive instrument of philosophy because in revolting to achieve happiness, it unconsciously serves the “cunning of reason” by realizing rational form in actual life. An ungenerous observer could still insist that Marx is tossing “the roasted pigeons of absolute science” into the mouth of the proletariat. Marx now seems to realize that there is no solution within the framework of a concept of reason as pure form, and so he proceeds to a radical critique and revision of the concept of reason itself.

Revision of the Concept of Reason

In the third phase of his early work, in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, Marx sets out to unify theory and practice through revising the concept of reason as it is formulated both in the philosophical tradition and his own previous writings. To accomplish this, Marx must return to the study of need from a new angle. In the early essays, Marx found a *form* of rational interaction in the pursuit of happiness. But the *content* of the concept of need with which he worked remained unthematized and unanalyzed; it remained, in fact, immediate and hence irrational for Marx as it had for earlier political philosophy. This now becomes the decisive dimension of the problem.

If there was a still dogmatic element in the earlier essays, it lay in Marx’s failure to derive rational social interaction, the “revolutionizing of the elements themselves,” from the needs it was to help satisfy. Instead, social revolution still appeared as a philosophical exigency from which the needy could incidentally benefit. The antinomy of need and reason is not abolished in the accidental convergence of philosophy and the proletariat, but rather reproduced in a new guise. The antinomies of philosophy and reality, theory and practice which appear in Marx’s discussion of historical agency are simply displacements of the original antinomy of political philosophy. To resolve these antinomies, Marx will now reverse the terms of the problem and attempt to found the demands of reason in the very nature of need. But this amounts to demonstrating that the content of the sphere of need is rational, is, in fact, *the* essential sphere of rationality for a meta-theoretically reconstructed concept of reason.

In developing this meta-theoretical approach to rationality, Marx is greatly aided by Feuerbach, who treads a similar path with more maturity and assurance in the same period. Feuerbach’s central idea is that philosophy is secularized theology. He says, “What lies in the other world for religion, lies in this world for philosophy.”[60] When philosophy identifies the subject with reason, with thinking, it brings the theological

idea of “spirit” down to earth. Similarly, the concept of the object as an object-of-thought, constituted by thought or obeying rational laws, is a homely transcendental equivalent of Biblical Genesis.

This is on the face of it a crass and reductionist interpretation of the essence of philosophy. What makes Feuerbach interesting and important is his attempt to go beyond this basic thesis toward a reconstruction of philosophy. There is a parallel here with Marx’s method in the essays discussed above. Marx took certain general principles of political philosophy—the demands of reason—and detached them from their accustomed object, in this case the state, to apply them to another object, society. Feuerbach does something similar for philosophy, detaching its formal structure from its concept of the subject and object. The “philosophy of the future,” as Feuerbach calls it, will conserve these formal traits but attach them to a new subject-object concept. This is a meta-theoretical approach to the critique and revision of fundamental philosophical concepts. These concepts are relativized through contact with the concrete existential domains from which they were first abstracted in their initial construction as philosophical.

Feuerbach calls Hegel’s thought, which he sees as the culmination of the philosophical tradition, a “philosophy of identity.” The identity referred to is that of thought and being, reason and reality. This identity is theological and to it Feuerbach opposes what he calls “the true and absolute viewpoint”: “the viewpoint of the distinction between I and thou, subject and object.”^[61] Yet although Feuerbach rejects the philosophy of identity, he reconstructs its formal principles on another plane.

He first redefines the concepts of subject and object, arguing that they are both sensuous, natural things in the world which cannot be brought together merely conceptually. The identity achieved in and through thought is spurious and ideological, but there is another kind of subject-object identity which can be achieved in nature through sense perception and love. Feuerbach writes, “The identity of subject and object, which in self-consciousness [in other words, in Hegel] is only an abstract idea, is truth and reality only in man’s sensuous perception of man.”^[62] Thus the formal principle, subject-object identity, is taken from Hegel and conserved while its content in Hegel’s thought is rejected.

The upshot is an enlargement of the concept of the subject to include more than thinking, to include the whole man, so to speak. This enlarged subject retains what might be called an “ontological pathos” through its continued submission to the formal principles of idealistic philosophy. Feuerbach expressed his conclusion in ringing phrases which certainly influenced Marx.

The unity of thought and being has meaning and truth only when man is comprehended as the ground and subject of this unity. Only a real being recognizes real objects; only where thought is not the subject of itself but a predicate of a real being is the idea not separated from being. . . .

From this result the following categorical imperatives: Desire not to be a philosopher as distinct from a man; be nothing else than a thinking man. Do not think as a thinker, that is, with a faculty torn from the totality of the real human being and isolated for itself; think as a living and real being, as one exposed to the vivifying and refreshing waves of the world’s oceans. Think in existence, in the world as a member of it, not in the vacuum of abstraction as a solitary monad, as an absolute monarch, as an indifferent, super-worldly God; then you can be sure

that your ideas are unities of being and thought.[63]

That is precisely Marx's starting point in the *1844 Manuscripts*. There he attempts to obey Feuerbach's injunction by a heroic effort to overcome the gap between thought and life. As Marx puts it, "One basis for life and another for science is *a priori* a falsehood." [64] Elsewhere in the text, Marx expresses himself in the first person in a manner which indicates his personal stake in the matter.

My universal consciousness is only the theoretical form of that whose living form is the real community, the social entity, although at the present day this universal consciousness is an abstraction from real life and is opposed to it as an enemy. That is why the activity of my universal consciousness as such is my theoretical existence as a social being.[65]

However, Marx is a better dialectician and more rigorous thinker than Feuerbach. He is not content to retain simply the general form the philosophy of identity while giving an anthropological twist to the concepts of subject and object. He takes more than this from Hegel in order to accomplish more ambitious goals than Feuerbach's. Marx follows Hegel in requiring that subject-object unity be grasped as the actual constitution or production of the object by the subject. He also agrees with the Hegel of the *Phenomenology of Mind* that this production takes place in the historical process. He accepts, in other words, what Lukács describes as "Hegel's programme: to see the absolute, the goal of his philosophy, as a *result* remains valid for Marxism with its very different objects of knowledge, and is even of greater concern to it, as the dialectical process is seen to be identical with the course of history." [66] The formal principles Marx retains are thus richer and more complex than those that survive Feuerbach's critical appropriation of traditional philosophy.

As Marx works out his program in the *Manuscripts*, it becomes clear that he is attempting not just a "reform of philosophy"—Feuerbach's phrase—but a rigorous *Aufhebung*, or transcendence, of Hegelian idealism, and with it of philosophy generally. To accomplish this Marx develops a meta-theoretical critique of Hegel, designed to show that the latter's attempt to found reason as absolute knowledge is a still theological attempt to overcome social alienation in thought. The "*ordre des raisons*" must be reversed: when alienation is overcome in real life, then and only then will it be possible to overcome the alienation of reason. In line with this approach, which situates reason within a philosophical anthropology, Marx praises Feuerbach, who "founded genuine materialism and positive science by making the social relationship of 'man to man' the basic principle of his theory." [67] Simultaneously, in contradistinction to Feuerbach, Marx believes that it is capitalism which is responsible for the degradation of the relation of "man to man." Thus the *Manuscripts* do not achieve their end in a mere philosophical reformulation of the concept of reason. Revolution becomes the basis for a new identity, overcoming the opposition of thought and life, thinker and society, by founding reason practically in life and community. The retention of the formal structure of Hegel's thought infused with this new content yields a philosophy of praxis.

How does Marx go about it? I will sketch the three dialectical "moments" of Marx's meta-theoretical argument and then elaborate each in some detail. Marx begins by showing that philosophical categories are "in reality" displacements of social ones. For example, Marx is convinced that the problem of alienated labor is the real foundation of Hegel's philosophy, but that Hegel fails for not posing it clearly. Marx argues that "Hegel's standpoint is that of modern political economy. He conceives labour as the

essence, the self-confirming essence of man. . . . [But] labour as Hegel understands and recognizes it is abstract mental labour. Thus, that which above all constitutes the essence of philosophy, the alienation of man knowing himself, or alienated science *thinking* itself, Hegel grasps as its essence.”[68] The whole artificial, speculative and ultimately theological structure of Hegel’s system results from just this inability to thematize real labor as the ontological core of history.

Having relativized the philosophical categories with respect to social ones, Marx proceeds to the second “moment” of the meta-theory. This consists in casting the social categories in the form of the philosophical ones, as does Feuerbach in the passages discussed above. Finally, in a third phase, the meta-theory demonstrates the role of social action in resolving the contradictions of the philosophically recast social categories. In this phase Marx is able to show that the problem with the alienation of labor is a fundamental problem *within* philosophy, and not just a contingent problem of practice. This is impossible within Hegel’s own thought, which encounters the alienation of labor in history as no more than a passing concern.

In sum, Marx redefines the *terms* of Hegel’s philosophy, while retaining in part the *relations* Hegel establishes between these terms. Marx can then set the entire system in motion in history itself because of the social redefinition to which he has submitted it. It is clear that these new definitions do not correspond with Hegel’s. It is also clear that Marx shifts back and forth in the *Manuscripts* between his own concepts and Hegel’s, using the same terms in different senses. But this is not just an ambiguous use of terms. Marx’s substantive thesis is that Hegel’s concepts are a misconstruction of a reality better described by Marx’s own, that Hegel attempts in a mystified way to solve the very problems that concern Marx.

The first phase of Marx’s meta-theory is developed in the conclusion of the *Manuscripts* in the “Critique of Hegel’s Dialectic.” There Marx argues that Hegel’s term “alienation” stands for the uncomprehended object of thought. To found reason, that is, to demonstrate the unity of subject and object, “It is necessary, therefore, to surmount the object of consciousness. Objectivity as such is regarded as an alienated human relationship which does not correspond with the essence of man, self-consciousness.”[69] The return of the alienated, the demonstration of its unity with the conscious subject, consists for Hegel only in surpassing the cognitive immediacy of the object. Thus the appropriation of alienated reality is its comprehension. But, Marx argues, in its social application this method leaves the world exactly as it was before, tacking a certificate of rationality onto every form of oppression. Since alienation is, at least for Hegel, really overcome in philosophy, the need to change the world has vanished. Thought can congratulate itself on having *produced* the reality and thereby justified it.

This is what Lukács means by philosophy remaining in the standpoint of immediacy. In *The Holy Family*, Marx describes it as “the mystery of speculative construction.” He says, “Speculation on the one hand apparently freely creates its object *a priori* out of itself and, on the other hand, precisely because it wishes to get rid by sophistry of the rational and natural dependence on the *object*, falls into the most irrational and unnatural *bondage* to the object, whose most accidental and most individual attributes it is obliged to construe as absolutely necessary and general.”[70]

Hegel’s conservatism, Marx believes, results from describing real alienation as the phenomenal appearance of the alienation of reason. For Hegel the alienation of the

individual in the *ancien regime* did not consist in the fact that he was reduced to an “abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being,” but in the fact that the state did not correspond with its concept, that, in practice, it could not command the rational obedience of its subjects. Once the state has been reformed, then it *can* command rational obedience even from an “abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being.” There is thus a merely contingent relation between philosophy and Marx’s “real” alienation, which consists in human misery and dependence. The philosopher becomes the “enemy” of the human community in demonstrating to it that it should accept its fate without protest. He withdraws the moral credit of the oppressed by rationalizing the established order.

Marx argues that Hegel falls into “uncritical positivism and uncritical idealism” because he begins by narrowing the subject to a mere function of thought. Marx writes:

For Hegel, human life, man is equivalent to self-consciousness. All alienation of human life is, therefore, nothing but alienation of self-consciousness. The alienation of self-consciousness is not regarded as the expression, reflected in knowledge and thought, of the real alienation of human life. Instead, actual alienation, that which appears real, is in its innermost hidden nature (which philosophy first discloses) only the phenomenal being of the alienation of real human life, self-consciousness.[71]

Hence for Hegel, “It is not the fact that the human being objectifies himself inhumanly, in opposition to himself, but that he objectifies himself by distinction from and in opposition to abstract thought, which constitutes alienation as it exists and as it has to be transcended.”[72]

In opposition to the formula he ascribes to Hegel, “man=self-consciousness,” Marx argues that man is sensuous natural existence, that, therefore, the subject is a natural being.[73] Its essential mode of activity is also natural: labor, not thinking. Similarly, Marx proposes to redefine the concept of the object as an essential correlate of this subject, as a sense object, existing proximally for the human senses as an object of need. Note that Marx does not return to Locke. He does not found knowledge on the senses in the empiricist manner, but applies the general formal principle of subject-object identity to a redefined subject and object. Thus Marx’s “sense object” is not a Lockean “idea” but the actual object itself, as it exists for the senses and especially as it exists as an object of need. With the establishment of these new definitions of the philosophical subject and object, the first phase of Marx’s meta-theory is completed.

The second phase of the meta-theory then proceeds to reconstitute the formal structure of philosophy of identity with the help of these redefined terms. It is in this phase that Marx revises the concepts of need and reason to overcome their antinomial formulation in political philosophy. This revision consists in transferring the formal attributes of reason to need. In Hegel, reason is self-reflective, it mediates itself in the course of its own self-development in history; again, for Hegel reason is also universal, both in the narrow sense that its ethical postulates apply equally to all, but also in the broader sense that its unconditioned categories apply to the whole of reality. The unity of subject and object is the foundation of this concept of rationality, the essential demand of reason which establishes reasons’ *imperium*. For Marx all these determinations of rationality are simply transferred wholesale onto “man.” And since “man” in Marx’s sense is a being of need, this remarkable substitution results in the attribution of the characteristic traits of rationality to the sphere of need. Need therefore

no longer appears as the irrational content of a formalistic rationality, but is itself charged with the functions of rationality.

For Marx the philosophical subject is now a natural being, man. As such, this subject encounters its object, nature, in a natural way. The proximate relation of subject to object will be need, which motivates labor for the satisfaction of need. "As a natural, embodied, sentient, objective being he is a suffering, conditioned and limited human being, like animals and plants. The object of his drives exist outside himself as objects independent of him, yet they are objects of his needs, essential objects which are indispensable to the exercise and confirmation of his faculties."^[74] Were this simply a statement about human physiology it would of course be completely banal. It is no news that hunger requires food. However, Marx is attempting to make a statement about being in general, about ontology, and not just about the empirical being of the animal man. He writes, "Man's feelings, passions, etc., are not merely anthropological characteristics in the narrower sense, but are true *ontological* affirmations of being (nature)..."^[75]

Bertell Ollman has suggested that we use the concept of "internal relations" to describe Marx's theory of need. Indeed, Marx rejects empiricism's nonteleological, external and accidental concept of relatedness. The ontologically primordial sphere is not that of mechanistic natural science, in which such external relations prevail, but the sphere of need, in which "the need of a thing is the evident irrefutable proof that the thing belongs to my being, that the existence of this thing for me and its property are the property . . . of my being."^[76] Hence Marx says that "Nature is the inorganic body of man," to express the idea that man and nature, subject and object, are joined in essential interdependence.^[77]

Now too the labor through which need is satisfied will also appear as an ontological category in the forms of philosophy of identity. Labor is in fact the actual process of unifying subject and object, man and nature. Here Marx passes from the abstract and immediate positing of the unity of subject and object in need, to a reflective, mediated unity through the production of the object by the subject in labor.

Such philosophically reconceptualized labor Marx calls "objectification," the natural activity of the naturalized subject, man. When human beings transform their environment through labor, they "objectify" their needs and faculties. This they must do, for as a natural being man must "express and authenticate himself in being as well as in thought,"^[78] The result is a "humanized" nature within which human beings can fulfill themselves and unfold their potentialities in a continuous process of self-creation. Here human existence is confirmed and universalized in the transformed objects of labor and, by extension, in all of being. Marx writes, "It is only when objective reality everywhere becomes for man in society the reality of human faculties, human reality, and the reality of his own faculties, that all objects become for him the objectification of himself. The objects then confirm and realize his individuality. They are his own objects, which is to say that man himself becomes the object."^[79]

Finally, the third phase of the meta-theory derives philosophical and political consequences from these formulations, consequences that appear once the philosophical terms have been reconstituted in history where they can be set in motion through social practice. At stake here is the meaning of the concept of "alienation" which, Marx argues, stands in contradiction to the "human essence." Hegel's concept of alienation is now revised to mean a specific, degraded type of objectification in which

the transformed world turns around and dominates its creators instead of serving them. The individuals cannot recognize or develop themselves through alienated objects, but are crushed and oppressed by them. Because alienation, as “loss of the object,” is not just a social category but also a determination of being, this condition can be reformulated as the antinomy of subject and object. In alienation, subject and object stand in conflict, as opposed principles requiring mediation.

Identity philosophy demands that the object appear as a product of the subject, but for Marx the process of this production is now a real one, occurring in history and not in the head of a philosopher. Alienation is a problem for philosophy, splitting subject from object, but not a problem that could be solved in pure thought through a speculative construction. Marx notes that “the medium through which alienation occurs is itself a practical one.”^[80] Its transcendence will also have to be practical, requiring a reversal in the relations between human beings and the products of their labor. This then is the “real” alienation which must be overcome and which Hegel confounds with objectivity itself.

Philosophy now appears not as a means through which a subject-object unity is achieved, but rather as the reflection in thought of their unity in history through labor. And where this unity is obstructed by alienation, the consequences will be felt by philosophy too as failure of its project. Thus where Hegel saw actual alienation, alienation in Marx’s sense of the term, as the phenomenal form of the alienation of self-consciousness, Marx reverses the terms and defines the alienation of self-consciousness as the phenomenal form of actual alienation.

This alienation of self-consciousness consists for Marx in religion and idealistic philosophy. The human species creates a world through labor which dominates and dispossesses it; in thought too the products of the mind become dominating powers. The spiritual and intellectual struggle to understand alienation gives rise to myths and speculative constructions. In them the individuals rationalize their powerlessness and learn to accept its inevitability as a positive good, as “the rose in the cross of the present.”^[81] In Hegel this form of artificial reconciliation with alienation nevertheless points toward the solution by mythologizing the actual unity of subject and object in labor.

Such alienated thought, Marx believes, cannot resolve its own antinomies. The concept of reason cannot be founded so long as alienation is accepted immediately in reality. It is the fact that philosophy remains in immediacy, that its transcendence of alienation takes place merely in thought and not in real life, that is responsible for idealism’s theological turn toward a supra-sensible reality. But if the overcoming of alienation in practice is essential to the liberation of reason from theological myths, then revolution itself is a *methodological* necessity for philosophy.

A characteristic theory-practice relation now emerges, similar to that which Lukács establishes in his early work. If theory attempts to overcome alienation in pure thought, it will fall into various secularized forms of religion. Yet alienation is the obstacle which must be overcome in order to found reason, for to accept it means to fail to unite subject and object, to demonstrate the production of the latter by the former, and this Marx believes is necessary. Thus theory can found itself only by passing into practice to destroy alienation in reality. This can be done through socialist revolution. Marx writes:

It is only in a social context that subjectivism and objectivism, spiritualism and materialism, activity and passivity, cease to be antinomies and thus cease to exist

as such antinomies. The resolution of the theoretical contradictions is possible only through practical means, only through the practical energy of man. Their resolution is not by any means, therefore, only a problem of knowledge, but is a real problem of life which philosophy was unable to solve precisely because it saw there a purely philosophical problem.[82]

The purpose of theory on these terms is to provide the proletariat with the “intellectual arms” it needs to solve not only its own problems but those of philosophy as well. No longer does theory appear as the real subject of this process, representing rational form to the proletariat, which latter, as mere need or factual content, can only be a “passive,” “material” base. Rather, the domain of need and labor in which the proletariat moves is also the element of reason itself. The contradictions the proletariat experiences in its existence are not accidentally related to the contradictions of philosophy, but are one and the same. Theory and practice have been united.

In reaching this conclusion Marx finally derives a wholly new type of ground for revolution: the ultimate demand of reason is rationality; revolution alone can satisfy this demand by resolving the antinomies of philosophy. If this is true, then reason itself requires revolution, and every rational individual should lend a hand.

From Marx to Lukács

The preceding discussion has shown that Marx’s early meta-theory of philosophy is in fact a critique of formalism, both in politics and more generally in the theory of rationality. In the next chapter, I will show how this critique of formalism is further elaborated in Lukács’s early Marxist philosophy. Lukács’s theory is deeply dependent on Marx’s, even though the most important early philosophical writings of Marx were still unpublished at the time of the composition of his early Marxist writings. Insofar as the theory presented in the Manuscripts is concerned, this dependency is therefore indirect, mediated by Marx’s *Capital*. It is precisely because Lukács studied *Capital* to find in it the basis of a meta-theory of formal rationality that he was able to reconstruct and extend its philosophical dimension in a manner paralleling Marx’s own early philosophical work.

Marx arrived at the study of the economy not merely through a change in interests, but through a philosophical argumentation in the course of which he demonstrated that economics is the science of alienation, the discipline in which is charted the original and basic alienation from which its philosophical forms are derived. Although Marx later abandoned the philosophy of praxis of his early works, the trace of this original discovery of the economy is preserved in his later ones. This trace appears most clearly in the continuing meta-theoretical approach.

Marx’s *Capital* continues to criticize formalistic abstractions by bringing them into relation to the social substratum from which they were originally abstracted. It is true that these are no longer philosophical abstractions but economic ones; however, Marx treats these latter in much the same way he had treated the former in the *Manuscripts*. The social contradictions he discovers are, in effect, philosophical antinomies reconstructed in a domain where they can be resolved through social action. The “secret” of *Capital*, its frequent obscurities, the “coquetting” with Hegel, the significance Marx attached to it as the basis of a theory of socialist revolution, all this is to be explained in terms of his fidelity to the original meta-theoretical project. Thus *Capital* is more than a scientific work on economics; it is also a chapter in the history of philosophy.

However, given its economic focus, *Capital* cannot adequately formulate and resolve the philosophical problems to which it is implicitly addressed. This is damaging to the coherence of Marxism; most importantly, it leaves a gap between the critique of capitalism and the socialist solution, a gap often filled by making pseudo-scientific and determinist claims for the economic theory. Whatever Marx himself may have said along these lines on occasion, Marxist economics establishes no causal connection between capitalism and socialism. As I will explain in more detail below, socialist revolution and the transition to a socialist society involve a type of cultural change that cannot be theorized on the model of those processes of “natural history” to which the mature Marx once compared them. On the contrary, the meta-theory of philosophy comes much closer to anticipating in philosophical terms the kind of cultural approach that can alone connect the critique of capitalism with socialism.

This was Lukács’s great insight: the discovery that the critique of formal rationality implicit in Marx’s economic works is the key to developing an adequate Marxist theory of revolution. Lukács thus began with a work that responded only implicitly, methodologically to his own preoccupations. He made this implicit dimension of Marxist economic theory explicit by reconstructing its meta-theoretical premises. Then, generalizing Marx’s concepts, Lukács reformulated the philosophical implications of the economic theory as the basis of a theory of revolution. To accomplish this, Lukács had to supply the missing moment in the meta-theory at the basis of Marxist economics, the moment in which philosophy itself operates with the historicized philosophical concepts to resolve simultaneously both historical and philosophical problems. In taking this step beyond Marx, Lukács developed an original philosophy of praxis.

Chapter 3

Reification and Rationality

The Crisis of Rationality

World War I throws bourgeois society into a general crisis embracing not only the ethical and political domains, but the very form and substance of rationality and culture. As Lukács put it in one early article: “The culture of the capitalist epoch had collapsed in itself and prior to the occurrence of economic and political breakdown. Therefore . . . it is a pressing necessity, precisely in the interests of culture, in the interest of opening the way to the new culture, to bring the long death process of capitalist society to its completion.”[83]

This sense of generalized culture crisis is not unique to Lukács. In the period between the wars, a Spenglerian mood of doom comes to dominate European thought, especially in the phenomenological and existentialist movement. In his “Vienna Lecture,” Husserl expresses this mood while offering phenomenology as a last hope for mankind: “There are only two escapes from the crisis of European existence: the downfall of Europe in its estrangement from its own rational sense of life, its fall into hostility toward the spirit and into barbarity; or the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy through a heroism of reason that overcomes naturalism once and for all.”[84]

What is unusual about Lukács's response to the crisis is his return to Marx for a solution in the *philosophical* domain, basing a "heroic" rationalism on the resolve of the revolutionary socialist movement. Of course in this period socialists are imbued with a sense of crisis, but nowhere is the philosophical significance of socialism raised to consciousness. In the 1920s the right is more active in thinking through the meaning of the collapse of Western ideals. There are several important attempts such as Heidegger's to formulate a philosophical alternative to what is perceived as a disintegrating rationalism, but most come to grief in a temporary union with fascism. Lukács, practically alone, attempts to resolve the crisis through renewing Marx's philosophy of praxis.[85]

Like the young Marx demanding the realization of philosophy through revolution, Lukács insists that what is at stake in the struggle for socialism is not only a change in society, but also the fate of rationality. The revolution is an affair of reason. For, once philosophical ideas are reformulated meta-theoretically as social projects, historical action has unique philosophical pertinence.

In the previous chapter I have shown that Marx arrives at the concept of socialism not through an ethical argument but through a theory of rationality and its "demands." Marx's early theory points toward a hierarchy of forms of rationality in economic and social life, corresponding to capitalism and socialism. Their succession is determined less by an economic or political than a philosophical mediation. It is true that the later Marx sometimes took this philosophical mediation for a causal link. This was due to his self-misunderstanding in terms of a scientific paradigm of explanation unsuited to the tasks he set it. Marx promises to explain the revolution on the basis of "iron laws," but in fact he gets from capitalism to socialism not by a causal progression but by a dialectical development. It is not surprising that unsympathetic critics speak of a religious or ethical exigency of socialism in Marx's work, since the economic theory cannot found it.[86]

Yet Marx could hardly have rested content with a theory so abstract and disconnected from concrete social life as the philosophical one presented in the *Manuscripts*. His dilemma was his inability to elaborate a new model of social change, based neither on a pure philosophical exigency nor on causal prediction, in short a model of cultural change. Such a theory of culture would be the missing term between the *Manuscripts* and *Capital*, on the one hand, and between the critique of capitalism and the idea of socialism on the other hand.

When Marx turned to economic research and abandoned philosophy, he left behind a number of vital conceptual tools needed to develop a theory of cultural change. The *Manuscripts* adumbrate such a theory which Lukács finally worked out in his theory of reification. Although Lukács uses the term "culture" relatively infrequently, his interpretation of Marxism is in fact quite close to a modern cultural approach. The concept of culture is of course notoriously vague, but it has served anthropologists well to the extent that it orients them toward the historical specificity and system-wide unity of the societies they study.[87] The concept of culture points towards the common structures of social life at all levels, in artifacts, behavior and belief systems, in character and institutions. It assigns the researcher the problem of discovering the overarching paradigms of meaning and value that inhabit all the various spheres of society. It is some such orientation which Lukács attempts to capture for Marxism with his theory of "forms of objectivity."

According to Lukács, social being and social thought cannot be separately conceptualized and then related by a theory of reciprocal causal interaction, as in most Marxist theory. This view, he argues, leads to an insoluble antinomy of thought and things that can be overcome “only by conceiving of thought as a form of reality, as a moment in the total process...”[88] The focus must shift from the mechanistic “influence” of social conditions on consciousness to the generalized patterning of all dimensions of society by a single form. Form in this sense is culture as an emergent property of social behavior, a property that is irreducible to the traditional categories of subjectivity and objectivity because it constitutes them.

Lukács reinterprets Marx’s critique of political economy in terms of this new approach. He treats the capitalist economy as the source of a cultural system prevailing throughout the social order: “What is customarily called the economy,” he writes, “is nothing but the system of forms of objectivity of real life.”[89] But then the discovery of contradictions in the economic sphere takes on a larger significance. What Marx describes as the economic crisis and breakdown of capitalism, Lukács reconstructs as the system’s cultural crisis and breakdown. He thereby avoids a mechanistic social theory which would derive revolution from simple dissatisfaction with the level of welfare that capitalism can (in theory) deliver to its working class.

The transition to socialism now appears in a different light; it is not a causal sequence, nor an ethical exigency, but a process of mediation historicized in the revolution. This mediation arises from the immanent cultural contradictions of capitalist culture, contradictions between reified social practice and living human beings who resist the imposition of the reified forms.

Lukács can finally link the philosophical concerns of Marxism with its analysis of political economy and projection of a socialist future. The tension he identifies in social reality between its reified form and its living human substratum represents meta-theoretically a larger conflict in the paradigms of rationality. In this tension, capitalist rationality comes up against a limitation that can only be overcome in an alternative paradigm, one which is theoretically expressed by Marxist dialectics and practically realized in socialism. Lukács reconceptualizes class struggle as the dialectical mediation in which formal-analytic rationality, as a cultural paradigm, is transcended historically by an alternative dialectical paradigm.

In his discussion of these alternatives, Lukács uses the concept of “reification” and its dialectical correlate, “totality,” to recapture for Marxism the Hegelian distinction between formal-analytic understanding (*Verstand*) and synthetic reason (*Vernunft*.) Lukács thematizes these two paradigms of rationality as opposed methodologies in social research and opposed cultural formations, with the latter emerging in each case as the *Aufhebung* of the former.

Lukács relates Marxism to the problem of rationality through a revolutionary philosophical interpretation of *Capital*. The preceding chapter has shown how Marx moved from an early critique of formalism in political philosophy to a broader concern with the formalistic concept of reason, very much as Lukács supposed. Unfortunately Marx did not explicitly follow up this line of thought in his later work; nevertheless, it is clear that his early meta-theory did prepare his choice of a dialectical method in economic and social research. Long before the publication of the *Manuscripts*, Lukács discovered that Marx’s critique of fetishistic formalism in political economy implies a far more general reconstruction of the concept of reason. Lukács’s theory of reification is an

original critique of formal rationality, based on Marx's *Capital*, and pursued to the point where it founds a dialectical concept of reason. There is a sense then in which his early Marxist work anticipates the publication of the *Manuscripts*, and goes beyond them theoretically in important respects.

This interpretation of Marxism is an extremely controversial one. Commentators of the so-called "scientific" school of Marxism, such as Lucio Colletiti and Louis Althusser, protest that Lukács theory of reification leads back to the romantic culture criticism from which Marx is supposed to have liberated radical social thought. For them the Lukácsian approach signifies the revival of philosophy, that is to say, of ideology inside the *cordon sanitaire* surrounding the "science" of Marxism.

Thus Gareth Stedman Jones writes that *History and Class-Consciousness* "represents the first major irruption of the romantic anti-scientific tradition of bourgeois thought into Marxist theory."^[90] Colletti has a similar opinion, complaining that Lukács "entered the factory not with *Capital* but with the *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience . . .*"^[91] In sum, Lukács would have transformed the Marxian critique of capitalism into a romantic critique of reason *per se* by conceptualizing formal rationality through the concept of reification as a cultural dimension of capitalistic society, rather than considering such rationality in the approved "scientific" manner as a universal ontological property of being itself in both the natural and the social world.

But Lukács had no need to study Bergson to arrive at his intellectual destination: Marx and Hegel would have sufficed. There is ample material in the first volume of *Capital* to support Lukács's critique of the alienating affects of the division and mechanization of labor. Lukács no more than Marx is hostile to machinery *per se*, as is sometimes charged. Lukács's argument leads not to an opposition to reason in general, but like Hegel's philosophy, on which it is based, it rejects the universal pretensions of formal rationality in order to validate the claims of dialectical rationality.

What really is questionable in Lukács's procedure is also what is most original and fruitful, namely, the discovery that linking all the phenomena of capitalist society Marx criticizes, from fetishism to mechanization and crises, there is a common structure, a pattern constituted by the imposition of formal rationality on the social world. It is this discovery which is the basis for Lukács's generalization of Marx's approach in the theory of reification.

Marx himself did not thematize this patterning process; his analysis therefore falls short of a specifically cultural approach. Lukács's leap from the critique of political economy to a theory of capitalist culture is thus a step beyond Marx, and it is fair to say that his reading of Marx involves a certain distortion of the latter's position insofar as he fails to make clear the originality of his own views, but attributes everything to Marx. This step beyond Marx was inspired, however, not only by Lukács's reading of philosophy and sociology, but still more by real social changes in capitalism with which many of his critics today have still not come to terms after fully fifty years.

Like Weber, Simmel and a number of other thinkers of the period, Lukács believed that fetishism extends in advanced capitalism into every domain of social life. This made it necessary to develop concepts unifying the diverse phenomena Marx criticized more or less separately in his work. This, rather than any retreat into irrationalism, inspired by *mauvaises lectures*, is what lies behind the introduction of the concept of reification and its application in a cultural critique of capitalism.

Reification

For Lukács the crisis of reason encompasses the dominant paradigm of rationality in all its manifestations, from science and technology to history and sociology, from the market and the bureaucracy to the socialist opposition itself. The concept of “reification,” which Lukács applies in all these domains is based on four principal sources: Marx’s critique of machine industry and his concept of economic fetishism, Weber’s concept of rationalization, and Hegel’s concept of appearance. Lukács theory can best be understood as a generalization of Marxian theory in two dimensions, in sociological breadth through Weber, and in ontological depth through Hegel. So generalized, the concept of reification becomes the basis for a critique of capitalist rationality as a system of thought and a method of organization threatened by its inability to grasp the material substratum of its own formalistic categories and institutional structures.

According to Lukács, the basis of all forms of reification is the capitalist transformation of the work process. The reification of labor is therefore the origin and model of reification throughout the society. “The destiny of the worker becomes the general destiny of the entire society.”[92] In practice, capitalism imposes this particular destiny on ever larger segments of the population as it everywhere divorces workers from their means of production and organizes them in factories. The capitalist class itself justifies its right to possess these means of production by claiming that they are the fruit of its own labor. Labor thus has new social and ideological functions in capitalist society, different in principle from those it possessed in earlier times. It is no longer a special concern of a particular estate as in slave and feudal society. Labor is not seen as a degraded, subhuman activity, but as the source of all social utility, as an eminently human occupation. This is not merely an ideological change; the key traits of reification workers experience also affect the upper classes. “The problems of consciousness arising from wage-labor are repeated in the ruling class in a refined and spiritualized, but for that very reason, more intensified form.”[93]

Lukács seeks the “*Seinsgrund*” of reified thought even in its highest philosophical manifestations in the structure of the capitalist labor process.[94] Under capitalism, the productive system faces the worker as a completed and independent object world, which imposes its own rhythm and order on his or her laboring activity. The more advanced is the mechanization, the more the expenditure of this labor power becomes the simple control of the autonomous productive activity of the machines themselves. Here work tends to become “the contemplative stance adopted towards a process mechanically conforming to fixed laws, enacted independently of man’s consciousness and impervious to human intervention, i.e. a perfectly closed system.”[95]

It is characteristic of reification that this appearance of autonomy and objective lawfulness obscures the fact that the machine itself is a product of human labor, that its essence is not to be found merely in the structure of its operation, but also in the human activity which first created it and gave it that structure. In short, obscured behind the rationality of the given productive system is the developmental process of the human species itself, of its knowledge and powers, and of the class relations of the society which created it.

The capitalist too confronts reified reality in his economic activity in a similar manner at another level. His much vaunted entrepreneurial “creativity,” says Lukács,

consists entirely in calculating as exactly as possible what will happen despite of his own intervention. The capitalist then attempts to so position himself with respect to this pre-determined outcome that he can profit from the objective evolution. Like the worker confronted with the autonomous activity of the machine, the capitalist confronts the autonomous activity of the market.

Thus the activity of the individual subject in capitalist society is not the transformation of reality in Lukács's ontological sense of the term, but rather conformity to it, and especially to its laws, in order to realize its potential benefits for the individual. The intervention of the subject is exhausted in taking up an orientation with respect to an ultimately unchangeable reality. Where this orienting activity is multiplied many times over, massive regularities of behavior appear which may indeed have a significant effect on the real world. But the subjects do not assume this effect as their common goal, but rather relate to it as the presupposition of an individual calculus of losses and gains. Thus, "the attitude of the subject becomes purely contemplative in the philosophical sense."^[96]

It is this contemplative attitude and the practices associated with it that lie at the origin of the fetishism of commodities. In *Capital* Marx describes fetishism as the substitution of exchange value for use value, relations between social objects for relations between the human beings who produce them, both in everyday life and in the scientific representation of the economy. Marx attributes this condition to the generalization of commodity exchange on the market. Fetishism characterizes a society in which the economic relations between the individuals are governed by the forces they unleash through their unplanned market interactions. In such a society, the "law" of the market takes on an independence and power, a "material character," the individuals themselves increasingly lose. Marx relates this condition to the fact that production itself is splintered and fragmented.

In the form of society now under consideration, the behavior of men in the social process of production is purely atomic. Hence their relations to each other in production assume a material character independent of their control and conscious individual action. These facts manifest themselves at first by products as a general rule taking the form of commodities.^[97]

Marx calls the result "fetishism" because the human relations of producers and consumers appear not as such, but as relations between economic goods and categories, which latter seem to have an effective reality independent of the individuals. The outcome of the myriad interactions of individuals on the market, which none can chart although all participate in determining it, appears as specifically economic "properties" attached to the goods in circulation. Thus goods "have" a price which seems to belong to them much as do their physical and chemical properties. Indeed, so real is their price that it effectively governs the movement of the goods. Similarly, some goods "are" capital, which others take the form of profit or wages or savings, and so on. Yet it is clear that while these categories are in no sense imaginary, neither are they "real" attributes of the things to which they are applied. They are, says Marx; social relations become things, or "reified."

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between

themselves, but between the products of their labour.[98]

Following in the footsteps of Weber, Lukács develops a general cultural analysis of capitalist forms of life in which certain traits Marx identified with fetishism are considered to be exemplary for society as a whole. Weber's importance, in this regard, lies in his emphasis on the role of "rationalization" in the development of capitalism, the submission of social reality to calculability and control. Weber's theory of rationalization has to do with the extension of formalistic, quantifying reason to social life. He links the process of rationalization to the rise of modern science, with its quantification of nature, and to the emergence of modern capitalism, with its orientation toward economic gain. The two tendencies are joined in the idea of society as an object of technical control. This tendency is fully realized in the bureaucratic system. Lukács incorporates Weber's theory wholesale into his own: wherever in capitalist society quality appears as quantity, or human interactions as the interaction between social things, and wherever the course of social events appears to be determined by quasi-natural laws, Lukács will interpret the phenomena through his concept of reification.

Lukács originality with respect to Weber lies in his emphasis on the tension between the formal structures of rationalization and the actual human "content" of social life on which they are imposed. Lukács thus borrows many themes from Weber, but treats them in the general framework of Marx's critique of fetishism, as a formal-rational "appearance" in dialectical conflict with an underlying reality it expresses. One might almost say that Weber's theory is recast by Lukács in the mold of Marx's, so that its general tendency is reversed: no longer an account of the inexorable progress of rationalization's "iron cage," Lukács's refurbished Weberianism sets this trend off against a dialectical counter-trend that promises eventual release from subservience to rationalization. In Lukács, social reality escapes from the net of reified rationality: the increasing rationality of the parts is tied, he claims, to the invincible "irrationality of the total process," to economic crisis and violent resistance from below.[99] With this approach, Lukács has the basis of a specifically Marxist theory of the culture of capitalism, developed later in many dimensions by other Marxists, especially by the Frankfurt School.

The Lukácsian crisis theory is concerned with the generalization and breakdown of formal rationality as the governing principle of capitalist social life. The crisis appears "in the conflict between existence in its immediacy together with its expression in thought in the categories of reflection, and living social reality." [100] Here we once again encounter the contradiction between "true actuality" and "existing actuality" identified by the early Marx. Lukács's formulation implies a contradiction between form and content at two related levels, epistemologically and socio-politically.

Lukács argues that bourgeois political economy is the immediate theoretical expression of the social structure (that is to say, of "existence in its immediacy"). Because of its formal-rational character, this structure stands in contradiction with "living social reality." Lukács explains the emergence of political economy in terms of the relative success of the bourgeoisie in imposing its reified categories on actual social life.

Nor is it an accident that economics became an independent discipline under capitalism. Thanks to its commodity and trade arrangements capitalist society has given the whole of economic life an identity notable for its autonomy, its cohesion and its reliance on immanent laws. This was

something quite unknown in earlier forms of society.[101]

But even this relative success of capitalist economic theory and practice meets its limit in inevitable resistance from below. Thus for Lukács formal rationality enters into crisis both epistemologically, in the ultimate failure of capitalist economic and social categories adequately to grasp the content of social life; and socio-politically, in the failure of the objects of these categories, the real institutions and relations they reflect, adequately to shape the lives of human beings in the society.

Nevertheless, Lukács insists that political economy does advance science and formulates more or less exact calculations and predictions in every sphere by abandoning qualitative explanations for quantitative ones. Partial abstract systems of laws can be constructed, each one embracing a specific segment of the economy in a form that allows it to be successfully manipulated for individual advantage. But the strength of this method is also its limit. Political economy's universal and atemporal laws cannot grasp the practices that constitute the lawful regularity of social reality. Thus it cannot comprehend those shifts and transformations at the level of the "totality" in which the foundations of the social system are laid and changed. "The whole structure of capitalist production rests on the interaction between a necessity subject to strict laws in all isolated phenomena and the relative irrationality of the total process." [102]

This "irrationality of the total process" is reflected in the economic crises of capitalism, in which Lukács sees an unconscious rebellion of use value against the exchange value that is its phenomenal form. The reified form here fails to mediate successfully the production and distribution of the real contents—use values—needed to maintain the system and the individuals who live under it.

This same "irrationality" appears consciously in the class struggle. "Force. . . appears as the concrete embodiment of the irrationality limiting capitalist rationalism, of the intermittence of its laws." [103] In class struggle economic, political and social acts react profoundly on each other, in direct opposition to the rigorous separation between them in bourgeois theory and practice; this constitutes an immediate refutation of the reified point of view. To the bourgeoisie the result appears as imminent barbarism and social disintegration. Lukács argues, on the contrary, that it is the uncomprehended content of that abstract labor power the capitalist pays at the factory gate, shattering its own reified form of objectivity and manifesting itself directly in historical action. Here the totality, as the actual moving force of history, the reality behind the reified appearances, emerges independently of the social laws and confronts them with forces they cannot control.

In this reformulation of the Marxian crisis theory, reification is a process of differentiation that produces relatively independent spheres of social life that interact externally. The autonomization of these subsystems is the condition of their restructuration under a formal technologic of rationalized control. The ultimate dialectical mediation of reified social reality consists in the real practical subversion of the social order through the breakdown of the boundaries between its subsystems. Making connections between these subsystems is the most threatening oppositional strategy for this reified social order, the strategy through which a new paradigm of rationality imposes itself on the inherited material of the old society. It is through such subversive mediation that the human community, conscious of itself, assumes control of its own history.

Reification and Reason

The full significance of Lukács's theory of reification within his construction of Marxist theory can only be understood by examining its ontological dimension. The basis of this approach is Hegel's distinction between "understanding" (*Verstand*) and "reason" (*Vernunft*.) As Hegel employs this distinction, it refers to different levels of reality, as well as to different faculties and methods. Hegel does not pretend to "refute" understanding as in error, so much as to cut down its claim to being the ultimate paradigm of rationality. Reason, for Hegel, arises not in opposition to understanding, but dialectically from it, through a process of mediation.

In his later defence of *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács writes that Hegel's "true philosophy of society" is his logic of essence because "unbeknownst to Hegel of course—here the real laws of movement, the real social being of bourgeois society mirror themselves conceptually..." Thus, "If Marx, in overturning Hegel's philosophy, has at the same time rescued its real core, then he precisely rescued most from the logic of essence—demythologized, of course."^[104] Lukács's claim is justified by Marx's frequent use of the Hegelian category of "appearance" in the discussion of economic fetishism, and by his reference to the Hegelian distinction of abstract and concrete in his most important methodological essay, the "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy." Both these aspects of Marx's thought reflect the Hegelian logic of essence.

Hegel's distinction of appearance and reality does not correspond with the usual one between what is merely for consciousness and what is in itself. Instead, appearance and reality are related as real moments in the dialectic of being. Appearance is not in the mind, but is the "immediate" reality of being, the form in which it reveals itself proximally. Through the discovery of the implicit "mediations" uniting these appearances, being passes into "reality." Similarly, in place of the usual distinction of abstract and concrete in terms of the degree of conceptual generality, Hegel substituted a distinction between the unilateral and the holistic. The abstract is the partial "moment" in a concrete "totality." Lukács's concept of reification covers approximately the territory of Hegel's concepts of appearance and abstraction.

The pivotal moment in this transition from appearance to reality is the transcendence of what Hegel calls the "law of appearance." This category refers to the connections between things established by analytical "understanding," for example in natural scientific explanation as the latter is interpreted by Kant. Scientific laws in this sense presuppose the independent existence of the things they draw into external relation, and fail to found these things through the relations that are defining for them. Law thus establishes, Hegel argues, only "immediate because abstract unity" and must be transcended by reason (*Vernunft*) in the concrete and mediated unity of a totality of essential relations.^[105]

For the most part Marx himself follows the Hegelian usage of these terms. However, there is a significant ambiguity in his theory of fetishism. There Marx seems to rely on the conventional distinction between the abstract and the concrete to describe the process in which money "appears" as the general equivalent for all economic goods. This "identity" of all commodities is ultimately rooted in the equivalence of the labor they contain. The comparability of all the forms of labor, their "abstract" identity (in the conventional sense of the term) is rooted in turn in the capitalist transformation of the

labor process. In the course of capitalist development, the concrete, qualitative specificity of the various types of craft labor is eliminated and all are reduced to the mere quantitative expenditure of time and energy. They thus become comparable, or equivalent in becoming more "abstract".

However, in spite of Marx's apparent reliance on the conventional distinction of abstract and concrete in these discussions, his constant reference to the former as the "appearance" of the latter indicates that something more complex is involved. In fact, the "Introduction of the Critique of Political Economy" shows that Marx's use of the conventional distinction is embedded in a Hegelian dialectic of appearance and reality.

There Marx explicitly employs the Hegelian distinction of abstract and concrete to describe his own method, and relates it to the distinction of appearance and reality. Marx writes, in a famous passage, "The concrete is concrete, because it is a combination of many objects with different destinations, i.e. a unity of diverse elements. In our thought, it therefore appears as a process of synthesis, as a result, and not as a starting point, although it is the real starting point and, therefore, also the starting point of observation and conception."^[106] Marx applies this distinction to the theory of fetishism, and shows that the abstract generality of the categories of the capitalist economy is the result of a process of development which, to be fully comprehended, must be reinserted into the social totality from which it arises.

The "synthesis" through which thought brings together all the various determinations and categories of the capitalist economy in a concrete totality, concrete in the Hegelian sense, thus overcomes their unilateral character precisely in the course of explaining their historical and origins and social functions. This synthesis is simultaneously, however, the demonstration that abstractness in the sense of conceptual generality, is the necessary form of appearance of the social reality which underlies the economy. So Marx writes that "the categories are therefore but forms of expression, manifestations of existence of this subject, this definite society . . ."^[107] Marx's method, as he himself describes it in this text, condenses the two concepts of the abstract and the concrete into one in a dialectic of appearance and reality.

The unity of these two concepts of the abstract and the concrete is in fact adumbrated already in Hegel's own discussion of the appearance/reality dialectic. Of course the entire *Logic*, indeed all of Hegel's work, is based on a method of exposition that passes from the abstract in his sense of the term toward the concrete. However, the theory of "appearance" thematizes precisely this distinction as a general ontological category. Appearance in this Hegelian sense is the "whole" insofar as it is "manifested" in "parts" which themselves have the apparent form of independence and autonomy. It is this form which is dialectically transcended in the synthesis of the parts in a "totality," in "reality."

These considerations on Hegel should help to explain why Lukács conjoins social ontology and methodology in this theory of reification. His starting point is the *appearance* of autonomy of the economic system and, modeled on it, other differentiated social institutions. This appearance, can neither be treated as an illusion, ideology or "worldview," nor as a reality in the full sense of the term. Rather it is *Erscheinung*, "appearance," that is to say; it is the real *in* that aspect which reveals a systematic order, a lawful form.

It is important for understanding Lukács relation to romanticism to note that he

does not contrast this lawful order with immediate experience. His philosophy is not one of romantic protest against reification; he is too much of a Hegelian for that. Rather, he seeks to transcend the category of appearance through mediating it at a higher level, a level richer in form as well as in content. In Hegel's *Logic*, this is the level of "totality," as a complex of essential relations between form and content, appearance and reality, law and its determined objects.

Lukács argues that Marx's method in *Capital* corresponds closely with Hegel's. The autonomized partial moments of the whole appear as "facts" of social life, raised to consciousness in the categories of political economy and comprehended through its formal—rational laws. These latter are not, for Marx, illusions or errors, but pivotal moments in the transcendence of the immediate appearances. This is why Marx's own theory is presented as a "critique" rather than as a canonically formulated alternative to political economy. As Lukács understands Marx, bourgeois economics thus represents the moment of appearance, formulated as a law through the understanding, while Marx's critique represents reason's discovery of the reality which appears.

There is however a significant difference between this Marxian and the original Hegelian approach: where in Hegel the contrast of understanding and reason is an atemporal distinction in ontological levels, Marx explains it historically. The sphere of appearance, which consists for Marx in the reified facts and laws of capitalism, is bounded historically by a possible transcendence in action. Reification is thus not merely subjective, but neither is it a permanent reality that can never be changed. It is the failure to grasp reification as social appearance in this sense that leads to its philosophical representation as an eternal foundation of knowledge and experience, rather than as a historically specific cultural form. Lukács's own analysis focuses on this aspect of the theory of reification.

Lukács argues that the Kantian analytic understanding represents in philosophy, at the highest level of generality, the same reified formalism found in bourgeois political economy. Just as Hegelian reason transcends the understanding through a synthetic process of mediation, so Marx accomplishes the same sort of radical critique of political economy. For Lukács, however, Marx is not simply applying Hegelian dialectics to a particular domain, the economy, nor are the formalistic categories of political economy merely categories of a specific social science. Bourgeois economics and the forms of existence of which it is the expression is the archetypal domain from which formalistic rationality arises as a cultural pattern. Lukács observes that "the structure of commodity relations [can] be made to yield a model of all the forms of objectivity of bourgeois society together with all the forms of subjectivity corresponding to them."^[108] The general predominance of formalistic rationality in philosophy, science, law and the other areas of the superstructures can now be explained on this basis.

From Lukács's meta-theoretical standpoint, the economy is the concrete substratum and the real basis of the philosophically abstracted categories which define formal rationality and its antinomies. The meta-theoretical reconstruction of these categories in the economy alters the problematic of rationality and points toward a very different kind of solution to its antinomies than that offered by philosophy, namely, a historical solution. On these terms, Marx's critique of political economy becomes the basis for a more general critique of formalistic rationality. In linking political economy as form of appearance to its base in the totality, Marx indicates the lines along which the concept of rationality would have to be revised to lose its formalistic limitation. Lukács

thus rediscovers the whole Marxian problematic of rationality from these indications in the economic works.

Lukács claims that his own approach unites philosophy and science, theory and history in the historical dialectic. The split between these domains is due to an illusion into which every era falls, the illusion that its own most general formal categories are suprahistorical. Philosophy then proceeds to elaborate abstract and atemporal systems based on the implications and contradictions of this apparently suprahistorical form, while the material life of society, history, is viewed as mere factual content.

Bourgeois society is unique in that in it the suprahistorical form appears as analytic understanding, corresponding to the actual categorical structure of the economy which is its archetype and source. Thus here the science of the economy transcends its own boundaries as a specialized discipline and contributes to the resolution of properly philosophical problems. In relating economy to rationality, the immediacy of form can finally be overcome, and it can be historicized in contact with its substratum and content. This historicization can be extended to all the more abstract philosophical theories that arise on the basis of the formal structure of the economy. Thus philosophy can be swept into the movement of history, and history itself can become the study of reason, no longer a mere contingent collection of facts. It can be shown “that history consists precisely in the constant transformation of those forms which earlier modes of thinking, undialectical and stuck fast in the immediacy of their present as they always were, regarded as suprahistorical.”^[109]

In sum, Lukács identifies formal rationality with capitalism and dialectical reason with socialism as successive stages in the history of rationality, and not as atemporal and alternative paradigms, each potentially valid throughout all of history. This historical identification of the forms of rationality Lukács regards as the specific contribution of Marxism to the resolution of the problems raised by Hegel’s theory of rationality.

The great advance over Hegel made by the scientific standpoint of the proletariat as embodied in Marxism lay in its formulation of the categories of reflection [*Reflexionsbestimmungen*] not as an “eternal” stage in the comprehension of reality in general, but rather as the necessary forms of existence and of thought of bourgeois society. Marxism thus grasped these categories as reifications of being and thought, and therewith discovered the dialectic in history itself.”^[110]

It is to Lukács’s application of this approach in an original meta-theory of philosophy that I will turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

The Realization of Philosophy

The Heritage of Classical German Philosophy

For Lukács traditional philosophy is in essence theory of culture that does not know itself as such. Philosophy reflects on cultural structures which it misinterprets as eternal principles disconnected from the accidents of history and social life. Yet in spite

of this systematic misconstruction of culture, philosophy is important insofar as it thematizes cultural presuppositions and exposes them to discussion and criticism. Philosophy has a unique contribution to make to a social theory which wants to understand its own place in a process of cultural transformation of which it is a part. This explains why the heart of Lukács's most important work is devoted to an extended analysis of the history of modern philosophy.

In the foreword to *History and Class Consciousness*, he says “ it is of *practical* importance to return in this respect to the traditions of Marx-interpretation founded by Engels (who regarded ‘the German workers’ movement’ as the ‘heir to classical German philosophy.’)”^[111] However, this statement is misleading to the extent that it would incline the reader to seek in Lukács a treatment of classical Germany philosophy similar to that which it receives from Engels and his orthodox Marxist followers. In fact there are few important similarities, for Lukács returns less to Engels’ specific interpretation of the heritage than to the general question of Marxism’s relation to its philosophical forebears.

Engels was the first to describe the broad sweep of the history of ideas from the French Enlightenment through Hegel and Feuerbach as a vast intellectual prolegomena to Marxism. He claimed that the German working class movement was the heir of this great intellectual tradition, continuing it within a new framework. However, this new framework, as Engels understood it, bore little resemblance to the heritage it assumed. Engels’ Marxism is a natural philosophy, synthesizing all the sciences into a materialist worldview. The final traces of classical German philosophy that remain were to be found in a revised dialectic, which presumably continued the Hegelian theory of reality as process. But neither this materialist worldview nor this dialectic can carry the weight of the inheritance Engels claims for them.

In fact for Engels the heritage of the bourgeoisie is not so much philosophy as science. The epistemological and ontological concerns of classical German philosophy go by the boards. Bourgeois philosophy served a function in developing dialectics, in stimulating the growth of the sciences, and in combating religion with materialist ideology. But, if Marxism can assume this heritage, it is only by everywhere substituting new scientific modes of thought for the old speculative ones. In the process, reason ceases to be problematical—hence philosophical; it regains the immediate self-certainty of early modern science, distinguishing itself from philosophy as this science distinguished itself from that of Aristotle.

For Engels the essence of the heritage is science, because only science is *universal*, not bound by the class conditions on which it nevertheless depends for its birth. The proletariat alone in bourgeois society *needs* the truth, and it alone, therefore, can rise to the universal point of view required for the continued pursuit of scientific truth in the period of the decadence of bourgeois society. Even in the natural sciences the declining bourgeoisie cannot accept the truth it discovers, because at every turn new ideas undermine the foundations of bourgeois ideology and subvert the static worldview and the “*post festum*” religious conversion of a class menaced by the repercussions of its own rationalistic traditions. Hence the task of reason devolves on the proletariat, which is prepared to accept this task in the proper spirit and carry it forward.

Like Engels and the mainstream of the Marxist tradition, Lukács too sees more at stake in the socialist movement than a change in property relations; the struggle will also decide the fate of reason itself. However, for Lukács, gone is the enlightenment

optimism and faith in science of the Marxist mainstream, gone the supreme self-confidence of Engels, who still could say of the petty bourgeoisie, “Let [them] cast in their lot with the anti-Semites until they have convinced themselves that they get no help in that quarter.”[112]

Both the rationalism and the irrationalism of bourgeois society now appear to Lukács to be infinitely more problematical than ever they appeared to earlier Marxists. For the first time there arises within Marxism an interrogation of enlightenment itself, and not just of its limits or abuse in bourgeois society. In this sense, Lukács’s critique of reified rationality foreshadows the later work of Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Like them, Lukács sees in modern irrationalism not a mere regression behind the achieved level of rationality, but the dialectical correlate of the later. In his own terminology irrationalism is described as a reaction against reification under the horizon of reification itself.[113] In any case, the heritage of classical German philosophy now appears in a very different light than it did to Engels, not as the salvation of the scientific debris of the Enlightenment from an increasingly obscurantist bourgeoisie, but as a great attempt to validate and found rationality itself, an attempt which inevitably failed on the ground of bourgeois society but which may yet succeed on proletarian soil.

For Lukács, bourgeois thought reaches its peak in classical German philosophy, but at the same time its contradictions manifest themselves there with more clarity and rigor than elsewhere. These contradictions, Lukács sums up as the “antinomies of bourgeois thought,” the split between subject and object, freedom and necessity, value and fact, form and content, which philosophy attempts to overcome in what Lukács calls a “totality.” For Lukács as for Hegel, “To transcend such ossified antitheses is the sole concern of reason.”[114] The resolution of the antinomies is the fundamental exigency of this philosophy, through which it founds its concept of reason. But, Lukács argues, in spite of the most strenuous intellectual efforts, the antinomies emerge intact from bourgeois philosophical reflection. Kant’s philosophy is for Lukács the highest and purest expression of these antinomies, and the greatness of Hegel lies principally in having developed the dialectical methodology by which Kantianism could be subjected to a rigorous critique and transcended. Marxism then appears as the completion of the Hegelian critique of Kant, a completion which requires a radical change in orientation, but which in essence prolongs Hegelian dialectics. Lukács’s own contribution consists in the appropriation of Hegel’s dialectical critique of Kant from within Marxism.

From this standpoint classical German philosophy takes on a wholly new importance for Marxism. It poses for the first time, if in a still relatively unconscious form, the fundamental problems that Marxism is called upon to solve. The theory of the antinomies of bourgeois thought is a summum of the fundamental methodological exigencies of a new concept of reason: the dialectical unification of subject and object, freedom and necessity, value and fact, form and content. This philosophy, Lukács says, “is able to think the deepest and most fundamental problems of the development of bourgeois society through to the end—on the plane of philosophy . . . And—in thought—it is able to take all the paradoxes of its position to the point where the methodological necessity of going beyond this historical stage in mankind’s development can at least be seen as a problem.”[115] Henceforth the founding of a universal concept of reason is impossible without this *historical* progress. This historical progress has therefore become, as such, a demand of reason. The failure of classical German philosophy

demonstrates that reason requires, on purely methodological grounds, a step beyond bourgeois society, beyond philosophical speculation into revolutionary practice.

Lukács refuses either to attempt a speculative resolution of the antinomies of philosophy, or to ignore them in the naïve self-certainty of science. The only possible reconciliation is the practical transcendence of the opposition between the antinomial terms at the level at which they arise. The procedure of Lukács's meta-theory of classical German philosophy consists in identifying this level as social and demonstrating the continuing traces of their social origin in the most abstract concepts of this philosophy.

The Reified Theory-Practice Relation

Lukács's approach to the study of philosophy is deeply disconcerting for it asks us not only to believe that philosophical abstractions are rooted in social life, but, stranger still, to believe that the problems arising from these abstractions can be resolved in social life. This approach implies a question not ordinarily posed about philosophy, namely why it is philosophy in the first instance.

This question makes no sense in terms of the usual Marxist theory of ideology. That theory contrasts an apologetic abstractionism, starting out from the problems of social life and rising to philosophy with, on the contrary, a direct practical assault on these same problems in order to resolve them practically. Clearly, such a philistine position leads to the simple dismissal of philosophy in order to turn to the serious business of practical affairs. Yet Lukács's point is that the kind of social problems that become the basis of philosophical reflection simply cannot be solved by such an unreflected practicality. They arise, rather, at the points where such practice invariably fails, or still more critically, at those points at which its very success raises further questions it knows not how to address practically. For Lukács, therefore, it is not any and every practice which might resolve philosophical problems, but only a very special kind of practice the nature of which he sets out to explain.

This dialectic of theory and practice might be approached from another angle. Most Marxists consider practice as a more or less conscious implementation of theory (of bourgeois or proletarian ideology, for example), but it would conform more to Lukács's intent to reverse the terms of the equation in order to consider theory as a specific type of practice "raised to consciousness" and conceptualized. One might ask then what it is about the type of practice prevalent in bourgeois society that generates the problems with which philosophy is concerned. This question could also be reformulated more precisely as follows: What is the inner limit on practice in bourgeois society which prevent it from resolving practically the types of problems that then appear in philosophy as antinomies? What is there about this practice that makes of it the source of problems it cannot even begin to resolve, which do not appear as practical problems at all, but rather as philosophical problems? Already, the very form of these questions begins to indicate just why instead of recommending an immediate return to practice, Lukács proceeds to a meta-theoretical critique of philosophy in the course of which everyday practice too is subjected to critical analysis.

Reified thought arises from the practical confrontation of individual and reified social reality. It is not confined to the bourgeoisie, but affects all classes in bourgeois society, including the proletariat. Not surprisingly, however, it is particularly suited to the life conditions of the bourgeoisie, which are individualistic in essence. Solidarity

between members of the class has a very limited (primarily defensive) function, and the form of their interaction is generally one of competition and conflict, not cooperation and common struggle. Therefore, what the class creates in common, as a class, it generally accomplishes unconsciously, through mechanisms which work behind the backs of the individuals. Each capitalist is aware of the activity of the class as a whole, “as something external which is subject to objective laws which it can only experience passively.”[116]

These sociological considerations form the essential background to a discussion of Lukács’s meta-theoretical procedure in the critique of philosophy. The antinomy of value and fact can serve here as an exemplary philosophical problem that arises from the reified theory-practice relation. The isolated individual is condemned to accept existing social reality, free only to take up one or another inner attitude toward it. Social reality appears to be governed by a pitiless determinism, indifferent to the needs and values of the individual, which appear to be purely subjective. Value stands opposed to fact, freedom to necessity. This correlation of inner freedom and outward necessity, of subjective value and objective reality is the immediate theoretical consequence of a practice which refuses all solidarity, all conscious *Aufhebung* of the unintended consequences of individual action.

The struggle of the individual with reified reality can play itself out in two complementary forms.

The reified consciousness must also remain hopelessly trapped in the two extremes of crude empiricism and abstract utopianism. In the one case, consciousness becomes a completely passive observer moving in obedience to laws which it can never control. In the other it regards itself as a power which is able of its own—subjective—volition to master the essentially meaningless motion of objects.[117]

These two antinomial opposites reappear everywhere in reified theory, in the opposition of a psychology of adaptation to an ethics of duty, in the opposition of a philosophy of history which emphasizes the lawful course of events to one which emphasizes the role of great men and ideas, in the opposition of a legal theory emphasizing environmental causes of behavior to one emphasizing personal responsibility, and so on and so forth.

For the individual, the dilemma is a painful and inescapable one. He or she may accept the given reality as is, and attempt to achieve a personally advantageous position within it. Freedom is now restricted to movement within the framework of the necessary laws of existing reality. No attempt can be made to transform or alter this world and what must necessarily come to pass within it. Resistance can lead only to defeat. However, the psychic costs of the realistic capitulation before reification have also been calculated from Stendhal to the modern critiques of conformism. Society as a market, indeed a racket in selfhood, is ultimately what Lukács’s discussion suggests.

The other horn of the dilemma is a utopian struggle to realize higher values in the world. The individual may refuse the existing reality and stand on principle regardless of cost. This attitude splits the subject in half, dividing its substance between empirical needs and desires that can best be satisfied by conforming, and the authentic selfhood that derives from moral law. This position, which Kant developed into a coherent ethical philosophy, is no more successful than “realism” in resolving the antinomy of value and fact. Indeed, by incorporating the split between these dimensions into the inner life of the subject, it intensifies it to a tragic degree. An unyielding reality, mechanistic in the

unfolding of its autonomous course, proves unresponsive to the moral promptings of utopian aspiration which it threatens in the inner citadel of the self. “Freedom,” Lukács writes, “is neither able to overcome the material necessity of the system of knowledge and the soullessness of the fatalistic laws of nature, nor is it able to give them any meaning.”[118]

Lukács arrives by this route at a theory of alienation quite close to that of the early Marx. “The activity of man, his own labor becomes something objective and independent of him which is submitted to the alienated autonomy of the natural social laws . . .”[119] This is the core of the Marxian critique of capitalist alienation, the demonstration that in this society, even in his most strenuous self-assertion man remains “object and not subject of events.”[120]

Reason and Domination

So far the discussion of Lukács’s meta-theory of philosophy has shown that the antinomies of practical reason can be derived from the immediate lifeworld of practical activity in capitalist society. This is not surprising since practical reason is inevitably closest to actual practice in its concepts and problems. However, the parallel demonstration that the antinomies of pure reason, specifically the antinomy of subject and object, can also be derived from this same practical lifeworld is more difficult.

How, on Lukács’s terms, can one understand the subject-object relation of bourgeois philosophy, which claims to be founding for practice rather than founded by it? Lukács suggests an answer to this question which I will reformulate as a meta-theoretical critique of the subject-object concept. A study of this argument also shows how Lukács derives the antinomies of reason from the structure of reified practice.

According to Lukács, the reified paradigm of knowledge is rooted in the practice of technical control which is the central project of the bourgeoisie from its origins as a class. More precisely, it is the universality of this project that distinguishes bourgeois thought from earlier forms of thought. Precapitalist societies carved only a narrow sphere of activity out of nature, frequently ascribing their power over this small humanized enclave to divine intervention. Technical rationality was thus always bounded at its limits by another type of thinking, a condition which reflected the feebleness of the human species and its limited understanding of the world. Never before the emergence of capitalism did human beings see their destiny as the total and integral domination of nature.

In capitalist society the ancient impotence and restraint gives way to a Faustian ambition to overcome every residue of uncontrolled nature, and this new project completely transforms the concept of reason. Corresponding to the gradual fulfillment of this ambition, there is an increasing extension of reification which, projected to the limit, would make it possible to represent every aspect of existence by its quantitative essence and to control it.

Of course this tendency toward total reification is only a tendency. Theory comes to the aid of the still incompletely realized project of total domination by demonstrating its possibility in principle. The demonstration at first consists in the construction of formally rational models of the universe which reveal it to be available for domination. Capitalism was thus accompanied by the development of rationalistic philosophy and mathematical science, as attempts to validate its project. (The similarity of this argument to Heidegger’s later discussion of technology is striking.)[121] Bourgeois class

consciousness required such a demonstration to found itself as a universal and coherent worldview, capable of organizing the infinite and unending extension of the exploitation of nature.

The theoretical validation of bourgeois society requires the demonstration that the entire universe is rational, reified and controllable in principle. Bourgeois thought believes it has comprehended reality only when the human and qualitative dimensions of the real have been reduced to formal, quantitative relations between things. The subject that is dialectically correlated with this concept of reality is an agent of individual technical practice, hence a contemplative subject in the sense of this term explained above. From this standpoint, the recognition of the inviolability of the impersonal, autonomous laws of reality is the very condition of the comprehension and domination of reality by the individual. Indeed, for reified thought, “only a reality caught in the net of such concepts can really be mastered by us.”^[122]

Might there not be another basis for control of objects: not individual manipulation on the basis of laws but conscious collective decision about the laws themselves? This would seem to be a possibility with respect to the laws of society. But this possibility is foreclosed by reified thought which understands law in every sphere as the precondition, not the outcome of action. For this thought, in sum, the reified is the rational and therefore also the controllable. The concept of knowledge is accordingly narrowed to include only such a rationality.

To show that the world is rational in this sense is to derive its *form* from the very structure of reified reason; what exists as reality in the outer world also exists as truth in the subject. The point can be made in another way. For reified thought “our” domination of nature, that of the human species in general, is only possible insofar as nature conforms to “our” reason. “The salient characteristic of the whole epoch is the equation, which appears naïve and dogmatic, of formal, mathematical, rational knowledge both with knowledge in general and also with ‘our’ knowledge.”^[123] What is produced by “us” in thought as rational knowledge must find its validation in reality as universal and objective. Then the deduction of the world from the principles of an autonomous and free reason can be shown to correspond with the nature of things. Thus the ambition of capitalism to dominate and transform requires the demonstration of the identity of subject and object.

Lukács points out that this rationalistic philosophy involves a curious reversal of perspectives. Practically, the subject stands in a contemplative relation to the world. It is on this condition alone that subjectivity can control its world under the horizon of reification. But theoretically, the subject attempts to produce the world actively in thought. It is on this condition alone that reification can appear as the essence of reality. Practical contemplation and theoretical activity compass this basic antinomy of reified thought.

Lukács summarizes the problem as follows:

The contradiction that appears here between subjectivity and objectivity in modern rationalist formal systems . . . the conflict between their nature as systems “produced” by “us” and their fatalistic necessity as distant from and alien to man, is nothing but the logical and methodological formulation of the state of modern society. For, on the one hand, men are constantly smashing, replacing and leaving behind them “natural” irrational and factual bonds, while, on the other hand, they erect around themselves in the reality they have created and “produced by

themselves,” a kind of second nature the operation of which opposes itself to them with exactly the same lawful necessity as was the case earlier on with irrational forces of nature (more exactly: the social relations which appear in this form). “To them, their own social action,” says Marx, “takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them.”^[124]

In capitalist society, then, the unmastered alienated form of social life takes shape as the dictate, no longer of irrational religious powers, but of “scientific” laws. In its reified form reason itself becomes an expression of this alienation.

Reified thought believes it has found the essence of reality in the formal rationality of the system of determinants which expose it to reified practice. Like the individual confronted with the machine, the individual confronted with reified social reality discovers the nature of the object in its *structure* and not in the process of its *production*. Thence arises what Lukács describes as the antinomy of logical *genesis* of the “categories” in terms of which reality is understood, and the actual (collective) *production* of the social world in the course of history. According to Lukács, the bourgeois social sciences exemplify this methodological contradiction. They seek to understand their objects through their logical structure, in abstraction from their historical becoming. The illusory priority of “structure” over “process” (and its romantic inversions) arises from a confusion in ontological levels characteristic of reified thought: the individual subject confronts the products of the collective activity in which it unconsciously engages as though they were independent of human action. Thus the “categorical” level of cultural forms and the corresponding analytic concepts seems to represent a more basic level of being than historical development, a level of eternal laws and principles that founds history.

What is really happening belies this. In fact, if history appears to be a subordinate domain, this is because the reified individuals do not act on social reality through a conscious collective practice, nor, therefore do they signify “reality” as the object of such a practice. As we have seen in the previous section, reification’s technical paradigm of subjectivity and objectivity presupposes an individual subject in principle. The more or less unconscious collective practices in which capitalism really consists appear to reified thought to lie *on the side of the object*. What the individuals cannot consciously and individually accomplish is thus not “accomplished” at all, but rather suffered by them as a fate. Of course, the individuals do relate to the products of these unconscious activities, but not as to human products. Rather, all they perceive of the collective practice in which they are engaged is its results, and behind these its *form*, imprinted on the objects of their control. This form appears as an impersonal and autonomous law which preexists and predetermines social behavior.

Lukács argues that this form is not really a law but a cultural principle reflecting an unconscious social practice. It is only insofar as the object has been submitted in the course of history to this form that it enters the circuit of capitalist technical domination. Thus priority would go to history in explaining apparent social laws and not vice versa. Reified thought refuses to see this social practice as culturally grounded. Instead, it sees the historical process in which its objects are reified and dominated as unveiling the preexisting essence of these objects. For reified thought this essence is precisely that dimension of the object through which control of it can be achieved. For reified thought, the reified object surrenders its own vital mechanism to human control, revealing its true essence as a potentiality of manipulation which has always slumbered within it.

Lukács's point, once again, is that this way of representing the subject-object relation reverses the picture by occluding the unconscious social practice which "prepares" the object for instrumental manipulation, both materially and through the work of social signification in which it takes on a lawful form.

From Kant to Hegel

Lukács's conception of reified society as a "second nature," the laws of which are created by man but which appear as objective as natural laws, suggests an important philosophical parallel. This is, after all, approximately the form of the Kantian doctrine, which proclaims that experience is governed by laws imposed on it by the subject which, in turn, necessarily determine the knowledge of the subject. What is the significance of this parallel?

Lukács does not claim that Kant's theory is an ideology reflecting realities of which Kant was only dimly aware. Rather, Kant's theory is a perfectly rational way of understanding these realities, *under their horizon*, that is to say, within the framework of reification. More precisely, this means that when Kant founds the identity of "our" knowledge and objectivity in the concept of transcendental synthesis, he is not merely *reflecting*, but rather *explaining* the social realities Lukács also explains, but as those realities appear to reified theory. It was thus Kant, in a sense, who first discovered the reification of reality by social practice discussed in the last section, but only insofar as it can be constructed speculatively as an imaginary individual practice.

This inability of classical German philosophy to go beyond a speculative theory of reification has complex consequences which Lukács elucidates in the course of his meta-theoretical critique. Where practice does not "penetrate" reality, affecting it in its essence, the limits of practice will leave their mark on theory; Kant's idea of the thing in itself is the clearest example of a *theoretical trace* of that domain of objectivity of which reified practice has renounced the transformation. However, in arriving at a concept such as the thing in itself, philosophy does succeed in indicating, at least negatively, the preconditions of unreified theory and practice for which the antinomies of reified thought would not arise. This is the kernel of truth to be found in philosophy once the mystical shell of speculative construction has been stripped away by the meta-theoretical revision of its concepts.

From this standpoint, Kant's philosophy is an enormous theoretical advance over earlier rationalism, which simply assumed the rationality of the universe without "noticing" the constitutive functions of the subject^[125]. The progression from Kant to Marx can then be understood as the gradual working out of Kant's original intuition in ever more concrete, ever more adequate forms, culminating in the final recognition of the social practice behind the reified appearance. At the center of *History and Class Consciousness* is an extraordinary discussion of the development of classical German philosophy, seen in this light as a step in the intellectual progression leading to Marxism. In the course of this discussion, Lukács shows that Marxism is the veritable *Aufhebung* of this philosophical tradition, arising from its inner dynamic and on the basis of its results.

Lukács's argument is presented as a quasi-history, behind which it is possible to identify a static model that in fact organizes his presentation. This model is the Kantian "system" itself, with its threefold division into critiques of pure reason, practical reason, and judgment. The history of classical German philosophy, as Lukács presents it, is in

fact the successive thematization of each of these three aspects of Kantian doctrine *qua* solution to the antinomies. As one attempt after another fails, the emphasis shifts, culminating finally in the Hegelian dialectic. All along the way, Lukács draws out the implicit conclusions established by this “philosophical experiment,” conclusions which will later form the basis of the new foundation of the concept of reason. In this section, I will recount the main lines of Lukács’s discussion.

Lukács argues that classical German philosophy is torn by the conflict of two principles. On the one hand, it understands rationality as the basis for overcoming the contingency, the merely factual givenness of objects. This principle can be formulated in terms of the exigency of an identity of subject and object as the condition for founding a universal rationalism, unbounded by supernatural mysteries or unknowable realities. In Kant this unification of subject and object takes the form of the “production” of the object in thought through its derivation from rational form. On the other hand, classical German philosophy assumes a reified, formalistic concept of reason which necessarily secretes contingency and facticity as the residue of the process of abstraction from concrete content in which it is constituted. Such a formalistic concept of reason can never be fully united with its corresponding objects. Thus this philosophy’s paradigm of knowledge conflicts with its method of validating the claims of knowledge. Lukács regards the principle of identity of subject and object as necessary for any consistent rationalism, including Marxism, but the reified paradigm of rationality is tied specifically to capitalist society. Marxism succeeds where classical German philosophy failed precisely through meeting the demands of an identical subject-object in terms of a different, dialectical paradigm of rationality.

Lukács begins his discussion not only with a critique of Kant, but with a critical appreciation of that aspect of Kantian philosophy that already anticipate dialectics. As noted above, reified thought encounters an insurmountable contradiction between its ambition to “produce” its objects in thought by deducing them from their forms, and the impossibility of embracing the content of these forms with a formalistic concept of reason. Instead of arbitrarily dismissing this contradiction, as had earlier rationalistic metaphysics, Kant conceptualizes it in the notion of the “thing in itself.”

This concept serves many functions in Kant’s thought, which Lukács groups into two main types. On the one hand the thing in itself is the material substratum of the rational forms in which the object is comprehended. On the other hand it is the ultimate end of knowledge, as God, the soul, and so on, which “are nothing but mythological expressions to denote the unified subject or, alternately the unified object of the totality of the objects of knowledge, considered as complete (and completely known.)”[126] These different functions of the thing in itself have in common the fact that in each case it represents an absolute limit to (reified) human knowledge, a barrier beyond which thought cannot penetrate. The thing in itself thus blocks the attainment of systematic knowledge of the universe as a whole in both the direction of the deduction of the content of knowledge from its forms, and the unification of the totality of forms in a single universal system.

The problem of the thing in itself arises from the seemingly “impenetrable” character of the empirical facts presented through formalistic concepts, the impossibility of deriving the material substratum of the concepts from the concepts themselves. Earlier dogmatic metaphysics had not even recognized this problem although its trace can be discovered there too. Spinoza, for example, postulated an

infinity of mediations linking substance (form) with its particular modes (content), thereby affirming the possibility in principle, if not in practice, of deducing the entire universe from its logical structure. Lukács argues, “it is clear that this principle of systematization [of rationalism] is not reconcilable with the recognition of any ‘reality,’ and ‘content’ which in principle cannot be deduced from the principle of form and which therefore has simply to be accepted as a facticity.”[127]

Kant rejects this assumption and shows that the concepts of the understanding cannot be deployed in isolation in a metaphysic, but require a material substratum of irreducibly contingent facts to be deployed correctly. With this the very notion of building a philosophical system on the model of mathematics is refuted. Kant argues “that pure reason is unable to make the last leap towards the synthesis and the constitution of an object, and so its principles cannot be deduced ‘directly from concepts, but only indirectly by relating these concepts to something wholly contingent, namely possible experience’.”[128] Because the concepts of the understanding must always be employed in relation to an entirely contingent “possible experience,” which cannot be produced by the subject, irrationality invades the terrain on which the traditional rationalist systems were constructed.

Kant’s critique of metaphysical system building shows the connection between the two aspects of the concept of the thing in itself; for now the deductive presentation of the concepts of the understanding no longer appears, as it did for rationalism, as a legitimate grasp of the totality of knowledge and of the world. The greatness of Kant’s philosophy is that it rejects any return to irrationalism or dogmatic metaphysics in the face of this difficulty. Kant’s thought is truly “critical” with respect to dogmatic rationalism to the extent that it recognizes the insuperable opposition of form and content for a formalistic concept of reason. But Kant is as uncritical and dogmatic as his predecessors in assuming that rationality is essentially formalistic. To this extent, Kant too accepts the basic framework of reified thought without question.

It is precisely because Kant both accepts this framework and criticizes the artificial solutions to its problems that he is driven beyond the limits of earlier philosophy. The struggle to maintain a systematic of reason in the face of this apparently insurmountable difficulty leads him to the limits of reified thought. Now that the unity of reified thought and reality has been fundamentally undermined, the maintenance of a concept of reason capable of “producing” its objects is only possible beyond the horizon of pure theory. The methodological validation of the power of reason must take place in another region of human existence.

Thus Kant was led to pose the fundamental demand of reason which was to preoccupy classical German philosophy thereafter, and eventually to lead to Hegel’s dialectic: the exigency of a “subject of thought which could be thought of as producing existence without any *hiatus irrationalis* or transcendental thing in itself.”[129] In contrast to the dogmatic metaphysics of the seventeenth century, which began by accepting the reified form of objectivity of its objects and then attempted to unify subject and object by deducing this form of objectivity from reason, Kant attempts to discover a level of reality at which the duality of subject and object is transcended, and starting out from which the empirical duality of both can be deduced.

But this exigency, in turn, can only be satisfied by transcending the contemplative point of view, by discovering a practical subject which, in generating its own world of objects, transcends the rigid dichotomy of form and content of contemplative thought.

This new orientation toward practice is motivated by the desire to find a subject, the object of which is integrally and fully its own product. Lukács explains:

Theory and praxis in fact relate to the same objects, for every object is given as an indissoluble complex of form and content. However, the diversity of the attitudes of the subject orients practice toward what is qualitatively unique, toward the content and the material substratum of the object concerned. As we have tried to show, theoretical contemplation leads to the neglect of this very factor . . . The very moment when this situation, i.e. when the indissoluble links that bind the contemplative attitude of the subject to the purely formal character of the object of knowledge becomes conscious, it is inevitable either that the attempt to find a solution to the problem of irrationality (the question of content, of the given, etc.) should be abandoned or that it should be sought in practice.[130]

Responding to this dilemma, Kant turned from epistemology to ethics, from the thinking subject to the acting individual to find the level of subject-object unity. The empirical duality of subject and object seems to be transcended in a deeper unity at the level of being at which this subject acts. No merely given facticity, resistant to subjectivity and independent of it appears to trouble the production of ethical substance.

However, in Kant's work this identical subject-object of ethics still confronts the reified reality described in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Its practice encounters a world in which "laws still operate with inexorable necessity." [131] As we have seen in an earlier discussion of the value-fact antinomy, the subject divides into an empirical self, given over to the laws of this world, and a transcendental self, which is free to obey the ethical law. The determinism of outward reality now penetrates into the inner life of the individual. A similar split between the empirical and the transcendental haunts the ethical act through which the individual strives to realize absolute principles in reality. This act is always an act in the world where it must take on a phenomenal form determined by the laws of the world just like any other thing. The ethical act is perfectly integrated into the course of this outer determinism, and thus there is a sense in which no value enters reality through it. Rather, in passing from an intention of the will into the positive form of ethical behavior, the higher values seem to be irretrievably lost. It is only the inner form of the act in the mind of the actor which distinguishes it from a non-ethical act, only the disposition of the will of the actor and not the act itself which is ethical in essence. Lukács sums up this dilemma: "For precisely in the pure, classical expression it received in the philosophy of Kant it remains true that the 'ought' presuppose a being to which the category of 'ought' remains inapplicable in principle." [132]

Ethical practice does not successfully fulfill its function in the system. All that this ethic can show "is the point where the real interpretation of form and content *should* begin, where it *would* begin if its formal rationality *could* allow it to do more than predict formal possibilities in terms of formal calculations." [133] But the actual unity of form and content, the actual unity of subject and object in the ethical act remains an unknowable thing in itself transcending experience. The ethical solution to the form-content problem in the sphere of knowledge has merely reproduced its terms.

Kant fails to discover what Lukács calls "the principle of practice," the essence of which "consists in annulling *that indifference of form towards content* that we found in

the problem of the thing in itself.”^[134] The principle of practice is not discovered unless the theoretical orientation toward reality is transcended by a practice that is “tailored to the concrete material substratum of action, in order to impinge upon it to some effect.”^[135] Nevertheless, Kant’s move beyond knowledge toward practice represents important progress in the direction of a solution he could not discover. It was left to his successors to attempt to find it.

Kant’s aesthetics provides the starting point for this attempt, because it includes the concept of the “creation of a concrete totality that springs from a conception of form oriented toward the concrete content of its material substratum.”^[136] The aesthetic subject is not a formalistic, rationalistic subject, incapable on principle of penetrating the content of the objects toward which it is oriented, but a sort of synthesis of theory and practice. It is an “intuitive understanding,” “whose content is not given but ‘created’.” This understanding is, in Kant’s words, spontaneous (i.e. active) and not receptive (i.e. contemplative) both as regards knowledge and intuitive perception.”^[137] Adumbrated in this concept is the principle of a practical synthesis of reality on which Lukács bases his theory. Kant himself did not employ this aesthetic principle for such a general purpose; however, his successors, notably Schiller and Fichte, applied it to the antinomies of philosophy.

In Schiller the problem of the production of objective reality in thought begins to recede into the background as a new problem of a similar type arises in relation to the subject itself. Both the philosophical and the real social development increasingly fragment the subject into opposed faculties which no longer form a unity. The comprehension of the totality now no longer proceeds through the deduction of reality from the subject, a task the limits of which have been revealed by Kant, but through the deduction of the unity of this subject itself from the subject of aesthetic experience.

The aesthetic subject cannot reconcile the faculties of the mind without being generalized beyond the sphere of artistic production. This Schiller does in his theory of the “instinct of play” and aesthetic education as the means of overcoming the rigid specializations of bourgeois social life. The aesthetic principle then reconciles all the contraries of human nature, both in theory and practice, and shows the way back to a unified and total humanity. But this attempt to employ the non-formalistic intuitive understanding of aesthetic practice as a new concept of reason is unsuccessful. Outside the sphere of actual artistic production, it ceases to be a true subject of *practice*. Schiller generalizes it by taking up an aesthetic *attitude* toward the existing world, an attitude which reproduces the world in thought as a finished work of art, in this way apparently overcoming its reified facticity. But here the “action” of the subject is reduced to yet another form of contemplation, not calculating reason, but aesthetic appreciation.

Fichte, who also attempts to construct a new concept of reason on the basis of the intuitive understanding, transforms it into a transcendental faculty of the mind from which proceeds the rest of the subject and the entire existing world. Now philosophy turns not toward an attitude, as with Schiller, but toward a renewal of speculative metaphysics. But this position too falls short of practice. The activity that was to unite the faculties of the subject, subject and object, form and content, turns out to be no more than another form of contemplation.

In one important respect, however, Schiller and Fichte do represent an advance over Kant. Although they no more than he discover the true principle of practice, they do finally challenge the dogmatic assumption that formalistic knowledge is the only kind of

knowledge. With Hegel this challenge is brought to fruition in the dialectical method. His unique contribution is the historical approach to overcoming the irrationality of the contents of knowledge. Hegel was the first to attempt to embrace the material substratum of thought through dialectics, to create a logic of the concrete concept, of the totality.

Hegel's Dialectic

In Kant's thought, the subject "synthesizes" the real, thereby producing an objective world of experience. This means that the objects of our knowledge are not immediately given but are always already worked up by thought before we become aware of them. The synthesis of experience consists in its submission to forms of objectivity, such as space, time and causality, without which it would not take shape as a coherent world of objects at all. Where earlier philosophy had, for the most part, taken for granted the objectivity of objects and the immediacy of experience, Kant showed that objectivity is the product of a synthesis performed by the subject on the raw materials of experience through the imposition of these abstract forms. This was Kant's famous "Copernican Revolution," which placed the subject at the center of the epistemological universe where formerly the object held sway.

As Lukács explains it, Germany philosophy after Kant attempted to use the concept of an intuitive understanding, drawn from Kantian aesthetics, to radicalize still further this revolution in epistemology. The subject was not only to play the chief role in epistemology, but in ontology as well by constituting not only the forms of knowledge but also the content, the thing in itself which for Kant lay irrevocably beyond knowledge. The Kantian concept of synthesis is thus transformed into a metaphysical principle of world constitution. This is the starting point for the elaboration of the Hegelian dialectic. However, Hegel realizes that the principle of practice cannot be fulfilled starting out from the individual subject. The dialectical unification of subject and object requires a subject that is also an object, a subject commensurate with the reality, which it knows. This is the demand that the "subject be substance." Lukács explains:

Only if the subject (consciousness, thought) were both producer and product of the dialectical process, only if, as a result the subject moved in a self-created world of which it is the conscious form and only if the world imposed itself upon it in full objectivity, only then can the problem of dialectics, and with it the abolition of the antitheses of subject and object, thought and existence, freedom and necessity, be held to be solved.[138]

In sum, not a mythologized transcendental subject modeled on the individual, but some larger, collective principle must resolve of the antinomies.

From this starting point, Hegel was led to make a new type of radical generalization of Kant's Copernican Revolution. Hegel's innovation was to take the Kantian construction of the subject-object relation and to shatter its ontological basis in the traditional concepts of subject and object, which Kant and his followers still presupposed.[139] If thought and things are no longer defined as ontologically independent domains of being, in what form can they be grasped? Hegel employed a meta-theoretical procedure to answer this question. He "released" the correlated attributes of subjectivity and objectivity from their reification in the hypostasized individual subject and object in order to reconstruct their relations in a different context and at a different level. Once released from the grip of their traditional ontological base,

these attributes are thematized in new combinations in a dialectical ontology.

In this ontology functions of the subject, such as reflection and appearance, are treated as functions of the real itself. Thus the concepts of synthesis and abstract form, which in Kant belonged to the subject as its essential content, are transferred to the real where they organize its dialectical movement. The traditional subject and object no longer appear in antinomial opposition, but are now derived as secondary spheres from a more basic unity established in this dialectic.[140] On this basis, Lukács argues, Hegel was finally able to discover a way of uniting form and content, the rational categories of philosophy and their material substratum, in real experience.

The ontological region uniquely suited to the elaboration of Hegel's approach is history, a region which embodies a type of objectivity that lends itself to explanation in terms of a non-formalistic concept of reason, and which requires as its subject a collective principle that can truly be found *in* reality. This historical subject must be shown to produce the actual content of the object, not simply speculatively in thought but in reality itself. As Lukács interprets his thought, Hegel was concerned to show that in history the process of "synthesis" of the real, its "logical genesis" at the level of the categories of philosophy, is identical with the practical production of social reality by its subject. Then form and content, philosophy and reality can be united and the antinomies that emerge in the Kantian system finally overcome. As Lukács explains it:

To go beyond . . . immediacy can only mean the genesis, the "production" of the object. But this assumes that the forms of mediation in and through which it becomes possible to go beyond the immediate existence of objects as they are given, can be shown to be the *structural principles of construction and the real tendencies of the movement of the objects themselves*, that therefore intellectual genesis must be identical in principle with historical genesis.[141]

Hegel's turning toward history marks a sharp break with rationalism. Rationalism finds in history its least suitable object because history involves newness and qualitative change. Formal reason can only grasp history in terms of a system of foreseeable possibilities, derived from abstract, atemporal laws. But history as a process of concrete becoming escapes this approach. On the other hand, history appears as the ideal object of dialectics. Here a logic of contents finds an object which is in constant qualitative transformation through the interaction of subject and object, form and content in a totality. Thus Hegel treats history as reality, as ontologically fundamental.

But, Lukács argues, history only points in the direction of a solution to the problems of classical German philosophy; the mere pointing is not yet the solution. For that it would be necessary to discover the subject of history not only speculatively but in fact, to find the real "we" whose action is history. The historical subject Hegel proposes is the Spirit of Peoples. But the Spirit of Peoples does not understand the significance of its own action in the course of history. It is not conscious of the truth of its deeds, which can only be comprehended once they are completed, once history has passed on to a new stage and the past is delivered over to philosophical reflection.

This limit Hegel conceptualizes by creating a second collective subject, the World Spirit, which uses the Spirit of the Peoples to attain ends this latter does not understand. (Hence the phrase "cunning of reason.") Between the activities of the historical subject and their meaning stands a mediation which itself transcends history. Lukács concludes that Hegel's subject of history can never claim its acts as its own. It is not the self-consciousness of its own process, the "subject as substance" which, in achieving self-

consciousness, transcends the antinomies of reified thought in the theoretical and practical transformation of reality. Only the World Spirit can accomplish this as it comes to self-awareness in the head of the individual philosopher at the “end” of history. Reason thus fulfills itself in history only by transcending history. As a result,

History is not able to form the living body of the total system: it becomes a part, an aspect of the totality that culminates in the ‘absolute spirit’, in art, religion and philosophy. But history is much too much the natural, and indeed the uniquely possible life-element of the dialectical method for such an enterprise to succeed.[142]

This, according to Lukács, explains why Hegel is obliged to confront the original problems of classical German philosophy outside of history in the realm of absolute spirit. The dialectical method can only establish the identity of subject and object where historical production and categorical genesis coincide. As soon as dialectics deploys itself outside of history the problems of form and content arise once again. In the theory of absolute spirit, in pure logic, the dialectical categories continue to “develop,” but now as forms detached from any specific content and from the real becoming of the world. The time of this dialectical process is purely ideal, no longer corresponding to a real time of actions in the world.

Hegel’s work is the culmination of classical German philosophy, drawing the logical conclusions from its various experiments and discoveries. These conclusions can be summed up in three “demands of reason” which must be fulfilled to overcome the horizon of reified thought. They are: 1) the principle of practice; 2) dialectical method; 3) history as reality. In spite of his limitations, Hegel did discover the dialectic and the special affinity of dialectics for history, and these discoveries underlie the principle of practice. However, not until the actual subject of this practice is also discovered can reason be founded rationally. This, Lukács believes, awaited the historical developments which finally culminate in the Marxist theory of history. Marxism arises directly on the soil of the Hegelian system, but informed by a far deeper insight into the empirical stuff of history. In Marxism the speculative character of the Hegelian approach is finally overcome in a correct appreciation of the role of social practice in the real production of history. “In this sense Marx’s critique of Hegel is the direct continuation and extension of the criticism that Hegel himself leveled at Kant and Fichte.”[143]

The Failure of Classical German Philosophy

Lukács’s meta-theory of classical German philosophy identifies a common failure to overcome the limits of reified thought. This philosophy attempts to go beyond reification, Lukács argues, only theoretically, through resolving its contradictions in thought. But at every stage in its progress one dimension of reified thought is surmounted from the point of view of another, theoretical contemplation by ethical practice, ethics by aesthetics, formalistic knowledge by a dialectic cut off, in the last analysis, from history. And precisely because the higher level from which the lower is deduced as a special case is itself reified, the original problems of the lower level simply reappear at the higher one in a new form.

The ontological foundation of classical German philosophy is reified capitalist society. The contradictions arising objectively from capitalist reification, between individual and social law, between this law itself and the content which it determines, between, in short, the historical subject and object, cannot be transcended from within

reification. Instead, reified thought produces more and more complex speculative mediations uniting the antinomial opposites, mediations which are pure mental constructions. This, Lukács calls “conceptual mythology,” which is “nothing more than the expression in thought of some fundamental fact of life that men can neither grasp nor reject.”[144]

Even where this philosophy strives hardest to base itself on a practical principle, it remains in the reified attitude of contemplation because it can offer no real challenge to the fixed and finished character of the capitalist world from which its problems arise. The very concepts of subject and object, of thought and being, which it employs immediately express the rigid oppositions of this world. Objectivity can only be united with subjectivity in a speculative, mythological manner because no real practical unity can be conceived in the untranscended framework of capitalist society. As Lukács writes, “But how to prove this identity in thought and being of the ultimate substance?—above all when it has been shown that they are completely heterogeneous in the way in which they present themselves to the intuitive, contemplative attitude?”[145] Even Hegel cannot escape this dilemma once the dialectic develops itself outside history in the medium of pure thought.

Nevertheless, Lukács concludes, within these limits classical German philosophy does succeed in indicating the direction in which a solution to its problems can be found. “To go beyond this immediacy can only mean the ‘production’ of the object.”[146] This exigency contains the condition for a transcendence of conceptual mythology. Lukács believes he has discovered this solution in the meta-theoretical revision of the concept of subject-object identity.

It will be recalled that Marx too developed a meta-theoretical critique and revision of the identity of subject and object in his early work. He redefined the subject and object of philosophy in terms of their concrete social substratum, related the redefined subject and object according to the forms of philosophy of identity, and then “set in motion” the redefined concepts historically in order to resolve the contradictions of this philosophy. Now Lukács reaches a similar conclusion, starting out from a similar evaluation of the demand for identity as the decisive philosophical result of traditional speculation.

Revision of the Concept of Subject-Object Identity

Reified practice is the basis of the antinomy of subject and object and the other antinomies of philosophy. These antinomies arise because the reified subject of practice treats the product of its combined action with other similar subjects as a law-governed, objective reality. It is the unconsciousness of the collective social practice of these subjects which condemns them to actively reproduce a world foreign to them and to their aims. Reified theory arises on this basis as the conceptualization of the reified form of objectivity that the objects of this practice acquire as such. This type of theory is adequate to understanding the world only in the framework of this practice. But it cannot recognize its own limits because it treats the most general consequences of a historical situation in which decision-making processes are separate as a metaphysical reality. In grasping these unintended consequences as a law, it hypostasizes ontologically what is in reality only an aspect of a specific type of practice.

Lukács suggests, following Marx, that the individuals might come together, under certain objective conditions, to make conscious collective decisions about their social

activities, thereby interrupting the feedback mechanism which chains them to the perpetual reproduction of their alienated condition. This is Lukács's explanation of the Marxian idea of socialism as "human control of history."

This conception of socialism suggests an intriguing possibility: if philosophy arises from reification and reification itself arises from the unconsciousness of social practice, then could one not imagine a unique kind of "action" which would consist in bringing this social practice to consciousness and thereby changing the conditions of philosophical reflection? Might it not be possible to de-reify the world, dissolving the social basis of the philosophical antinomies, simply by becoming aware of the unintended consequences of one's actions and, in common with other social actors, bringing these consequences within the domain of conscious social choice and control? Here theory, as consciousness of social reality, would become a practical act with real social consequences and would no longer be comprehensible on reified terms as value-free contemplation of reality from a mythic epistemological "beyond." As Horkheimer puts a similar point, "in genuinely critical thought explanation signifies not only a logical process but a concrete historical one as well. In the course of it both the social structure as a whole and the relation of the theoretician to society are altered, that is both the subject and the role of thought are changed."^[147]

The central question left unanswered by this brief description of the theory concerns the nature of the "action" in which this thought would consist. The problem, as Lukács poses it, consists in finding a type of practice which does not presuppose reification as its horizon but which transcends this horizon and changes reality itself. The problem first emerged as such (although in a different formulation) with classical German philosophy. Hegel, for example, argued that the subject of such a practice would also have to be substance, that is to say, that its subjective activity would also have to be its own self-production as a real object in the world. Classical German philosophy reached this conclusion by the negative demonstration that any practice operating on a world of alien objects must accept the law of those objects as its horizon. The only practice capable of "penetrating" its objects thus proves to be one in which the subject is the object of its own practice, in which therefore its subjectivity is already an objective reality. Then changes in its subjective orientation would be immediately reflected in real changes, fulfilling the exigency of the principle of practice.

Classical German philosophy has already explored the limitations of many types of practice in its search for this identical subject-object. Technical practice and, Lukács would add, natural scientific knowledge proceed from a reified subjectivity for which the problem of the thing in itself inevitably arises. Ethics, aesthetics and the wisdom of the philosopher at the end of history all suffer from an inner resignation, even reconciliation with reified reality, toward which they take an attitude rather than effecting a change. Historical action remains as the only domain in which to find a practice that can affect not only superficial traits of reality, but the very essence of the phenomena. Since, unlike nature, history is the product of human action, it is conceivable that here self-change would be an objective change in (historical) reality as the principle of practice requires.

Equally important, the type of practice in question must affect "reality" as a whole and not just marginal aspects of it. Artistic practice, to give a counter-illustration, cannot satisfy the exigency of an identity of subject and object because it has so little impact on the social world which is founding for it. What is needed is a practice that is "total" in the sense that it is unbounded by dimensions of reality it cannot alter and

which, therefore, persist as a reified residuum, a thing in itself. In Lukács's view, the dialectical identity of subject and object can only be established through history because history is not a mere sector among others, but can be grasped as the primary and basic reality. This is so because all other subject-object relations can be derived from that of the historical subject and object and interpreted through their historical dimension. Lukács takes Hegel himself as the demonstration *in contrario* of this position, for the residue of unhistorical reality remaining in Hegel's system becomes the point at which the reified subject-object relation is reintroduced.

Lukács argues that the antinomies of value and fact, knowledge and reality would finally be overcome for a self-conscious collective subject of history. For it theory and practice would be united: the immediate repercussions on its behavior of its own self-understanding would abolish the gap between mind and matter, creating a new type of practice different from reified technical practice. The "contemplative" limits of the traditional philosophical subject would be transcended, as would the rigid opposition of subject and object, value and fact. In *knowing*, this subject would be *producing* the object of its knowledge or, more precisely, changing the form of its objectivity by overcoming its own immediacy. This would be a Kantian "intuitive understanding" based not on a mythic principle, a transcendental ego or a hypothetical god, but on actual finite subjects in the world. The class conscious proletariat occupies this place in Lukács's theory.

Interpreted along these lines, the Lukácsian concept of subject-object identity is open to misunderstanding. The argument is so formal and abstract that it is difficult to relate it to any really imaginable historical practice. It would even be possible, if one stopped short at this point in interpreting Lukács's text, to conclude that for him the proletariat freely creates a world after its own designs. Yet Lukács did not intend us to stop short here, and he explicitly denies this interpretation of his thought. He writes,

It is true that the proletariat is the conscious subject of total social reality. But the conscious subject is not defined here as in Kant, where "subject" is defined as that which can never be an object. The "subject" here is not a detached spectator of the process. The proletariat is more than just the active and passive part of this process: the rise and evolution of its knowledge and its actual rise and evolution in the course of history are just the two different sides of the same real process.[148]

And, Lukács further clarifies this proposition, writing that the "identity" of thought and existences means "that they are aspects of one and same real historical and dialectical process." [149]

Can one specify more precisely the exact sense in which the proletariat functions in the medium of objectivity even in its role as subject? This is the decisive question of whether Lukács's proletariat is a free creative power, breaking the chains of capitalist convention in a unique act of untrammelled self-expression. In fact it is essential to Lukács's conception that the proletariat *not* be conceived as such a generalized romantic subjectivity, which would still move within the framework of a reified worldview as the incarnated freedom antinomically opposed to the "pitiless necessity of the laws" of the system. Rather, if the proletariat as subject is also an object, this is because its freedom is a specific mediation, a "determinate negation" of the given, hence actualization of real potentialities in the Hegelian sense of the terms, rather than a utopian will.

For Lukács the "true" consciousness of the proletariat is a function of its social insertion rather than the usual concept of scientificity. For this class knowing cannot be

understood as liberation from existence but rather as a concrete mediation within existence. As Lukács puts it, “the subjective mirroring of the objective process is an actual, operative moment of the process itself.”^[150] Thus the transcendence of the premises of capitalist culture in proletarian class consciousness implies no epistemological withdrawal to a free *cogito*, to a pure undetermined ground of truth. The precondition of this transcendence is capitalist society itself, its culture, its forms of thought, which can only be transcended through a reflection in which they are criticized, mediated and comprehended historically. Capitalist culture is the foundation of true knowledge of society precisely insofar as it is relativized dialectically.

Proletarian thought does not require a *tabula rasa*, a new start to the task of comprehending reality and one without any preconceptions . . . [but] conceives of bourgeois society together with its intellectual and artistic productions as the point of departure for its own method. . . . It implies that the “falseness” and the “one-sidedness” of the bourgeois view of history must be seen as a necessary factor in the systematic acquisition of knowledge about society.^[151] Why? Because “It is just in this [bourgeois] objectification, rationalization and reification of all social forms that we see clearly for the first time how society is constructed from the relations of men with each other”^[152]

Thus for Lukács truth is a mediation, and the transcendence of the capitalist standpoint rests on a specific operation performed on it to which it is intrinsically and uniquely susceptible.

Lukács’s meta-theoretical revision of the subject-object concept makes possible a true dialectical unity of category and history, and avoids the dissolution of the former into the latter. This unity is achieved by emphasizing the objective side of the subjectivity which constitutes the social world, and through which it is bound by a determinate order in which it exercises its socially specific initiative. Lukács argues that history must be explained through human action, but human action itself is as much product as producer of history. “Man has become the measure of all (societal) things,” he writes, and the understanding of history consists in the “derivation of the indissoluble fetishistic forms from the primary forms of human relations.”^[153] In this sense, “man is the measure” specifically in opposition to all attempts to “measure” history from an “above” or an “outside” of history itself, such as a god, nature or transhistorical laws conceived as founding for history. Yet this is no humanism in the sense of a doctrine which would derive history from a prior concept of man, or from a quasi-theological creative power attributed to the human species.

For if man is made the measure of all things, and if with the aid of that assumption all transcendence is to be eliminated without applying the same “standard” to himself or—more exactly—without making man himself dialectical, then man himself is made into an absolute and he simply puts himself in the place of those transcendental forces he was supposed to explain, dissolve and systematically replace.^[154]

To argue for the possibility of a mediated subject-object identity is to argue that history would become increasingly “rational” once grasped by a self-conscious humanity. It would cease to appear as a law-governed domain of alienated objectivity and become instead the objective precondition of a growth process. Like a tree adapting to its environment in the very assertion of its unique identity, so humanity would rework the stuff of circumstance by bringing it under the law of its own self-development. This

is the very opposite of a reified technical practice, not in the sense of being absolutely free from all objective conditions and limits—that is the utopia of technique—but in the sense of representing a higher, unreified relation to these objective conditions and limits. The dialectic is the paradigm of rationality corresponding to such a practice because it posits no eternal laws, but explains the permanent possibility of the transcendence of ever renewed objective conditions through their incorporation into a life process.

Chapter 5

History and Nature

The Antinomy of History and Nature

Despite his Marxism, Lukács was very much a product of an intellectual environment that favored the idea of an independent *Geisteswissenschaft* based on methods different from those of the natural sciences. He was its representative on the left, defending *Geist* against theoretical reification by vulgar Marxism. His philosophy of praxis is thus different from Marx's in that it rejects the "naturalization of man" for an insistent emphasis on the originality and autonomy of the human phenomenon.

Nevertheless, his doctrine is not to be confounded with that of Dilthey or Heidegger if only because Lukács is a much less consistent historicist. While the logic of his position seems to demand that he give history a privileged place at the expense of the traditional Marxist faith in the natural sciences, in practice he never goes quite so far. Contradictions in his philosophy of praxis result on which his critics have focused ever since the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*. This chapter will consider some of the implications of these problems for Lukács's early Marxism, and once again relate his position to that of the young Marx who, in contrast with Lukács, affirmed the unity of history and nature. In conclusion I will sketch a synthesis of ideas drawn from both Lukács and Marx which resolves certain problems in the philosophy of praxis.

Lukács's early philosophy of praxis was immediately criticized for its inability to give a consistent account of the concept of nature and the truth of the natural sciences. I will review here three types of arguments in support of this criticism, arguments against Lukács's supposed idealism, the false identification of objectification and alienation in his concept of reification, and the unacceptable dualism of history and nature that haunts his theory. I will show that the first two criticisms are wrong, but that they do point to serious and unresolved problems discussed under the last heading.

Deborin wrote the major early critique of *History and Class Consciousness*, accusing it of idealism from a Leninist perspective. His approach continues to be typical of "orthodox" criticism of Lukács.^[155] Deborin begins by accusing Lukács of setting Engels against Marx in order to oppose the former's materialistic dialectic with his own idealistic dialectic, falsely attributed to the latter. Deborin is especially critical of Lukács's rejection of Engels' dialectics of nature, a position that is in fact central to all of Lukács's difficulties, although not for the reasons Deborin suggests. In the first essay of *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács does actually reject the application of dialectics to nature, and offers an interpretation of historical dialectics he distinguishes

rather sharply from that of Engels.

It is of the first importance to realize that the method is limited here to the realms of history and society. The misunderstandings that arise from Engels' account of dialectics can in the main be put down to the fact that Engels—following Hegel's mistaken lead—extended the method to apply also to nature. However, the crucial determinants of dialectics—the interaction of subject and object, the unity of theory and practice, the historical changes in the reality underlying the categories as the root cause of changes in thought, etc.,--are absent from our knowledge of nature.[156]

Even when, later in his book, Lukács reverses his position, he continues to distinguish the objective dialectics of nature from historical dialectics by the absence of subject-object interaction.[157] Deborin calls this “a new conception of dialectical method, . . . a conception which contradicts that of Marxism. . .”[158]

Deborin goes on to argue that Lukács is an idealist who “sees in the category of *knowledge*, in a certain sense, the substance or truth of reality.”[159] In Lukács's dialectic, practice and historical reality are supposedly *aufgehoben* in the knowledge of a knowing subject. Hence, “according to Lukács praxis is *overcome* only through theory, only through knowledge, and not through the self-development of reality, of which knowledge is simply a part.”[160] Deborin interprets the Lukácsian theory of subject-object identity as a traditional idealist position, completely overlooking Lukács's meta-theoretical revision of the subject-object concept. “The object,” Deborin declares, “is swallowed by the subject.”[161] Clearly then, since Lukács does not intend for humanity to swallow the whole of nature, the natural world must be excluded from this subject-object identity, and forthwith from the dialectic itself.

Deborin concludes by contrasting Lukács's theory with that of orthodox Marxism. Knowledge, he objects, is never identical with its objects but tends asymptotically toward an accurate picture of them. The true unity of subject and object is to be found in the domain of labor practice, not in revolutionary class consciousness. He argues that the object with which Marxism is specifically concerned is nature, which is the substratum of human life, the subject is labor, and their unity (not identity) is the process of production.

Like many later Lukács critics, Deborin misses the point because he does not grasp the originality of Lukács's concept of class consciousness. For Lukács “consciousness” is not identifiable with a “knowledge” of the sort to which Deborin refers. Merleau-Ponty clarifies the distinction between consciousness and knowledge in Lukács. “In the proletariat, class consciousness is not a state of mind or a knowledge, nor yet is it a theoretical construction, because it is a praxis, that is to say less than a subject and more than an object . . .”[162] It is, on these terms, absurd to argue that for Lukács consciousness “transcends” practice, or that the subject “swallows” the object. The goal of Lukács's dialectic is to overcome the opposition of theory and practice, subject and object in a region of historical reality where they stand in essential and necessary relation. But by defining the Lukácsian subject as a subject of knowledge, Deborin forces the theory back into a traditional idealistic framework which it is designed precisely to transcend.

Nevertheless, Deborin's critique does strike tangentially at some of the real problems. It is true that Lukács's fundamental difficulty is with nature. His dialectic is a dialectic of consciousness—better, of cultural practice—different in important respects

from Marx's own dialectic of the labor process. Furthermore, Lukács does not have a fully coherent theory of either nature or natural science. These things Deborin notes, without developing a useful account of them.

In his new forward of 1967, Lukács himself discusses these problems, and suggests another line of criticism which is surely unique as an example of philosophical self-misunderstanding. Lukács describes how the reading of Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts* finally convinced him of the ontological priority of objectivity and the universality of objectification; therewith, says the older Lukács, his early Marxist work became completely "foreign" to him.[163] Many other critics have similarly charged the early Lukács with confounding, as did Hegel, objectification with alienation in the concept of reification.[164] This would indeed be a powerful critique if it were true. But does Lukács actually use the term "reification" to refer to objective being in general? Does he identify in it "alienation" and "objectification"? In sum, does he actually believe the historical transcendence of reification to be the *Aufhebung* of objectivity as such?

Lukács's concept of subject-object identity has been interpreted in this way by critics ranging from structuralist Marxists to the Frankfurt School. The former explain Lukács's identity philosophy as a consequence of his supposed "romantic" rejection of natural science and the independence of nature it presupposes; the latter reject identity philosophy as rooted in the project of domination of nature and assert the insuperable separation of subject and object. In his 1967 "Preface" to *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács himself dismissed his own earlier theory of identity as an "attempt to out-Hegel Hegel." [165] In contrast to all these critics, I have argued that the Lukács of 1923 revised the concept of subject-object identity to explain the possibility of a socialist social practice and to elucidate its philosophical implications.[166]

However, Lukács's argument contains an ambiguity which seems to justify the harsh judgment of his critics. As we have seen, bourgeois identity philosophy establishes only a commonality of form of subject and object. Lukács's meta-theoretical revision of the concept of subject-object identity aims to go beyond this toward a deeper unity based on the production of the object by the subject. But what is the meaning of the concept of "production" in this context?

The ambition of Lukács's theory is to demonstrate that "the core of being [is] social becoming." [167] He can only achieve this if he, as classical German philosophy would have it, can fulfill the "exigency of understanding...every givenness as a product of this identical subject-object, every duality as a special case derived from this original unity." [168] If this is so, it may well be asked whether Lukács's philosophy of praxis can survive his acceptance of the general validity of the sciences of nature and the independence of their objects. How can reason be founded on the identity of subject and object in history when such identity cannot be achieved in relation to nature? To the extent that nature is conceived as an irreducible and unhistorical reality in a dualistic worldview, the whole theoretical superstructure collapses. It would seem that Lukács is saved from his critics only to fall into self-contradiction.

This is the stumbling block to the view of Lukács as an idealist. For Lukács nature forms a sphere of objectivity that is not transcended in revolution and that is not a mere moment in the dialectic as it is in Hegel. Still, there are occasional passages in *History and Class Consciousness*, which seem to point in the opposite direction. Sometimes the critique of reification seems to extend to the reified form of objectivity of nature, and there are passages, which look like a critique of natural science. Some critics have leaped

at the bait and argued, with Alfred Schmidt, that nature in Lukács is “totally dissolved into the historical processes of its appropriation in respect of form, content, extent and objectivity.”[169]

For some reason, no one has gone on to complete the critique of Lukács implicit in these assertions, although Steven Vogel claims to agree with the version of it I have constructed here.[170] For, if Lukács really believed that the revolution would overcome all objective being in overcoming reification, his theory would be both rigorously consistent and obviously absurd. Then nature would be “posited” by the identical subject-object of history, and in overcoming social reification the proletariat would transform nature itself. The result would be, as Lukács himself suggests in his new forward, rather more Fichtean than Hegelian.[171] This Fichtean interpretation of Lukács’s theory rests on the following propositions, which outline an ontology and epistemology in conformity with the critics’ image of Lukács, if not with Lukács’s actual views.

1. The identical subject-object of history is also the identical subject-object of nature.
2. Nature is a purely social category, and the natural world therefore has no independence of humanity and the human understanding of it.
3. Reification is a capitalist category in terms of which the whole of being, including nature, is “posited” by capitalist society.
4. Proletarian revolution suppresses the reified objectivity of nature in suppressing capitalism.
5. Since the existing natural sciences are reified, and therefore conditioned by capitalist society both in their genesis and their validity, proletarian revolution also suppresses these sciences in suppressing capitalism.

This image of Lukács’s theory is immensely overdrawn, but it has the virtue of rendering one commonplace interpretation of it rigorously consistent. If the critics are correct in attributing some such view to Lukács, then they are also right to tax him with idealism; in this theory the entire existing world is a product of human activity. All that would distinguish Lukács’s “Marxism” from other forms of idealism would be his insistence that this constituting activity is social in character.

But does this construct really concern theses sustained in *History and Class Consciousness*? Or even distant implications of the book? The careful reader discovers no significant support for such an interpretation, while there are numerous positive statements to the contrary. This is, in fact, the “myth” of Lukács’s famous book, which hovers over it as an atmosphere and prejudices the very reading of the text.

What is Lukács’s concept of nature? Let us begin with the passage usually cited in support of the interpretation sketched above. Lukács does say that “nature is a social category,” but he proceeds immediately in the following sentence to qualify this statement. The entire passage reads:

Nature is a social category. That is to say [*D.h.*], *what passes for nature [als Natur gilt]* at a determinate stage in social evolution, the constitution of the relation between *this [dieser]* nature and man and the form in which the confrontation of man and nature takes place, in short, what nature *signifies [bedeuten]* in its form and its content, its range and its objectivity, are all socially conditioned.[172]

The opening sentence of this passage is often quoted to show that Lukács believed nature in itself, without qualification, to be a social product. But the second sentence is

quite careful to discuss not nature as such, but only “what passes for nature.” And surely Lukács intends us to understand this qualification, since he introduces the second sentence with “that is to say,” as equivalent to but more precise than the preceding one.[173] Already the first three theses of the construct have fallen, for now nature in itself, if not the knowledge of it, is independent of man and cannot possibly be “posited” by capitalism. And then, of course, the fourth these is also untenable, for under these conditions proletarian revolution cannot suppress and transform nature, nor can it appear as a social product.

Nevertheless, Lukács continues to affirm if not exactly the fifth thesis, something quite similar. He says, “it cannot be our task to investigate the question of the priority or the historical and causal order of successions between the ‘laws of nature’ and capitalism. (The author of these lines has, however, no wish to conceal his view that the development of capitalist economics takes precedence.)”[174] In addition, after distinguishing the objective dialectic of nature from the dialectic of subject and object in history, Lukács notes that “the growth of *knowledge* about nature is a social phenomenon and therefore to be included in the second dialectical type.”[175] Thus the fate of the natural sciences and that of capitalism would still seem to be intimately intertwined.

These statements, combined with the critique or reification, have inspired Colletti and others to build an image of an irrationalist, “Bergsonian” Lukács.[176] Yet Lukács himself rejects irrationalism as an immediate reflex of reification. “The value of formal knowledge in the face of ‘living life’ may be questioned (see irrationalist philosophies from Hamann to Bergson),” but, Lukács writes, reification is not thereby transcended: “Whether this gives rise to ecstasy, resignation or despair, whether we search for a path leading to ‘life’ via irrational mystical experience, this will do absolutely nothing to modify the situation as it is in fact.”[177] Another significant passage makes clear Lukács’s disagreement with the irrationalist attack on the natural sciences. After a lengthy and apparently “Bergsonian” critique of the application of natural scientific method to society, a critique that seems at points to cast doubt on the validity of science in general, Lukács states: “When the epistemological ideal of the natural sciences is applied to nature it simply furthers the progress of science. But when it is applied to society it turns out to be an ideological weapon of the bourgeoisie.”[178]

Lukács’s precise attitude toward the fifth thesis can now be summarized. He does believe the rise of capitalism to have stimulated the growth of the modern natural sciences, but he nowhere proposes that these sciences are therefore false, that proletarian revolution will abolish them or transcend the reified form of objectivity of nature on which they depend. The validity of the natural sciences and of the reified concept of nature seems to be independent of the conditions of their creation. Here Lukács is in agreement with Marx and Engels.

After examining all these passages in detail, one is astonished to discover that nothing remains of the image of Lukács as a subjective idealist at the level of the collective “I” of the proletariat, Lukács the Fichtean, the irrationalist, the Bergsonian, an image which begins with Deborin in 1924 and continues to contemporaries such as Colletti. In fact the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* has a quite banal respect for the sciences of nature. He nowhere denies the independence of nature or the validity of the sciences that study it. Nor, *pace* Colletti, is his denunciation of modern technology so very different from Marx’s that it would justify the label of “romantic” it has acquired

in the course of numerous polemics.

Some critics have understood this and noticed the dualism, which it introduces into Lukács's theory. There is in fact a clear methodological split between history and nature in the theory, and it is only this which saves Lukács from the attacks discussed above. Most of those who recognize this split argue, I think correctly, that it gives rise to serious problems for Lukács's philosophy of praxis. However, it is not uncommon for critics of Lukács's dualism, including the later Lukács himself, to fail to notice that it renders the identification of his concept of reification with Hegel's concept of alienation quite futile. For, if nature is reified and undialectical in essence, as Lukács seems to assert, and if it is not transcended in the revolution, then clearly Lukács's philosophy is not hostile to objectivity *per se*, and to that degree it is quite different from Hegel's. These critics produce an empirically accurate image of the various strands of Lukács's thought, but a theoretically inconsistent critique of them. Lukács is charged with the contradictory vices of identifying what should be separated (alienation and objectification) and separating what should be identified (nature and history).[179] The resulting critique is hardly more satisfactory than the positions surveyed above.

This self-contradictory critique of Lukács is nevertheless useful because it points to the real contradictions in his thought. If there is something in nature which is not produced in history, then history is not the fundamental ontological domain from which all others are derived. What is more, unless the identity of subject and object in nature can somehow be established, its identity in history appears as a purely contingent feature of the universe. Another type of rationality with its own objectivity arises alongside history, and there subject and object can never be united. Reason remains permanently caught in the antinomies of reified thought in relation to nature, which persists as an impenetrable thing in itself. The Kantian construction of rationality now returns in full force, bringing in its train all the untranscended antinomies Lukács set out to resolve.

Unless some solution can be found, Lukács's philosophy of praxis will collapse into a far more limited methodological preliminary to historical research. It could then no longer pretend to solve ontological problems, but only certain epistemological problems relating to historical knowledge. Reason would not be implicated in revolution, only social theory. This is in fact the position adopted by Lucien Goldmann, Lukács's most important follower.[180]

Marx's Concept of Nature

In 1844 Marx encountered somewhat similar problems in his philosophy of praxis, which he attempted to resolve with the idea of a dialectic of the natural subject and object of labor. (Of course the relevant texts were unavailable to Lukács in the early 1920s.) Marx too sought to transcend philosophy and to develop a new concept of reason based on the practical identity of subject and object. However, Marx starts out not from historical practice as the proximate domain of identity but from the labor process, and he is therefore able to grasp the natural subject and object in a dialectical interaction.

Alfred Schmidt summarizes Marx's conception as follows:

The hidden nature speculation in Marx [holds that] the different economic formations of society which have succeeded each other historically have been so many modes of nature's self-mediation. Sundered into two parts, man and material

to be worked on, nature is always present to itself in this division. Nature attains self-consciousness in men, and amalgamates with itself by virtue of their theoretical-practical activity. Human participation in something alien and external to them appears at first to be something equally alien and external to nature; but in fact it proves to be a “natural condition of human existence,” which is itself a part of nature, and it therefore constitutes nature’s self-movement. Only in this way can we speak meaningfully of a “dialectic of nature.”[181]

Marx’s materialism is thus quite different from all previous forms since he claims that human consciousness is a moment in nature’s self-development and not an external spectator on the latter.

Marx’s theory promises to overcome the split between history and nature that mars Lukács’s theory. However, the Marxian solution is not without problems of its own. Throughout the *Manuscripts* one senses that there is something very wrong with Marx’s concept of subject-object identity. In the following passage, to cite but one example among many, Marx seems to hover between hyperbole and absurdity:

It is only when objective reality everywhere becomes for man in society the reality of human faculties, human reality, and the reality of his own faculties that all *objects* become for him the *objectification of himself*. The objects then confirm and realize his individuality, they are *his own* objects, i.e. man himself becomes the object.[182]

Reading such passages, one wonders if Marx can really mean it. Under what conditions can “man himself *become* the object?” Will not the realm of independent nature always transcend society, hence the human subject? In short, will not man always be a stranger in the universe, whatever the form and content of his social interactions? Marx seems to argue the contrary, that under the appropriate social conditions it will be possible to recognize the essence of nature as human activity. Formally, this recognition exactly parallels Vico’s notion that history is a human product. Just as this notion opens the way to the de-reification of history and the recognition of human creative power in the historical domain, so Marx wants to de-reify nature and to attribute to human beings a comparable creative power in the natural domain. As we have seen, Lukács stops short of such a claim and accepts the reification of nature as an insuperable ontological condition.

Marx’s concept of nature as human activity has three somewhat different dimensions which he does not distinguish clearly. At the simplest level Marx’s claim that man and nature are consubstantial reduces to a conundrum, as when he writes that “the physical and mental life of man, and nature, are interdependent means simply that nature is interdependent with itself, for man is a part of nature.”[183] By itself such a statement only classifies man as a natural being without elucidating the essence of nature or establishing man’s active powers in the natural world. However, Marx aims to prove more than this; he wants to convince us that human beings *qua* social beings, with their fully developed subjective capacities, can recognize their consubstantiality with “objective reality everywhere” as “the reality of human faculties.” This more ambitious claim points to a second level of the theory.

According to Marx’s theory of need the interdependence of man and nature is manifest in the essential relation between human need and the natural objects of satisfaction. Marx explicitly affirms that this is an ontological relation, and not merely a fact of physiology. What is more, he proposes a theory of the historical evolution of

human need which indicates that it is not only hunger which is objectified in food, but the higher needs of the social human being which find their essential object in the natural world. In this sense the interdependence takes on a larger metaphysical significance which I will call the “participatory identity” of man and nature.

This second dimension of the theory of nature does not stand alone in Marx’s text but is always related to a third in which the idea of a dereification of nature is given a more active character. At this third level, the unity of man and nature is a result of human labor, which really objectifies human faculties in transforming natural objects. This third level of the theory presupposes the first two and, in a sense, supersedes them as the fully realized form of the unity of man and nature, the form in which human creative power in nature is most completely expressed.

The grandeur but also the paradox of this culminating aspect of the theory consists in the universality of Marx’s claims for human labor. He is not content to confine human creative powers to the narrow domain that mankind actually and potentially transforms in an imaginable labor process, but wants to extend those powers to “objective reality everywhere.” One may well ask why he should formulate his theory in such a way that it has to include all sorts of objects which cannot be imagined as objects of labor. After all, objective reality everywhere includes the entire universe! In what sense can we really conceive such an immensity as “the reality of human faculties?”

The paradox results from casting the dialectics of the labor process in the form of identity philosophy, meta-theoretically redefining the subject and object in terms of labor and raw material. The resulting theory is profoundly unsatisfactory. It is not only that some natural objects are unimaginable as potential objects of labor; equally questionable is the narrowness of any definition of the fundamental human relation to nature which focuses so exclusively on labor. It is by no means self-evident that the transformative impulse is the primary one through which being is disclosed. In everyday coping, play, aesthetic appreciation and contemplation humans relate to being perhaps just as fundamentally as they do in labor without attempting to remake objects in their own image. And to these less active modes of involvement in the world there correspond objective dimensions of the real perhaps just as fundamental as any revealed to the laboring subject.

Marx is reacting against traditional philosophy, which attempts to sum up the human relation to reality in the concept of consciousness. And he may well be right to protest that other and perhaps more fundamental relations to the real should have priority over that one. Yet the imaginable extension of the concept of an object of consciousness is in truth far greater than that of an object of labor. Thus if a Fichte or a Berkeley were to declare that “consciousness itself becomes the object,” we might disagree with the philosophical premises that lead to such a conclusion, but at least the notion of consciousness refers potentially to every possible object. The idealistic conclusion need not be rejected out of hand because consciousness self-evidently and in principle *requires* an object irreducible to it.[184]

Just as Lukács encountered an insuperable barrier to applying his concept of historical practice to nature, so Marx seems to encounter a similar barrier to generalizing his concept of labor from the human scale to the totality of nature. The universe is not, in principle, mere raw material: the very idea is either absurd or abhorrent. Even admitting that in some partial domains labor achieves subject-object identity, this identity still falls short of that required by a philosophy of praxis. As a

result, the whole Kantian problematic of the thing in itself returns, for alongside history, in which subject and object are one in labor, another sphere of nature and natural science must be distinguished in which man is *not* the object.

But instead of accepting the Kantian view, Marx elaborated a theory of sensation in which the senses “become directly theoreticians in practice,” acting on their objects as does the worker on his raw materials.[185] The senses, unlike labor, have traditionally been conceived by philosophy as a potentially universal mode of reception, relating to all possible (real) objects. The senses can therefore take over where actual labor leaves off, supporting the assertion of a universal identity of subject and object in nature.

Marx’s theory of sensation is distinguished from all previous ones by his meta-theoretical reconstruction of sense knowledge as a historically evolving dimension of human being. Marx argues that the object of sensation contains a wealth of meaning available only to the trained and socially developed sense organ. In alienated society man experiences nature as a dog or cat might experience a symphony. And, as the “musical” ear recognizes itself “affirmed” in the music it hears, so will liberated humanity recognize itself affirmed in nature. “The distinctive character of each faculty is precisely its characteristic essence and thus also the characteristic mode of its objectification, of its objective real, living being. It is therefore not only in thought, but through all the senses that man is affirmed in the objective world.”[186] On these terms, the emancipated senses are active transformers of their object and not mere passive receptors; they can be understood on the model of the labor process as engaging in a theoretical-practical activity, objectifying human nature and releasing the implicit potentialities of the material on which they work.

For the early Marx, the senses are alienated in the alienation of labor. Communism is thus the condition for the training of the senses to their highest pitch of perfection. When the revolution transforms the senses by abolishing alienation it attains the core of being itself, as required by the philosophy of praxis: “The suppression of private property is, therefore, the complete emancipation of all the human qualities and senses. . . . The eye has become a human eye when its object has become a human, social object, created by man and destined for him.”[187] Revolution unites subject and object in liberated sensation and thereby reveals the truth of nature.

But can one really speak of “truth” in this context? Has not Marx simply arrived once again by a different route at the very difficulty Lukács encountered? Conceivably, the historically evolved senses of communist man are different from those of man in class society, but are the senses in any case significantly related to the truth about nature? Is it not natural science which discovers this truth, and often by the most arduous effort to transcend the given social-sensory horizon toward deeper representations? In the *Manuscripts*, Marx explicitly rejects the epistemology implied by these questions, and with it, the existing natural sciences as well.

Marx insists that he is seeking the “unifying truth” of “both idealism and materialism.”[188] Given his quasi-naturalistic assumptions, he cannot claim that the senses “posit” their objects in some sort of prior constitution. This would be to deny the reality of nature while affirming the natural, sensory character of man, an obvious contradiction. He therefore argues, on the one hand, that the sense object is real and not simply a product of consciousness. On the other hand, Marx rejects any notion of a thing in itself transcendent to perception in principle. Neither realistic epistemology nor the Kantian critique is compatible with his position. Marx cannot allow, as does British

empiricism, that the sense object is merely a sign, causally (or otherwise) connected with a “real” object. If the sensed object is only a sign or image, then no real unity of subject and object is achieved in sensation as Kant’s first *Critique* makes abundantly clear. The “real” object is not “humanized” by sensation in realistic and critical epistemology, but flees behind the senses to where it can be reached through thought alone, if at all. Marx therefore rejects the attempt to conceive nature as a reality transcendent to sensation: “Nature too,” he writes, “taken abstractly, for itself, and rigidly separated from man, is nothing for man.”[189] To this “abstract” nature, he opposes the concrete, lived nature of direct sensory experience. Marx’s synthesis of idealism and materialism thus culminates in a unique form of phenomenalism.

Marx’s theory of sensation leads him to reject the natural sciences for their “abstract materialistic, or rather idealistic orientation.”[190] His critique might be elaborated more fully as follows. The materialist interpretation of science asserts the reality of the ideal objects of scientific laws, in contrast with the mere appearances perceived by the senses; but the ideal objects of science are objects of thought, and so via materialism we return to the basic premise of idealism, the notion that in its essence being is an object of thought and not of a natural, sensuous subject. This is merely a secularized version of the theological priority of spirit over matter. Marx’s own radical epistemological atheism insists on locating both appearance and reality in the sphere of sensation, as levels or degrees in the unveiling of what is perceived. The truth of the object does not lie beyond sensation in thought but in truer and deeper sensation itself, in the developed and liberated senses of social man. Only on this assumption can Marx overcome the split between man and nature that threatens his philosophy of praxis.

Now science must be transformed in its methods and its structure. Following Feuerbach (and definitely not Locke), Marx states: “Sense experience . . . must be the basis of all science.”[191] Presumably, the perceptions of the liberated senses can be raised to consciousness by a new science although it is difficult to imagine in what form. Furthermore, the division of natural and social science must be overcome: the very object of natural science has been *aufgehoben* and in its place stands the “humanized” nature disclosed to liberated sensation. “There will be,” Marx prophesizes, “a single science.”[192] Marx seems to be saying that a reformed science will, in studying nature, really be studying the objectifications of man’s socialized senses, hence man himself.

The first object for man—man himself—is nature, sense experience; and the particular sensuous human faculties, which can only find objective realization in natural objects, can only attain self-knowledge in the science of natural being. . . . The social reality of nature and human natural science, or the natural science of man, are identical expressions.[193]

In these passages, Marx takes the step that Lukács later refused to take: the rejection of the existing natural sciences as the precondition for a radical historicization of the concept of nature. Undergirding the “abstractly conceived” nature of the existing sciences, Marx seems to say, there is a primordial practical relation of human subject to natural object. This practical relation cannot be explained as an external interaction between the sort of objectivities conceived by natural science, but constitutes a more fundamental reality. Here, if not in Lukács’s case, it might be shown that philosophy of praxis leads to a romantic and antiscientific doctrine.

The next step, which Marx did not take, would be the development of a philosophy of nature based on a teleological concept of being as in essence subordinate to human

aims. Rather than go this route, Marx rejected his entire early philosophy. In the works immediately following the *Manuscripts*, particularly in the “Theses on Feuerbach” and *The German Ideology*, he began to backtrack. He first rejected not so much the premises of the *Manuscripts* as the conclusion they were supposed to establish, the identity of subject and object. In *The German Ideology*, for example, Marx sets out at one point to prove that the entire universe is a product of human sensuous activity. But, in the very middle of a passage that could have been lifted from the *Manuscripts*, he suddenly notes, “Of course the priority of external nature remains, and all this has no application to the original men produced by *generatio aequivoca*.” This is a damaging admission from the point of view of his earlier philosophy of praxis: it presupposes that nature can be meaningfully conceived apart from man, and so presumably, comprehended in abstraction from its sensuous appearance. Perhaps this implication still made Marx a bit uncomfortable, for he immediately tries to patch things up. He continues, “But this differentiation has meaning only insofar as man is considered distinct from nature,” a perspective which, Marx assures us, is irrelevant in the modern world where industry has transformed nature except “on a few Australian coral islands of recent origin.”[194]

These are school boy squirmings compared with the daring and rigor of the *Manuscripts*, and show to what extent Marx has abandoned his philosophy of praxis even though some of his arguments still *tend* toward establishing his old conclusions. This hesitation and wavering occurs several times in the first part of *The German Ideology*, where occasional passages prepare proofs of the identity of subject and object despite the fact that Marx now ridicules the very terminology in which such a conclusion would have to be stated. Soon even this backhanded reference to the philosophy of praxis of the *Manuscripts* is dropped, and Marx plunges into economic and historical research.

The mature work of Marx and Lukács is not based on philosophical arguments but on a materialistic faith in science. Yet, as I have argued at length in earlier chapters, some important aspects of the philosophy of praxis survive the abandonment of its most daring theses. The meta-theory of philosophy of the early works continues to influence Marx and Lukács in the later ones. It will be recalled that this meta-theory has three moments, the first two of which reconstruct the categories of identity philosophy in social reality, while the third resolves the philosophical antinomies of that philosophy through the demand for the historical transformation of the reconstructed terms. Now the third moment of the meta-theory of philosophy is abandoned, and the first two survive as a negative critique of reified forms of social thought. The meta-theoretically reconstructed categories still interact dialectically in history, but their ultimate identity in a synthesis is denied.

It was left to Engels to elaborate an ontology corresponding to the social theory of the mature Marx. He did so in numerous articles and books which espouse an unabashed naturalism. Marx himself seems to have accepted this as a satisfactory substitute for the philosophy of praxis. However, a discussion of Engels’ naturalism would bring us full circle: Lukács was, of course, aware of Engels’ views which he condemned as precritical, still unawakened from the “dogmatic slumbers” Kant interrupted for all time. On this point Lukács is undoubtedly right.

Existential Marxism

Central to philosophy of praxis is the idea that the truth of being is historical becoming; but it is also from this idea that the antinomy of history and nature arises. The project of this philosophy is to transpose the concept of subject-object identity from the domain of metaphysical theory to that of real social practice. In support of this project, philosophy of praxis argues that being is first disclosed to the subject in a practical relation such as needing, laboring, or historical action. The dialectical interdependence of the practically related subject and object is then taken as paradigmatic for subject-object relations in general. The antinomy of history and nature arises from difficulties in understanding the concept of nature on these terms.

The methodological dimension of this antinomy concerns the relation of theory to practice. So-called “external” nature is a privileged object of theoretical contemplation. As Lukács shows, even the corresponding technical practice in which nature is manipulated is basically “contemplative” in the sense that it obeys the laws disclosed to theory. The matter stands quite differently with society, which is humanly created in its very being. Practice actually produces the objects that appear in their (created) independence as objects of social theory and which in turn reproduce the practice that produced them. Here the objects of theory are objectifications of practice, which latter is therefore no merely derivative function of theory. The contingency of the laws of history is without parallel in the domain of natural science. The specificity of the historical sciences is due to these differences.

At issue in the ontological question of whether “external” nature has priority over historical reality or *vice versa* is the methodological question of whether theory or practice has epistemological priority. On this in turn depends whether or not subject and object can be united. In the customary representation of theory, subject and object are not identical, but distinctly separate. As Lukács argues in his discussion of contemplative thought, the ideal of a pure theoretical subject-object identity presupposes the separation of the terms it brings into relation. The subject of theory occupies a position beyond all but cognitive connection with its objects, and unites with them not in reality but in knowledge, in a specular relation of correspondence or reflection.

This tenuous subject-object relation in which truth is revealed is utterly unlike the principle of practice required by Marx and Lukács. They insist that subject-object identity be demonstrated by explaining the real process of production of the thought-objects of theory. This involves no merely reflexive correspondence of thought and things, but an active creating. But can practice serve this ambitious philosophical purpose? Marx, argues that only “real” objects can exist in practical relations. But by “real” objects we usually mean objects that have their being in their objectivity and not in a relation to a subject; it is thus that we distinguish a real thing from an imaginary one that can only exist “in the mind.” Now, our ordinary conception of practice presupposes the objectivity of its moments. But objectivity is first revealed not to practice, but to knowledge; it involves not the strong dialectical interrelatedness of a doing, but the weak and contingent relation of a knowing. Hence the very attempt to make practice primordial appears to be self-contradictory.[195]

This contradictory result is reached because philosophy of praxis rejects idealism and insists on defining the subject-object relation as a “real” practical relation between “real” objects, without sufficiently clarifying its concept of reality. It intends for practice to found objectivity, and yet it implies the contrary, that objectivity is independent of

practice and founding for it. Philosophy of praxis would thus be bounded by traditional objectivity and its corresponding form of contemplative rationality. This boundary is reached as soon as it becomes apparent that for this philosophy nature is a thing in itself, beyond the horizon of social practice, a permanently reified external substratum of history society can never touch in its being but only know.

Some Marxists have concluded that a speculative nature philosophy can complete the philosophy of praxis, once and for all subordinating nature and the theory of it to historical practice.^[196] They attempt to conceive a “practice” prior to and founding for the objectivity of nature, either in the form of a transcendental constitution or a pantheistic providentialism. In such theories, society’s meaning-positing functions are conceived as a generative principle for nature, or nature itself is conceived as a living organism of which man would be the conscious faculty. Yet even here, in the context of the most ambitious attempt to found philosophy of praxis, the antinomy of history and nature reappears. The historical practice which, for Marxism, founds the objectivity of social objects, is the “real” practice of identifiable human subjects and social groups. The practice in which speculative philosophy conceives nature to be constituted does not have this “real” character, but is a conceptual mythology.

To the extent that Marx and Lukács hint at a solution to the problem, they look to a revision of the concept of objectivity as the precondition for conceiving subject-object identity with real subjects and objects. Unfortunately, neither follows through adequately on this requirement of a consistent philosophy of praxis. Marx offers daring suggestions for transforming the concept of nature, but he barely sketches the meta-theoretical revision of the concept of objectivity on which such an enterprise depends. Lukács develops an elaborate framework for revising the concept of objectivity, but then draws back from applying it to nature. It is still remarkable, despite these hesitations, that both Marx and Lukács arrive independently at a similar break with traditional concepts.

They reject the hypothetical absolute subject that serves as an epistemological model for traditional theory of knowledge. The absolute subject always has it in its power to shatter the hard won unity of subject and object by positing external nature as reality. They therefore deny that it is meaningful even to imagine an observer that could perceive and question the universe from “outside”, from a disincarnated position of pure thought. In its regulative employment as an ideal of knowledge this hypothesis is an ultimate theological postulate that escapes the critique of their philosophical predecessors and which they must now expunge from theory.

The epistemology which derives from their critique is closer to Nietzsche’s than it is to Hegel’s, with whom Marx and Lukács are usually compared. It is true that, like Hegel, they regard knowledge as a historical outcome, but they deny the possibility of a final synoptic wisdom such as that in which Hegel’s philosophy of history culminates. The tendency to which they belong would say, rather, with Nietzsche:

Let us, from now on, be on our guard against the hallowed philosophers’ myth of a “pure, will-less, painless, timeless knower”; let us beware of the tentacles of such contradictory notions as “pure reason,” “absolute knowledge,” “absolute intelligence.” All these concepts presuppose an eye such as no living being can imagine, an eye required to have no direction, to abrogate its active and interpretive powers—precisely those powers that alone make of seeing, seeing something. All seeing is essentially perspective and so is all knowing.^[197]

This reference to existentialism is not arbitrary, for at least in their critique of objectivism, Marx and Lukács are “existential” Marxists. Both assert the inescapable involvement of a finite subject of knowledge in its objects; and both reject the skeptical consequences that usually derive from this premise by revising the concept of objectivity meta-theoretically in accordance with the epistemological potentialities of a finite being.

There is a brief argument in Marx’s *Manuscripts* which makes these points with startling effect. In a discussion of the cosmological proof of the existence of God, Marx demands that his imaginary interlocutor, who questions the source of the universe, reflect on his own position in relation to the question:

If you ask a question about the creation of nature and man you abstract from nature and man. You suppose them non-existent and you want me to demonstrate that they exist. I reply: give up your abstraction and at the same time you abandon your question. Or else, if you want to maintain your abstraction, be consistent, and if you think of man and natures as non-existent, think of yourself too as non-existent, for you are also man and nature. Do not think, do not ask me any questions, for as soon as you think and ask questions your abstraction from the existence of nature and man becomes meaningless.[198]

At issue in this passage is not just the problem of the existence of God, but also the very nature of objectivity. For, in denying his interlocutor the right to abstract from his position in existence in order to pose a question about existence, Marx denies that thinking can occupy what Lukács calls a “systematic locus,” an absolute position of truth beyond all real connection with its objects.

The student of existentialism may recognize the formal similarity of Marx’s argument and certain arguments in Kierkegaard.[199] Independent of both Marx and Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel developed this type of argument into a methodology. Like Marx, Marcel also questions the legitimacy of interrogating being as a whole, and for the same reason, because it involves abstracting from the position in being of the questioner. A problem like that posed by the cosmological proof is simply insoluble because it is not a legitimate problem at all.

The comparison of Marx and Marcel is worth developing briefly for both are concerned to demonstrate the ontological priority of lived experience over its objectivistic representation. For Marcel, lived experience is “meta-problematical,” a domain of “mystery” which can only be explored from within. Marcel’s term “mystery” is ill-chosen, because it does not refer to a numinous reality. As he defines it, “A mystery is a problem which encroaches on its own data, invading them, as it were, and thereby transcending itself as a simple problem.”[200] Just so, in Marx the “problem” of the existence of the universe “encroaches” on the subject who poses it as a problem. Marcel concludes again along lines anticipated by Marx, that “To postulate the meta-problematical is to postulate the primacy of being over knowledge;. . . it is to recognize that knowledge is, as it were, environed by being. . . .”[201]

Marcel rejects the act of abstraction in which the subject conceives itself as an objective reality holding a real relation with the material substance of a body or an object of sensation. What can be so related, he asserts, is only the falsely objectified concept of the “mind,” whereas in reality the subject as such disappears “behind” this objective misconception. Marcel traces this particular argument back to Hegel.[202] It is not clear to what text in Hegel Marcel refers, however, it may well be to the chapter on “Phrenology” in the *Phenomenology of Mind*. There Hegel attacks every form of

objectivistic reduction of subjectivity, as epitomized in the absurd phrenological hypothesis which holds “the reality of self-consciousness to consist in the skull-bone.” Hegel argues:

Brain-fibres and the like, looked at as forms of the being of mind, are already an imagined, a merely hypothetical actuality of mind – not its presented reality, not its felt, seen, in short not its true reality. If they are present to us, if they are seen, they are lifeless objects, and then no longer pass for the being of mind. . . . The principle involved in this idea is that reason claims to be all thinghood, even thinghood of a purely objective kind. It is this, however, in concept: for, only this notion is the truth of reason; and the purer the notion itself is, the more silly an idea does it become. . . .

In sum, the skull or brain, as the material reality of thought, exists as such only as an idea for thought; hence thought exists as material reality only insofar as that reality is a thought reality. The search for a material foundation for reason ends up “ingenuously” affirming a thought as reality.[203] Like the hypothesis of the creation of the universe, so in another way the reductionist hypothesis implies the existence of an absolute subject, beyond all but cognitive connection to existence.

Marx’s argument against the cosmological proof is part of a larger attempt to establish the ontological priority of the lived nature of which we are a part over the objective nature of the natural sciences on which we are only a spectator. To accomplish this he interrupts his imaginary interlocutor with the phrase, “Do not think, do not ask me any questions. . . .” He seems to be operating here with a criterion of meaning which restricts propositions about reality to those that can be accounted for in a dialectic of subject and object. His aim is to deny ontology access to the object “in itself,” as it would appear to a contemplative subject, apart from its relation to human beings in labor and sensation. Otherwise stated, Marx attempts to found his theory on the “real” or “concrete” relation of man to nature, subject to object which, in labor, has the form of an essential interdependence, rather than founding it on the mathematicized model of objective nature we owe to the sciences and which bears no essential relation to humanity. In effect, Marx wants to show that nature as it really is can only be conceived in dialectical interaction with man, while “abstractly” conceived, merely “external” nature must be excluded from philosophical consideration as a meaningless construction.

This interpretation of Marx’s argument suggests yet another similarity between his early thought and existentialism. Marx’s criterion of meaning resembles the phenomenological concept of “horizon” as a limit “under” which thought proceeds. Kant would seem to be the primary reference for this approach to the problem of meaning. It was he who first suggested that there are specific limits to the range of pertinence of the categories of experience. The employment of reason beyond the domain of possible experience, that is to say, in relation to being in itself, gives rise to a “transcendental illusion.”

Phenomenology too sets out from the idea of a criterion of meaning specifying the range of pertinence of the concepts of understanding, although it interprets the significance of this procedure differently from Kant. Heidegger, for example, not only identifies this legitimate range with the limits of a finite subject, but he goes on to interpret the essence of being under the horizon of experience for such a subject. Apart from the structures of its disclosure to the finite subject, the idea of a being “in itself” is

entirely meaningless. Modern phenomenology, like Marx, thus retains the Kantian idea of limiting the application of the categories to the possible experience of a finite subject, but it rejects as theological the postulated transcendence of the thing in itself. They thus arrive at what I will call the a “finite horizon” of being and knowledge.

These clarifications and allusions may contribute to understanding Marx’s intent in the *Manuscripts*, but it would be too much to say that Marx succeeds in presenting a satisfactory theory there. He circles around the concept of a finite horizon without achieving a clear statement of a new concept of objectivity defined in the domain of lived experience. I believe that Lukács does finally accomplish this independently of Marx’s *Manuscripts* employing conceptual tools derived from Marx’s later theory of ideology, with its implied assertion of the culturally imminent character of all human thought.

Believing and Doing

As a Marxist, Lukács formulates all epistemological questions in terms of the *consciousness of classes* rather than the *knowledge of individuals*. We usually conceive of the subject of knowledge as a mind possessed of science, and not as a social group caught in the illusions of everyday experience. Lukács, however, denies that *any* individual standpoint transcends the determination of some more general cultural perspective it represents theoretically with more or less coherence and insight. On these terms, the validity of individual thought is to be measured ultimately by the limits of the thinker’s culture.

Lukács explains cultural perspectives as the schemata of practical syntheses of the real; the synthetic function itself is attached to social classes. The effect of these assumptions is to enclose rationality without remainder in the embrace of culture, and culture in that of class practice. Reason, culture and practice are stacked like Chinese boxes, the one inside the other, with no way out. No personal discipline, no science, no wisdom can break through this limit. Lukács thus proposes an epistemology which is integrally cultural in character, which admits of no “outside” of culture from which reality could be viewed, no privileged preserve of science on the margins of the world.

It bears emphasizing that this is not a deterministic thesis. Lukács does not believe all members of a given class achieve an understanding of the world corresponding to the limits of their class consciousness. As individuals, they may fall far below this limit, or transcend it by adopting the class standpoint of another class in society. The point is that even in transcending one form of class determination the individual inevitably falls under another, and does not escape from consciousness into knowledge as traditional philosophy would have it.

So far Lukács’s position appears to be merely relativistic, and this is indeed how it was understood by those who, like Karl Mannheim, attempted to elaborate a sociology of knowledge on the basis of his concept of false consciousness.[204] However, in postulating the intrinsic dependency of knowledge on consciousness, Lukács does not aim to deny the possibility of true knowledge. Rather, he insists that the historical involvement of the subject of knowledge is a necessary precondition for knowing, and not just a barrier from which a “pure” science would have to abstract. This is a meta-theoretical reconstruction of the concept of knowledge *in* the relative, under a finite horizon, rather than a skeptical critique of human limits in the light of an unattainable absolute truth.

Lukács’s main target in these epistemological considerations is reified objectivism,

and with it the idea that being in itself transcends the reach of practice. Relativism is not, he argues, a truly independent position, but a variant of objectivism. Both objectivism and relativism presupposes an “absolute” in the form of the “systematic locus” of thought as a supposed spectator on a reality in which it does not, in principle, participate. In the final analysis, Lukács claims, it matters little if, having presupposed that thought is a pure logical space of representation, one accepts or denies the possibility of achieving truth on this basis; one is squarely situated under the horizon of the “absolute” in either case.

“This absolute,” Lukács writes, “is nothing but the fixation in thought, the projection into myth of the intellectual failure to understand reality concretely as a historical process.”^[205] It is thus that culture, as the repository of society’s most general categories of thought and action, appears to transcend history and indeed all real connection with objects as an apparently eternal or transcendental system of categories prior to the real process and founding for it. The absolute is this appearance of culture at the horizon of history as an unchanging essence. Lukács reverses this formula: it is not in transcending history that the truth is to be found, but in the recognition of the historical character of all transcendence.

For Lukács society cannot be known in the absolute, but it can indeed be known from within.^[206] The subject of this self-knowledge of society is the proletariat. What is the basis for this unique epistemological qualification? It is not the superior scientificity of the proletarian standpoint, as though this class could cross the unbridgeable gap between a reified subject and object, thereby attaining the truth that escaped the most conscientious effort of earlier thinkers. Nor is it merely that the barrier of class interest does not stand between the proletariat and a truth that would lie evidently before it. To understand Lukács’s theory of proletarian true consciousness, it is necessary to get to the root of his critique of contemplative theory, for it is the practical role of the proletariat which situates it in the truth rather than any theoretical virtue.

Lukács traces the “fixation” of thought in a realm beyond history to specific social causes. The absolute and its correlated concept of the relative appear in response to the untranscended immediacies of life in class society. Because of the obstacles to conscious cooperation in this type of society, whole domains of social reality confront the individuals as alien powers over which they have no control. At the same time, the dominant culture can only serve its historical function of justifying class rule insofar as this function remains unconscious, insofar, therefore, as culture itself appears as a repository of eternal truths. The illusion of a transhistorical, systematic locus of thought corresponds to this untransformed reality and uncomprehended culture.

Lukács argues that the proletariat throws these immediacies into the movement of history and subjects them to a practical mediation which decisively alters the position of truth. Proletarian practice acts on the form of objectivity of its objects; it consciously transforms culture and therefore reality as well; and, as the expression of a cooperative and potentially universal historical subject, this practice need not accept any merely given immediacy as its horizon.

As soon as mankind has clearly understood and hence restructured the foundations of its existence truth acquires a wholly novel aspect. When theory and practice are united it becomes possible to change reality and when this happens the absolute and its “relativistic” counterpart will have played their historical role for the last time. For as the result of these changes we shall see the disappearance of

that reality which the absolute and its relative expressed in like manner.[207] The idea of theory as observation of reality from a disincarnated “beyond” is overthrown, and theory brought under a finite horizon when it is finally located in a process of conscious cultural change.

Nietzsche claimed that truth was the last idol of a disenchanted world, the final form in which the eternal ripped the seamless web of time. Lukács, too, proceeds to humanize truth itself, to make it enter into time as a real moment in the creation of history. For Lukács, there is no ontological barrier between perceiver and perceived, subject and object, form and content. “Reality” is a cultural product and not an objectivity which precedes culture and which would have to be perceived from a beyond of culture to be known in its truth. This reality, produced in a cultural process, can be known in the cultural forms of its production where those forms are themselves objects of conscious practice.

Pragmatic theories of truth are close to Lukács’s view in arguing that believing is a form of doing with real consequences in the world. But they focus on individual belief in particular “truths” for instrumental ends, and so arrive at an energetic faith which requires constant infusions of will power to be maintained in conflict with stubborn realities that do not respond to a mere change in personal commitments. The problematic of the will in pragmatism thus testifies to the transcendence of the real which it is precisely Lukács’s intention to overcome. Lukács is not concerned with the consequences of belief about particular matters, such as the existence of God, the destiny of nations, or even “every one of Marx’s individual theses.”[208]

For Lukács ideas are acts, but they are *not* therefore subject to an instrumental logic. The level at which believing is doing is simply inappropriate for such a reductive treatment. The kind of “belief” with which Lukács is concerned is situated not at the level of particular thought contents and ideas, but at the most general level of cultural forms. A change in culture is a change in social reality: this, rather than some merely pragmatic self-manipulation, is the principle of Lukács’s historicism. In the case of the proletariat, Lukács conceives this change as a re-synthesis of social reality, a mediation of its given reified form of objectivity. It is not this or that idea which is changed, but the “transcendental” condition of the objectivity of social objects in general, the forms in which they are socially produced as objects. It is only at this level of generality that theory and practice are “identical.”

Particular beliefs falling under the horizon of the new culture may still be true or false as before, still require objective proof, and so on. But the new culture is a new production of social reality, not subject to such norms of proof because it is their horizon. It is not to be understood as a verifiable belief “about” social reality, but as a set of dispositions, practices, a mode of seeing and doing which is the very stuff of that reality. Nevertheless, unverifiable as it is, the new culture has a certain arguable truth value and therefore is not proposed for merely faithful adherence. Lukács asserts the epistemological superiority of the proletarian standpoint over that of the bourgeoisie on the basis of a hermeneutic criterion. The dialectical standpoint of the proletariat arises from a mediation of reification, which it encompasses and transcends. Beyond some such immanent criterion, there is no conceivable way of comparing cultures as to their truth value.[209]

Lukács’s theory of the finite horizon is far more developed than Marx’s, and in it the concept of rationality is more successfully reconstructed. In Lukács’s theory of the

proletariat, conscious thought is no external spectator on reality, nor is it condemned merely to rationalize the results of class practices it cannot comprehend. Rather, as a necessary moment in the mediation of the given reified culture, thought is situated in a position from which history can be known in its truth. On this basis the concept of truth can be elucidated anew without reference to an absolute subject.

Practice and Rationality

The theoretical exigencies of the philosophy of praxis which the socialist revolution is supposed finally to satisfy are the *principle of practice*, *history as reality*, and *dialectical method*. But the principle of practice introduces tensions within this triptych between the theory of subject-object identity, the concept of nature, and the theory of rationality. These tensions are particularly clear in Marx's early formulation. Practice seems to cancel the independence of nature even as the experience of nature is exalted as an ontological revealing. The theory is not able to meet the demand for dialectical method but instead issues in a vague promise of a historicized natural science entirely different from the existing sciences.

Lukács's theory more nearly fulfills the requirements it sets up. In accordance with the principle of practice, the theory of subject-object identity is supposed to demonstrate the production of being as a whole, in its content and its form, its existence and its reality, by human subjects. This is only possible if history is reality in the specific sense that all subject-objects are explained through their role in history. But this view is complicated by Lukács's insistence that nature has a quasi-independent status. He thus avoids a transcendental humanism in which the creative power of the divinity would be exercised by human agents. His saving inconsistency is his explicit recognition that finite human subjects cannot constitute nature as they have history.

But how does this recognition square with the ontological significance the philosophy of praxis grants to human action? The independence of nature is usually interpreted as its ontological priority and correlated with an objectivistic "view from nowhere" that transcends in thought the finitude of the human subject. Marx introduced the notion of a finite horizon in order to valorize the nature of lived experience as against the theoretical construction of nature by natural science but his approach ends up dissolving nature in history. However, the concept of a finite horizon is essential to the philosophy of praxis. It reappears in Lukács in a form that permits recognition of nature and scientific truth in a form compatible with the philosophy of praxis.

Lukács's theory of rationality holds that the truth is a mediation of immediate appearances in a totality. In its main features this theory is derived from Hegel whose dialectic of essence transcends the immediacy of both formal-analytic law and its material substratum by relating them in a concrete totality. Hegel does not return to the concrete of immediate experience, as demanded by romanticism. The concrete to which Hegel refers is such by reason of its synthetic completeness, not its immediacy. What Hegel calls the "law of appearance" Lukács understands as the basis of a system of practice; as such this law enters into further real relations with practice in the course of historical development. Law does not transcend history, nor is it denied abstractly, but rather it is conceived as a cultural form. The historical totality is constituted in a practical mediation in which the truth is not only discovered but created through relating law to the experiential reality the form of which it determines, and transforming both.

Unlike Marx, who simply affirms that “man himself becomes the object,” Lukács’s interpretation of the principle of practice is more subtle. But there is still a certain tension between his theory of subject-object identity and his theory of rationality. The former seems to lead toward a utopian claim that reification can be wholly overcome in a future society. Even allowing for the persistent reification of nature, this is a puzzling view which seems to imply the possibility of human action without unintended consequences. With the complete abolition of reification, no law of appearance would arise from the subject’s practice, which would, therefore, be able freely to create its world.

Although this is an implausible construction of his theory of subject-object identity, Lukács certainly left himself open to misinterpretation along lines anticipated by Marx’s over-estimation of labor. In contrast, Lukács’s dialectical theory of rationality has the proletariat constituting itself as a subject through an unsurpassable process of mediation, which presupposes reification as its basis. Rationality is thus achieved not by creating a wholly new type of human condition in which appearance and reality immediately coincide, but through the perpetual mediation of the ever-new appearances in which reality comes to consciousness. The dialectical theory of rationality requires an intrinsically mediated subject-object identity in which subjective and objective dimensions are united through an active process and not simply identified conceptually. Here reason arises from understanding, dialectics from analytic rationality, conscious action from a process in which unintended consequences and objective preconditions are integrated to the life of the subject.

The emphasis on mediation means that the subject is itself an object in the world which must operate under given historical conditions determining the limits of its activity. Historical production is thus not the creation but rather the mediation of the object. Here the subject in no way resembles a collective cogito, a transcendental consciousness outside a world it constitutes. As an agent of social practice, the subject does not posit society but is a moment of society, determined as well as determining. Such a subject “penetrates” its objects by altering their form of objectivity in accordance with their real potentialities. In so doing it establishes the unbounded reach of rationality and abolishes all mysteries that would confine human action within the limits of class society.

Lukács believed this position was compatible with the independence of nature. Nature enters history through the mediation theory of rationality without losing its specificity as a condition rather than a product of human activity. Forms of objectivity established in history open perspectives within which nature is understood in each era. The reified form of objectivity of capitalism has made possible modern natural science. It is not refuted by the revolution but brought within its compass through a dialectical reevaluation and recontextualization.

We now have all the elements required to address the question of nature in philosophy of praxis, but they must be combined in a new formulation to overcome the many doubts and difficulties we have encountered thus far. This is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Reconciliation with Nature

Between Marx and Lukács

In this concluding chapter, I will argue that neither the philosophy of praxis of Marx nor that of Lukács can stand alone, but that a synthesis of some of their major ideas can form the basis of a coherent position. Crucial difficulties in each can be resolved by reference to the other. The tensions between Lukács's emphasis on the productive power of subjectivity and his theory of rationality as dialectical mediation can be corrected by reference to the Marxian reconciliation with nature in a participatory subject-object identity. Marx's lack of a coherent account of science can be compensated by reference to Lukács's concept of rationality. The outcome of the comparison and critique of the two positions is thus a third formulation of the philosophy of praxis which takes into account their defects and accomplishments.

Marx's *Manuscripts* offers a hint of a solution to the problems in Lukács's formulation of the philosophy of praxis. It is true that at points the *Manuscripts* are at least as productionist as anything in Lukács, employing a concept of human labor which has more in common with Biblical Genesis than with anything that actually goes on in a factory or field. Yet there are other passages in Marx's text that emphasize less the *creation* of nature *by* man than the *participation* of man *in* nature. In his discussion of human needs, Marx argues that the unity of man and nature rests on their mutual participation in each other's being, on their "internal relation" to each other.

The notion of participatory identity makes room for the sheer naturalness of nature in a way the theory of the humanization of nature through labor does not. In claiming that human needs are correlated with their objects ontologically, Marx asserts an ultimate harmony joining the human being as a natural being with the nature in which its nature is fulfilled. Nature is not merely the object of the subject because the subject is itself a natural object. The consubstantiality of subject and object supersedes the contingent relation between them assumed by modern philosophy since Descartes.

The far reaching implications of participatory identity are hardly developed in Marx but they are central to the concept of nature in the Frankfurt School. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer protest the untrammled pursuit of power over nature, which they regard as the irrational core of rationalism.

In class history, the enmity of the self to sacrifice implied a sacrifice of the self, inasmuch as it was paid for by a denial of nature in man for the sake of domination over non-human nature and over other men. This very denial, the nucleus of all civilizing rationality, is the germ cell of a proliferating mythic irrationality: with the denial of nature in man not merely the *telos* of outward control of nature but the *telos* of man's own life is distorted and befogged. As soon as man discards his awareness that he himself is nature, all the aims for which he keeps himself alive—social progress, the intensification of all his material and spiritual powers, even consciousness itself—are nullified, and the enthronement of the means as an end, which under late capitalism is tantamount to open insanity, is already perceptible in the prehistory of subjectivity.[210]

The solution the authors propose is obscurely hinted at in scattered passages throughout the book. In one such passage, they remark: "By virtue of this mindfulness

[*eingedenken*] of nature in the subject, in whose fulfillment the acknowledged truth of all culture lies hidden enlightenment is universally opposed to domination.”[211] And they go on to suggest that domination can only be dissolved when it is recognized as “unreconciled nature.”[212] This unreconciled nature must not be conquered and absorbed but accepted through a process of reflection. It is such reflective acceptance of nature which really challenges power. “Dominant practice and its inescapable alternatives are not threatened by nature, which tends rather to coincide with them, but by the fact that nature is remembered [*erinnert*].”[213]

Marcuse’s essay on “Nature and Revolution” represents the furthest advance of the Frankfurt School in the direction of a Marxist theory of nature in socialist society. Marcuse argues that the capitalist view of nature as

Value-free matter, material [there only] for the sake of domination is a *historical a priori*, pertaining to a specific form of society. A free society may well have a very different *a priori* and a very different object; the development of the scientific concepts may be grounded in an experience of nature as a totality of life to be protected and “cultivated”, and technology would apply this science to the reconstruction of the environment of life.[214]

Marcuse goes on to suggest the possibility of a “liberation of nature” that would be “the recovery of the life-enhancing forces in nature, the sensuous aesthetic qualities which are foreign to a life wasted in unending competitive performance.” Here the Frankfurt School’s insistence on non-identity is superseded by a different kind of identity, the identity of nature *in* subject and object, which recognizes itself in reflection and aesthetic appreciation and so mediates itself in a positing that affirms rather than transforms what is. Marcuse’s view, based on an interpretation of the *Manuscripts*, goes against the productionist grain of much of that text. It enables us to see another dimension of Marx’s early ontological conception of the relation of subject to object.

But Marcuse no more than the early Marx solves the problems raised by this radical concept of nature.[215] As I have shown, if the unity of human beings and nature is to be more than a psychological or physiological fact, if it is to have ontological significance, a finite horizon is required to hold the participating moments of subjectivity and objectivity together in an irreducible totality. But from this there arise other difficulties: as presented in the *Manuscripts*, Marx’s concept of the finite horizon is incompatible with natural science. Thus while the aspects of Marx’s theory of nature recognized by Marcuse may well offer a viable supplement to Lukács’s theory, Marx himself developed his approach at the expense of the concept of truth, which ought to make room for the sciences, if not for them alone. The problems in Lukács and Marx are complementary; the solution may therefore consist in pulling together the most successful aspects of each theory. A synthesis of Marx’s concept of participatory subject-object identity with Lukács’s mediation theory of rationality constitutes a coherent and defensible version of the philosophy of praxis.

The critical test of such a synthesis is its ability to account for the relation of man and nature in a way which preserves both the truth of the sciences and the active powers of the human species. Lukács and the later Marx were wise to conclude that philosophy cannot legislate the truth of nature in competition with natural science. But is it necessary, in order to establish the legitimacy of science, to accept a naturalistic ontology incompatible with the philosophy of praxis?

Science and Experience

The problem is the old dilemma of science and experience. As modern science develops, it distances itself increasingly from the everyday evidence of the senses. Of course science continues to rely on sensory data extracted through observation and experiment, but these data are no longer situated in the continuum of the lifeworld. This raises the question of which source of knowledge is fundamental? Two obvious answers have struggled for preeminence throughout modern times: either the scientific worldview is affirmed as universally valid, or science is relegated to a merely instrumental status and deprived of its claim to truth in favor of the evidence of experience. The first solution is generally associated with naturalism and leads to such reductionist hypotheses as the identification of the mind with the brain. The second solution is associated with romanticism and existentialism and retains a certain prestige still in humanistic circles.

There remains a third possibility that, I will argue, can form the basis of a new interpretation of philosophy of praxis. This is the transcendental-pragmatic theory of complementarity proposed by Karl-Otto Apel. Apel notes that science is based on experimental activities that can only go on in a lifeworld of meaningful experience. When experience is reduced naturalistically, that lifeworld is collapsed into various physiological reactions without intrinsic meaning. The reductionist argument thus undercuts its own premises: the results of science render the process of scientific discovery incomprehensible. Apel proposes that we follow the example of quantum mechanics and allow two complementary entities in our ontology, the world as revealed by science and the world of everyday experience. The impulse toward unity is to be resisted and instead we are to accept the inherent duality of truths available to a finite subject in the world.[216]

Apel's theory roughly describes the desiderata of a renewed philosophy of praxis. Without following all the contours of his solution to the dilemma, I would nevertheless like to retain his notion of complementarity for my own purposes.

The argument of the previous chapter leads to the conclusion that philosophy of praxis must affirm the priority of lived nature over its natural scientific construction while also grasping the results of scientific research as moments in the disclosure of the truth of nature. It is necessary to recognize the quantitative, lawful dimension of nature romanticism abstractly negates without relegating lived nature to a merely epiphenomenal status. The corresponding theory of practice must project the possibility of a technical relation to nature which is not only destruction and transformation but also a realization of nature's potentialities in harmony with human needs. The few pages which follow will develop these themes on the basis of the synthesis of Marx and Lukács suggested above. These remarks are necessarily brief and inadequate, but they will have served their purpose if they breathe a little life into the philosophy of praxis which, I am convinced, is not yet the "*tote hund*" in the ideological zoo the major schools of contemporary Marxism take it to be.

In the Marxist tradition, variants of naturalism are the dominant alternative to philosophy of praxis. Naturalism assumes that the nature of natural science is more *real* than that of lived experience because it is richer in *truth*. But the nature of natural science is also self-evidently an ideal theoretical construction; it abstracts from important dimensions of experience that are (currently) scientifically unproblematic, or incomprehensible or irrelevant to the scientist. These three categories cover a lot of

territory. The nature of natural science is, as Hegel argues, a “law of appearance,” significantly impoverished in comparison with the rich variety of immediate appearances of which it is the law. Yet, real as it is, lived nature is evidently lacking in truth, in those subtler interconnections and insights that make of science a deeper perception of reality than ordinary experience. These considerations suggest that neither scientific nor lived nature can stand alone as the totality. I will argue that the contradiction between the two bifurcated natures can be overcome, and that at the point at which the unity of nature is recomposed the antinomy of nature and history is also transcended.

Marx’s historical theory of sensation suggests a solution. As Marx explains it, “Industry is the actual historical relationship of nature, and thus of natural science, to man.”^[217] The maturation and humanization of the senses in the course of history is owing to the development of the objective human powers represented by technology. Unfortunately, Marx did not pursue the role of technology in the formation of the senses.

But Lukács returned to these hints in his *Defence of History and Class Consciousness* and developed them further. There he refutes his critics’ claim that scientific knowledge is independent of social influences. This claim implies that humanity relates immediately to nature. But, Lukács argues, humanity is not a real subject. It is merely an abstraction from the concrete social subjects that interact with nature in history. Lukács points out, furthermore, that Marx himself interpreted certain scientific discoveries in terms of their social background. For example, Marx claimed that Darwin’s theory draws on characteristic features of bourgeois social life. According to Lukács this view does not lead to relativism but rather to the demand that the theorist become reflexive, “conscious that the categories in which he conceives objective reality (society and nature) are determined by the social being of his present moment, that they are only mental summations of this objective reality. (Categories are ‘forms of existence, conditions of existence’—Marx).”^[218] Lukács also rejects the accusation of dualism with which he is taxed for excluding nature from the dialectic, and holds that on the contrary the real dualists are those who imagine that science is independent of society.

Lukács considers knowledge of nature to be a reflex of the technical relations to nature established by society, and seems to hold that the progressive development of productive forces makes it possible to order scientific conceptions progressively as well. But just as the passage from capitalism to socialism differs from all earlier transitions between modes of production, so will the advance of science after the revolution differ from earlier epistemological transitions. Instead of a radical break, as much will be conserved as overthrown.

Capitalism introduced mechanization and the corresponding mechanistic world view that has been so productive in science. Socialism’s contribution is to be a complementary historicizing of knowledge in every sphere. This view of the interaction of science, technology and historical practice suggests the possibility of a social critique of science where its concepts retain traces of an obsolete mode of production. Such critique, Lukács argues, “will probably show that some categories that appear today as ‘eternal’, as categories directly taken from nature, e.g. work in physics, are actually historical, determined by the specific exchange of matter between capitalist society and nature.”^[219] But Lukács does not foresee a general transformation of science. The revolution may inspire critical advances in understanding nature dialectically and

historically, but it does not promise the *replacement* of modern natural science by a dialectical successor comparable to the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries.

What are the implications of this state of affairs for the reified form of objectivity of nature that accompanies and indeed makes possible modern natural science? In neither *History and Class Consciousness*, nor in the later *Defence*, does Lukács squarely face the implications of this question. It would seem that reification retains a certain truth value in the study of nature even after the revolution. And indeed, in speaking of the process in which the proletariat suppresses reification, he does remark that “there can be no single act that will eliminate reification in all its forms at one blow; a whole host of objects seem to remain more or less unaffected by the process. This is true in the first instance of nature.”[220]

The outcome of these reflections is puzzling. Lukács clearly disagrees with Marx’s early notion that a communist successor science will replace the sciences of the bourgeoisie. But this implies the permanence of reification which threatens the thesis of subject-object identity. We find once again the tension within Lukács’s theory between its two main streams. Rather than simply dismissing the theory for incoherence at this point, I would like to propose a resolution that Lukács himself might not have embraced, but which links his thought to Marx’s in new ways. It is Lukács’s dialectic of system and process, law of appearance and totality that suggests this approach. This dialectic indicates a way of integrating the results of science to the Marxian theory of the senses in the general framework of a philosophy of praxis.

In Lukács’s theory of culture, the social totality contains a moment of system which stands in a determinate relation to the historical process of which it is the horizon. The systematic moment is not denied, nor is it reduced to the succession of process, but rather these two dimensions of social life are dialectically interdependent. Marx’s general approach to the senses could inform a similar dialectic of system and process in the understanding of nature. Marx argues that lived nature is shaped by technology, but science too contributes to the way we experience the world. When we look at the sky we no longer see crystalline spheres but a transparent medium beyond which we intuit the infinite expanse of space. Such scientized perceptions are commonplace and by no means matters of “opinion” since meanings derived from science have entered the sensory world itself. Thus the laws of nature are brought into a real relation to the nature we experience as a reified moment in the totality. Lived nature is this totality, not because it is innocent of abstract lawfulness, but on the contrary, because it is a unity of law with its material substratum, a unity richer in both form and content than either science or sensation taken abstractly.

The nature of direct experience is no poetic *schwärmerei*, distinguished from the prose of equations and laboratory experiments by the absence of thought and reflection. Rather, it is informed by science and technology, sensed and comprehended through forms of objectivity that are both social and scientific in character. Science participates in the education of the human senses by being integrated to everyday experience and conception as a moment in the perception of nature, infusing sensation with those larger interconnections and deeper insights that are its contribution to human experience. Lived nature is thus not immediate, but is always already culturally mediated.

The reified dimension of nature on which natural science is based is neither the whole of nature nor is it a mere illusion of alienated reason, as Marx seems to have

believed in 1844. This dimension cannot be canceled by a historical progress that would reveal the truth of nature as human labor. Yet the reification of nature can be comprehended as a dialectical moment of the process in which the senses, and with them lived nature, have developed. Lived nature is, in effect, a dimension of history and this explains why it is structured as a cultural phenomenon. Nature may not be “created” by human practice on the same terms as history, but its participation in a dialectic of system and process reveals it to be fundamentally historical in another way.

On this account, scientific laws are always subtly eccentric with respect to the real. It is this which makes possible their great simplicity, but also their inevitable transcendence by more perfected laws at a later stage. Throughout the course of scientific development, lived nature too evolves under the impact of science, and contributes ever new material to research. It is on this basis that the progress of science occurs, drawing new resources from the inexhaustible material of perceptual experience which it, in turn, enriches by its own development. Lived nature thereby shares in truth to the degree that science informs it by shaping the schemata of perception.

This position is incompatible with the notion that reification characterizes only the bourgeois era. Given the internal link between reification and dialectics in the concept of mediation, it is impossible to eliminate the former without also eliminating the latter. Insofar as the truth is discovered dialectically, reification is a necessary moment in the process of discovery. Reification is, in sum, not the "opposite" of dialectics, but a moment in it. What may nevertheless radically change in the course of history is the position of the reified moment in the totality to which it belongs. As István Mészáros writes, "Granting that it is unthinkable to supersede . . . all possible dangers and potentials of reification, is fully compatible with conceiving 'Aufhebung' as a succession of social enterprises of which the later is less . . . alienation-ridden than the preceding one."[\[221\]](#) Lukács himself says something like this in a passage, which shows he was aware of the danger of a utopian interpretation of his theory:

At the same time it is clear that from the standpoint of the proletariat the empirically given reality of the objects does dissolve into processes and tendencies; this process is no single, unrepeatable tearing of the veil that masks the process but the unbroken alternation of ossification, contradiction and movement; and thus the proletariat represents the true reality, namely the tendencies of history awakening into consciousness.[\[222\]](#)

Now the relevance of the concept of the finite horizon becomes clear. The finite horizon establishes the ontological priority of lived nature over the abstractly conceptualized nature of natural science. The nature of lived experience has the status of a primary reality in which both subject and object participate. This primary reality cannot be further reduced, for example to the physiologically inevitable illusions of the human animal. Lived nature is, rather, a cultural phenomenon of a special sort, and as such the horizon of science and not its object. Science is not therefore to be compared with lived nature as a new theory with an old and refuted one. The extraordinary privilege of lived nature derives from the fact that it is not a theory at all, but a synthesis of theory and an infinitely rich “manifold” of experience to which science will always turn.

Critical Theory of Technology

A similar dialectic of system and process explains the socio-historical dimension of

technology. Both Marx and Lukács are aware that technology is a social phenomenon and not a pure application of science, and they both situate technology within the context of political economy. What is missing in their accounts is a theory of the interaction between the human beings and the rational form of technology itself, its specific design. Marx and Lukács are blocked by the notion that the transformation of technology will only occur in a remote communist future. This notion, like their respect for natural science, discourages them from developing the a concrete dialectic of scientific and technical rationality. Thus they fail to notice that in both cases a reified rational form confronts a living human content, in the case of science the lived nature revealed by the senses, in the case of technology the lives of those dominated by the technologies they use and which use them.

Of course there is a significant different between science and technology. Scientific change depends on the highly specialized knowledge of scientists and excludes ordinary people and their experience. But ordinary people possess sufficient situated knowledge to contribute to the critique and redesign of technology. This observation is confirmed in recent technology studies, which has shown how human agency is both shaped by and shapes technology. Here we return to a central Lukácsian insight: rational forms and living human content enter into a dialectical relationship expressed in conscious praxis.

There is another reason why our perspective on this dialectic differs from that of Lukács and the other Marxists of his time. In the early 1920s they still had confidence that the proletarian revolution would inaugurate a new historical era in the relatively near future. This perspective oriented their thinking toward the relevant issues in political economy, issues which came to a head in the Great Depression. In this context rationality and agency related as economy and class struggle. The parallel dialectic of technical rationality and social struggle over design remained invisible. But today the relationship between political economy and technology is reversed. The politics of technology are increasingly debated while the weakening of labor in the age of regulation, mass communications and globalization has defeated traditional Marxist expectations.

There are two brief comments in *History and Class Consciousness* in which Lukács anticipates aspects of our present situation. On the one hand, he notes that as capitalism enters into crisis, the hold of reification on the central institutions of society weakens even as its range spreads to more and more social domains. On the other hand, he suggests that if the proletariat fails to seize the contradictions of capitalism they will reproduce themselves at a “higher level.”^[223]

Combined, these remarks yield a fair picture of our world. The higher level at which the contradictions are reproduced is the “one-dimensional society” in which the “laws” of political economy are increasingly suspended by state regulation while reified relationships spread into every facet of social life in the wake of an ever more pervasive technicization. In this new context, proletarian revolution of the classical sort Marx and Lukács awaited seems decidedly less likely. But the contradictions have not disappeared. They emerge now in relation to technology which more and more supplies the reified rationality organizing everyday existence. The potential for resistance which Marx and Lukács identified in the proletariat is now present in the whole underlying population insofar as it is submitted to this technology. The limits of the factory and its political forms have been breached.

This new situation has political consequences I have developed in the critical

theory of technology. The formation of a compact social subject led by a revolutionary party is no longer possible as the contradictions are dispersed across the whole surface of the technicized society. The original model of revolution derived from the French experience, which Marx incorporated into his theory and Lenin into his practice, no longer appears plausible. Instead, of a fight to the death over control of the state, we witness the dialectical dance of struggle, cooptation and renewed struggle over technological trajectories and designs. In the past Marxists always dismissed such struggles as “reformist,” but they now appear as the logic of our moment in history.

The outcomes of such struggles are inevitably ambiguous. Nostalgia for the old revolutionary model inspires one-sided condemnation of the only forms of action possible today. A theory of reification adapted to the present situation suggests more hopeful perspectives. The new pattern of struggle holds open the possibility of a human world against the powerful technocratic tendencies of late capitalism. Such innovations as public access to the Internet for both public and private purposes testify to the significance of this dynamic.[224] Perhaps change will continue in forms dispersed as are the agents of change. Where this process will lead is unknown because no critical break such as the abolition of private property in the means of production demarcates eras in the history of technology.

Although the confidence in revolution of the Marxist tradition is apparently refuted by history, another possibility appears on the horizon of contemporary struggles. This is a change in the relative weight of lived experience and economic and technical rationality. Under modern capitalism and the failed communist societies that emulated it, rational forms prevailed overwhelmingly over traditions that reflected centuries of accumulated experience with nature, power, and human relations. There was certainly a liberating aspect to this process but as the individuals were recruited into ever more complex and tightly managed technical networks, their margin of freedom contracted once again. The technocratic culmination of this development seemed certain in the mid 20th century. If it is less certain today, this is because new forms of resistance have arisen in response to the participant interests of the individuals within the technical networks of advanced societies.

Lived experience still contains the unsurpassable evidence of human needs and potentialities frustrated to some degree within the established forms. The lessons of experience slowly come to consciousness and break through the reified organization of the society in a wide variety of struggles around the environment, gender and race, globalization, communication, and, of course, production—still and always. All these domains are structured to one degree or another by the technologies of control. In resisting this control, participants in technical networks encounter the rationality of the system at every turn and negotiate its transformation wherever they find the strength to impose their will. These interventions appear weak today relative to the institutional and technical structures on which the society is based. But the perspective of a reversal is not excluded in principle. It is the final trace of the struggle against reification for a free society.

[1] Karl Korsch and Antonio Gramsci are the other major representatives of this trend.

[2] Important summaries of the debate are contained in: Ernest Mandel, *La Formation de la Pensée Economique de Karl Marx* (Paris: Maspero, 1967); Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie und*

Praxis (Neuwied und Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967). Also interesting are: Herbert Marcuse, "The Foundations of Historical Materialism," in *Studies in Critical Theory*, trans. By J. de Bres, (Boston: Beacon, 1973), first published in 1932; Louis Althusser, "Sur le jeune Marx," in *Pour Marx* (Paris: Maspero, 1966); Bertell Ollman, *Alienation* (New York: Cambridge University, 1971); István Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

[3] Important discussions of the relation of the *Grundrisse* to *Capital* are: Roman Rosdolsky, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Marxschen 'Kapital'* (Wien: Europa Verlag, 1968); Irving Fetscher, "The Young and the Old Marx," in Shlomo Avineri, ed., *Marx's Socialism* (New York: Lieber Atherton, 1973); Ernst Mandel, *La Formation de la Pensée Economique de Karl Marx* (Paris: Maspero, 1967). The authors all agree that the early concept of alienation in Marx is further developed in the concept of fetishism in *Capital*.

[4] Mandel, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

[5] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. by R. Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT, 1971), p. xliv (emphasis omitted). Throughout the footnotes, *History and Class Consciousness* will be referred to as "HCC." All references are to this edition, but Livingstone's translation has sometimes been modified to approach literalness as nearly as possible.

[6] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. and ed., by T. B. Bottomore (London: C. A. Watts, 1963), p. 217.

[7] HCC, p. 144.

[8] HCC, p. 145. For a further discussion of Lukács's concept of praxis, see Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács et Heidegger* (Paris: Denoël, 1973), pp. 103-105.

[9] Herbert Marcuse, "The Foundations of Historical Materialism," *op. cit.*, p. 24. The translator has somewhat simplified the original. Cf Herbert Marcuse "Neue Quellen zur Grundlegung des Historischen Materialismus," in *Der Deutsche Künstlerroman, Frühe Aufsätze* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), p. 530-531.

[10] Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. by J. Shapiro, (Boston: Beacon, 1971), p. 28.

[11] Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), p. 275.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 314.

[13] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," *op. cit.*, p. 155.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 157. In this, as in many other passages from the early Marx quoted here, italics have been omitted for the sake of clarity.

[15] One who sees Marx's *Manuscripts* as an ethical work is Eugene Kamenka. See his, *Marxism and Ethics* (New York: St. Martins, 1969). A contrary position is taken by Bertell Ollman, *op. cit.*, p. 47. Cf Allen Wood, "The Marxian Critique of Justice," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1972). For an important discussion of the historical debate over Marxism and ethics, see "Y a-t-il une sociologie marxiste?" in Lucien Goldmann, *Recherches Dialectiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959).

[16] Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), p. 136.

[17] See A. Feenberg, *Transforming Technology* (New York: Oxford, 2002), chap. 2.

[18] Georg Lukács, "Moses Hess and the Problems of Idealistic Dialectics," in George Lukács, *Tactics and Ethics*, trans. by M. McColgan, ed. by R. Livingstone (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 191.

[19] Marx, "Letter to Ruge," L. Easton and K. Guddat, trans. and eds., *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 213.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

[21] Frederick Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," Marx and Engels, *Selected Works* (New York: International, 1968), pp. 596-597.

[22] Marx, "On the Jewish Question," *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[23] For a summary of the theory, see the appendix to Habermas' *Knowledge and Human Interests*.

- [24] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World* (New York: Mentor, 1948), p. 88.
- [25] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origins of the Negative Dialectic* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), pp. 26-27.
- [26] Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory," *Negations*, trans. J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1968), p. 142.
- [27] Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," L. Easton and K. Guddat, trans. and eds., *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 402.
- [28] I owe many of the ideas in this section to discussion with Gerald Doppelt.
- [29] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: International, 1979), p. 29.
- [30] "Traditional and Critical Theory," in M. Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, M. O'Connell, Trans, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972.)
- [31] D. Hofstadter, *Godel, Escher, Bach* (New York: Basic books, 1979), 21-22.
- [32] G. Lukács, *A Defense of History and Class Consciousness*, E. Leslie, trans. (London: Verso, 2000), p. 109.
- [33] John Locke, "An Essay Concerning the True Origin, Extent and End of Civil Government," in Ernest Barker, ed., *Social Contract* (New York: Oxford University, 1962), p. 133.
- [34] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- [35] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "The Social Contract," trans. By G. Hopkins, in Ernest Barker, ed., *Social Contract* (New York: Oxford University, 1962), p. 175.
- [36] Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," in T.B. Bottomore, trans. And ed., *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (London: C.A. Watts, 1963), p. 52.
- [37] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- [38] Herbert Marcus, "Philosophy and Critical Theory," in *Negations* trans. by J. Shapiro, (Boston: Beacon, 1968), p. 137.
- [39] Karl Marx, "Letter to Ruge," in Loyd Easaton and Kurt Guddat, trans. and eds., *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), p. 213.
- [40] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social* (Paris: Gonthier, 1962), p. 247, my translation. Barker's edition has the tendentiously incorrect "to obey the law laid down by society is to be free." Cf. Ernest Barker, ed., *Social Contract* (New York: Oxford University, 1962), p. 186. For more on the relation of Rousseau and Kant, see Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant and Goethe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).
- [41] Cf. Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Kant: The Philosophy of Right* (London: Macmillan, 1970), chapter III.
- [42] Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in T.B. Bottomore, trans. and ed., *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (London: C.A. Watts, 1963), P. 13.
- [43] Karl Marx, "Letter to Ruge," *op. cit.*, p. 213.
- [44] This critique is basic to understanding the Marxian conception of socialism and socialist politics. Marx was aware of the Hegelian critique of Jacobin voluntarism and quite self-consciously worked toward a non-voluntaristic formulation of revolutionary theory. Marx believed political revolution to be through and through tied to class society because in it moral exigencies contrary to the "private" interests of the individuals are imposed by the state on a separate civil society of private owners. A revolution to abolish class society and private property would only reproduce these evils were it to attempt to impose a moral legislation in opposition to the perceived interests of the individuals. Rather, a socialist revolution against the very principle of class would necessarily have to be rooted in their interests; only on this condition would it overcome the antinomy of state and civil society, reason and need. Whatever the course of events in the existing communist countries, Marx at least was aware of the type of problems raised by conservative critics such as Leo Strauss or J.L. Talmon, who see in Marxism simply another version of Jacobin voluntarism. For more on Marx's approach, see especially his early essay, "Critical Notes on 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform'", in L. Easton and K. Guddat, trans. and eds. *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society* (New York: Doubleday,

1967).

[45] Marx, "On the Jewish Question," *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[49] *HCC*, p. 160.

[50] Marx, "On the Jewish Question," *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[51] *HCC*, p. 126.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[53] Lucien Goldmann, "Philosophie et sociologie dans l'oeuvre du jeune Marx: Contribution à l'étude du problème," in *Marxisme et Sciences Humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 148. For a recent reformulation of the problem, see Alvin Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979).

[54] Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," in T.B. Bottomore, trans. and ed., *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (London: C.A. Watts, 1963), p. 53.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 58

[57] Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," *op. cit.*, p. 59.

[58] *HCC*, p. 2.

[59] Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," *op. cit.*, p. 54.

[60] Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by M. Vogel, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 5.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 67. For a useful discussion of the relation of Marx to Feuerbach, see Shlomo Avineri, "The Hegelian Origins of Marx's Political Thought," in S. Avineri, ed., *Marx's Socialism* (New York: Lieber-Atherton, 1972), pp. 3-4.

[64] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," in T.B. Bottomore, trans. and ed. *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (London: C.A. Watts, 1963), p. 163.

[65] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," *op. cit.*, p. 158.

[66] *HCC*, p. 170. Cf. Also Georg Lukács, "Moses Hess and the Problems of Idealist Dialectics," in Georg Lukács, *Tactics and Ethics*, trans. by M. McColgan, ed. By R. Livingstone (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 214-215.

[67] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," *op. cit.*, p. 197.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 203. Jean Hyppolite has written a defense of Hegel in response to such criticisms. See "Aliénation et objectivation," in Jean Hyppolite, *Etudes sur Marx et Hegel* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1965). For a response to Hyppolite, see István Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 242-245.

[70] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism*, trans. by R. Dixon and C. Dutte (Moscow: Progress, 1975), p. 70.

[71] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," *op. cit.*, p. 204.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 207.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[76] Quoted in Bertell Ollman, *Alienation* (New York: Cambridge University, 1971), p. 275.

[77] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 208.

- [79] *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.
- [80] *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- [81] The phrase is, of course, Hegel's. See, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M. Knox (London: Oxford University, 1952), p. 12.
- [82] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," *op. cit.*, p. 162. That the concept of reason is truly at issue in Marx seems to me to be a necessary implication of his discussion of the reform of the sciences. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164. This aspect of his theory will be discussed at greater length in the conclusion of this book.
- [83] George Lukács, "The Old Culture and the New Culture," trans. by P. Breines and S. Weber, *Telos*, no. 5 (1970), p. 21.
- [84] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. by D. Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1970), p. 299.
- [85] The other major work of this tendency is Karl Korsch, *Marxismus and Philosophie* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1966), originally published in 1923, at the same time as Lukács *History and Class Consciousness*. Korsch's book is available in a partial English translation under the title *Marxism and Philosophy*, trans. by F. Halliday (New York: Monthly Review, 1970). See also Franz Jakubowski, *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism*, A. Booth, trans. (New York: St. Martins Press, 1976).
- [86] For a discussion of the gap between Marx's critique of political economy and the revolutionary theory of socialism, cf., Stanley Moore, "Utopian Themes in Marx and Mao: A Critique for Modern Revisionists," *Monthly Review* 21, no. 2 (1969). Moore's argument is developed further in "Marx and Lenin as Historical Materialists," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 4, no. 2 (1975).
- [87] An exhaustive survey of the various meanings of the concept of culture is provided by A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Vintage, 1963). They conclude that "most social scientists" would define culture as follows:
 Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (*Ibid.*, p. 357.)
- [88] *HCC*, p. 203.
- [89] *HCC*, p. 152.
- [90] Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Marxism of the Early Lukács: An Evaluation," *New Left Review*, no. 70 (1971), p. 44.
- [91] Lucio Colletti, *Il Marxismo e Hegel* (Bari: Laterza, 1969), p. 342.
- [92] *HCC*, p. 91.
- [93] *HCC*, p. 100.
- [94] *HCC*, p. 112.
- [95] *HCC*, p. 89.
- [96] *HCC*, p. 130.
- [97] Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 105.
- [98] *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 83.
- [99] *HCC*, p. 102.
- [100] *HCC*, pp. 184-185.
- [101] *HCC*, p. 231.
- [102] *HCC*, p. 202.
- [103] *HCC*, p. 179.
- [104] Georg Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*, E. Leslie, trans. (London: Verso, 2000), p. 137.

- [105] Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. by W.H. Johnston and L.G. Struther (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961), vol. II, p. 135.
- [106] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1904), p. 293.
- [107] Marx, *A Contribution of the Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1904), p. 302.
- [108] *HCC*, p. 83.
- [109] Lukács, "Moses Hess and the Problems of Idealist Dialectics," in *Tactics and Ethics*, ed. By R. Livingstone, trans. by M. McColgan (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 215.
- [110] *HCC*, p. 177.
- [111] *HCC*, p. xiv.
- [112] Frederick Engels, "The Peasant Question in France and German," Marx and Engels, *Selected Works* (New York: International, 1969), p. 648.
- [113] *HCC*, pp. 110 and 187-188. It was Nietzsche who first attempted a general critique of rationality as an expression of the will to power, identifying conceptual generality and hierarchy with corresponding social projects of control and domination. The Frankfurt School continues some aspects of this critique, which it enriches and concretizes in terms of the Lukácsian critique of reification.
- [114] Quoted by Lukács in *HCC*, p. 141. The passage is from *Die Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems*. In its entirety it reads: "The antitheses . . . which used to be expressed in terms of mind and matter, body and soul, faith and reason, freedom and necessity, etc., and were also prominent in a number of more restricted spheres and concentrated all human interests in themselves, became transformed as culture advanced into contrasts between reason and the senses, intelligence and nature and, in its most general form, between absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity. To transcend such ossified antitheses is the sole concern of reason. This concern does not imply hostility to opposites and restrictions in general; for the necessary course of evolution is one factor of life which advances by opposites: and the totality of life, at its most intense is only possible as a new synthesis out of the most absolute separation."
- [115] *HCC*, p. 121.
- [116] *HCC*, p. 63.
- [117] *HCC*, p. 77. This dilemma Lukács has already treated at great length in *The Theory of the Novel* before becoming a Marxist. That early work, which contains Lukács critique of romanticism and ethical idealism, concludes with a chapter on the "transcendence of social forms of life." The messianic-utopian stage in Lukács thought lies here, in the idea of the creation of a new epic community through the dissolution of all social conventions and constraints in soul-to-soul encounters of the Dostoevskian type. The later idea of unity of theory and practice is an attempt to demythologize this early notion by supplying concrete mediations through which it could be realized. For more on Lukács's messianism, see Michael Löwy, *Pour une Sociologie des Intellectuels Révolutionnaires* (Paris: PUF, 1976).
- [118] *HCC*, p. 134.
- [119] *HCC*, p. 87.
- [120] *HCC*, p. 135.
- [121] M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, W. Lovitt, trans. (New York: Harper, 1977).
- [122] *HCC*, p. 129.
- [123] *HCC*, p. 112.
- [124] *HCC*, p. 128.
- [125] Lukács's interpretation of Kant is developed further in Lucien Goldmann, *Mensch, Gemeinschaft und Welt in der Philosophie Immanuel Kants* (Zürich: Europa Verlag, 1945) and George Lukács, *The Young Hegel* (Cambridge: MIT, 1975).

- [126] *HCC*, p. 115.
- [127] *HCC*, p. 117.
- [128] *HCC*, p. 116.
- [129] *HCC*, p. 122.
- [130] *HCC*, p. 126.
- [131] *HCC*, p. 124.
- [132] *HCC*, p. 160. Implicit in this critique of Kantian moral idealism is a critique of political voluntarism in the left wing of the socialist movement. It is interesting that Lukács himself is generally perceived as a political voluntarist even though he elaborated the theoretical basis of a profound critique of that position. Lukács's own critique of sectarianism as a disguised ethical idealism is to be found on *HCC*, pp. 320-322 and 326-328.
- [133] *HCC*, p. 134. This interpretation of Kant's ethics is of course alien to concerns of recent Anglo-American analysis of Kant's thought. It is not, however, without precedent in earlier Kant-criticism. Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans., by J.B. Ballie (New York: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 615 ff.
- [134] *HCC*, p. 126.
- [135] *HCC* p. 126
- [136] *HCC*, p. 137.
- [137] *HCC*, p. 138. Kant defines the "intuitive understanding" as follows: "In fact our understanding has the property of proceeding in its cognition, e.g. of the cause of a product, from the analytical-universal (concepts) to the particular (given empirical intuition). Thus, as regards the manifold of the latter, it determines nothing, but must await this determination by the judgment of the subsumption of the empirical intuition (if the object is a natural product) under the concept. We can, however, think an understanding which being not like ours, discursive, but intuitive proceeds from the synthetical-universal (the intuition of whole as such) to the particular, i.e., from the whole to the parts. The contingency of the combination of the parts, in order that a definite form of the whole shall be possible, is not implied by such an understanding its representation of the whole." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. by H.H. Bernard (New York, Hafner, 1951), p. 255. The centrality Lukács attributes to the idea of an "intuitive understanding" in the development of classical German philosophy follows closely on Hegel's interpretation. In *Glauben und Wissen*, Hegel even asserts that "*die Idee dieses urbildlichen, intuitiven Verstandes ist im Grunde durchaus nichts anders als dieselbe Idee der transzendentalen Einbildungskraft.*" G.W.F. Hegel, *Glauben und Wissen* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1962), p. 33. This identification also underlies Lukács interpretation of Fichte and Hegel. Among recent Kant scholars, those of the historical-ontological school seem to be closest to Lukács in emphasis. Cf. Heinz Heimsoeth, "Metaphysical Motives in the Development of Critical Idealism," Moltke Gram, ed., *Kant: Disputed Questions* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1967). Heimsoeth writes, for example, that "it is a conviction of Kant's which endures to his last period, that complete and immediate knowledge is only present where the subject posits the object," *op .cit.*, p. 161.
- [138] *HCC*, p. 142.
- [139] The accuracy of this interpretation of Kant is not the issue here since this was in fact how Hegel understood critical philosophy. Cf. G.F.W. Hegel, *Glauben and Wissen* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1962), pp. 20-21.
- [140] See Herbert Marcuse, *Hegels Ontologie* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1968), pp. 40-43 and especially, pp. 133-134.
- [141] *HCC*, p. 155.
- [142] *HCC*, p. 147.
- [143] *HCC*, p. 17.
- [144] *HCC*, p. 18.
- [145] *HCC*, p. 201.

[146] HCC, p. 155.

[147] Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, trans. by M.J. O'Connell (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 211. Subject-object identity in this sense is clearly quite different from the kind of identity rejected by the Frankfurt School. Cf. Max Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Seabury, 1974), pp. 169-173. In that discussion, it can be seen that the Frankfurt School interprets subject-object identity entirely in terms of the relation of "Spirit" to "nature," leaving out the interaction of theory and practice in history in which identity consists most importantly for Lukács. For a different view in cf. Martin Jay, "The Frankfurt School's Critique of Marxist Humanism," *Social Research* XXXIX:2 (1972).

[148] HCC, p. 21.

[149] HCC, p. 204.

[150] Georg Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*, E. Leslie, trans. (London: Verso, 2000), p. 52.

[151] HCC, p. 163.

[152] HCC, p. 176.

[153] HCC, p. 185.

[154] HCC, p. 187. To what extent does this treatment of the category of subjectivity answer objections to the use of that category formulated from a structuralist viewpoint? The structuralist critique of subjectivism and humanism began as a reaction to phenomenology and Sartrean existentialism, doctrines interpreted to argue for the unbounded creative capacity of pure consciousness. The early formulations of the critique were scientific and hence internal to the general antinomy of subjectivism/objectivism they attempted to transcend. (For an especially revealing example, see the November, 1963 issue of *Esprit*, containing a fascinating debate between Levi-Strauss and several representatives of French phenomenology.) There has been a recognition in France that the simple "abolition" of the subject by a scientific *coup de force* cannot resolve the specific problems posed by the study of society. The decisive question is not the ontological one of whether human subjectivity "exists" or whether it is a merely subjective illusion (of a "subject"?), but rather the methodological one of the position of subjectivity in a framework of structures and rules that it does not posit but which are – not so much determining for it as – constitutive of its very being. In different ways, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault have thought through the implications of this position. Without claiming that Lukács (or Marx) anticipates the subtle and original modes of analysis elaborated by Bourdieu and Foucault, I think it can be shown that they are at least situated in neighboring conceptual fields, and that the critique of Marxist subjectivist-humanism elaborated in reaction to Sartre's *Critique* does not apply to their formulation of the Marxist theory of the subject.

[155] See John Hoffman, *Marxism and the Theory of Praxis* (New York: International, 1975). There are also several Althusserian critiques of Lukács in English which belong to the same general tendency. See Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Marxism of the Early Lukács: An Evaluation," *New Left Review* 70 (1971), pp. 27-64; and John Horton and Fari Filsoufi, "Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder in Theory and Method," *The Insurgent Sociologist* VII, no. 1 (1977). Both these articles make the mistake of identifying Lukács's turn to "orthodoxy" with the writing of his little book on *Lenin* in 1924, even though several major essays developing the viewpoint expressed in *History and Class Consciousness* are written in the years that follow. The question of political Leninism was simply not the touchstone of philosophical "orthodoxy" for Lukács these critics make it out to be. (See the appendix to this book.)

[156] HCC, p. 24.

[157] HCC, p. 207.

[158] Abram Deborin, "Lukács und seine Kritik des Marxismus," in Abram Deborin and Nikolai Bucharin, *Kontroversen über dialektischen und mechanistischen Materialismus* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 1968), p. 192.

- [159] *Ibid.*, p. 192.
- [160] *Ibid.*, p. 214.
- [161] *Ibid.*, p. 218.
- [162] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Les Aventures de la Dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), pp. 66.
- [163] *HCC*, p. xxxvi.
- [164] For a balanced discussion of this commonplace charge, see Andrew Arato, "Lukács's Theory of Reification," *Telos*, no. 11 (1972), pp. 42-43.
- [165] *HCC*, p. xxiii.
- [166] This interpretation is confirmed by G. Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*, E. Leslie, trans. (London: Verso, 2000). For a discussion of this historical background to Lukács's concept of subject-object identity, see James Schmidt, "The Concrete Totality and Lukács's Concept of Proletarian *Bildung*," *Telos*, no. 24 (1975), p. 240ff.
- [167] *HCC*, p. 19
- [168] *HCC*, p. 123.
- [169] Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, B. Fowkes, trans. (London: New Left Books, 1971), p. 70. Jîndrich Zéleny carries the misunderstanding still further, writing that Lukács interprets Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach to call for "a reduction of all reality to practical human activity." See Jîndrich Zéleny, *Die Wissenschaftslogik un 'Das Kapital'*" (Wien: Europa Verlag, 1968), p. 302.
- [170] S. Vogel, *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory*. Albany: SUNY, 1996, pp. 31 and 180n.
- [171] *HCC*, p. xxiii.
- [172] *HCC*, p. 234 (my emphasis) Cf., Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (Neuwied und Berlin: Luchterhand, 1968), p. 410.
- [173] Andrew Arato argues for a similar conclusion in *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42. Lukács insists on this point in his *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*, E. Leslie, trans. (London: Verso, 2000), p. 97.
- [174] *HCC*, p. 131.
- [175] *HCC*, p. 207.
- [176] See Lucio Colletti, *Il Marxismo e Hegel* (Bari: Laterza, 1969), pp. 317-356. This chapter is titled, significantly, "Da Bergson a Lukács."
- [177] *HCC*, p. 110.
- [178] *HCC*, p. 10. G.S. Jones quotes part of the second sentence of this passage to prove Lukács's hostility to natural scientific method *in general*. (*op. cit.*, p. 20.) Such crudely selective use of quotations is evidently compatible with the "scientific" objectivity Jones boosts in his article!
- [179] For an example of this approach, see Guisepppe Bedeschi, *Alienazione e Feticismo nel Pensiero di Marx* (Bari: Laterza, 1968), pp. 177-207.
- [180] Lucien Goldmann, *Sciences Humaines et Philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 1952), p. 17.
- [181] Alfred Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
- [182] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, T.B. Bottomore, trans. and ed., (London: C.A. Watts, 1963), pp. 160-161.
- [183] *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- [184] This is, of course, Sartre's thesis, but it is by no means self-evident
- [185] *Ibid.*, p. 160.
- [186] *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- [187] *Ibid.*, p. 160.
- [188] *Ibid.*, p. 206.
- [189] *Ibid.*, p. 217.
- [190] *Ibid.*, p. 163. On the equivalence of idealism and materialism, cf. Robert Havemann, *Dialektik ohne Dogma?* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1964), pp. 27-32.
- [191] *Ibid.*, p. 164.

- [192] *Ibid.*, p. 164. Marx's discussion of the reform of science has divided commentators. For two different interpretations, cf. István Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 101-121; and Jean Hyppolite, *Études sur Marx et Hegel* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1965), pp. 112-113. Mészáros gives a common sense reading to Marx's text, which Hyppolite interprets literally as calling for the most radical transformation of natural science.
- [193] *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- [194] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International, 1947), pp. 36-37.
- [195] It is to avoid this paradox that Heidegger proposes that action has "its own kind of sight." Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*. trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, 1962, p. 99.
- [196] Ernst Bloch is the most famous example. For a discussion of the difficulties arising from Bloch's position, see Alfred Schmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-163.
- [197] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Genealogy of Morals," in *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, F. Golffing, trans. (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 255.
- [198] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," *op. cit.*, p. 166. Cf. Jean-Francois Lyotard, "La place de l'aliénation dans le retournement marxiste," in Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Dérive à Partir de Marx et Freud* (Paris: UGE, 1973), pp. 112-115.
- [199] Cf., for example, Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, D. Swenson and W. Lowrie, trans. (Princeton: Princeton Univ., 1968), pp. 108-109. Like Marx, Kierkegaard objects to the act of abstraction in which the subject places itself outside of existence to interrogate existence.
- [200] Gabriel Marcel, "On the Ontological Mystery," Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, M. Harari, trans. (New York: Citadel, 1966), p. 19.
- [201] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- [202] Garbriel Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, B. Wall, trans. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952), pp. 102 and 332-339.
- [203] G.F.W. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, J.B. Baille, trans. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961), pp. 370-371.
- [204] For a discussion of the relation of Mannheim to Lukács, see Joseph Gabel, "Mannheim et le marxisme hongrois," in Joseph Gabel, *Idéologies* (Paris: Anthropos, 1974), pp. 255-278.
- [205] *HCC*, p. 187.
- [206] This is the thesis of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-45 and 63-64.
- [207] *HCC*, p. 189.
- [208] *HCC*, p. 1.
- [209] G. Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*, E. Leslie, trans. (London: Verso, 2000), p. 71.
- [210] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, J. Cumming, trans. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 54.
- [211] *Ibid.*, p. 40, (trans. modified). The German text is to be found in Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Amsterdam: Querido Verlag, 1944, reprint n.d.), p. 55.
- [212] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *op. cit.*, p. 41. (In the German text, *op. cit.*, p. 55).
- [213] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *op. cit.*, p. 255. (In the German text, *op. cit.*, p. 305). It is in this context that they claim that "All reification is a forgetting" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *op. cit.*, p. 230, trans. modified).
- [214] Herbert Marcuse, "Nature and Revolution," in Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon, 1972), p. 61.
- [215] For a discussion of Marcuse's attempt, see A. Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), chap. 6.
- [216] See Apel, Karl-Otto. (1984). *Understanding and Explanation: A Transcendental-Pragmatic Approach*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

[217] Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” *op. cit.*, pp. 149-160.

[218] G. Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*, E. Leslie, trans. (London: Verso, 2000), p. 105.

[219] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[220] *HCC*, p. 206. The use of the word “seem” in this passage does not introduce an antithesis in which it would be shown that the reification of nature is transcended despite appearances; on the contrary, it introduces a discussion of an objective dialectics of nature in contrast with the subjective dialectic of subject and object.

[221] István Mészáros, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

[222] *HCC*, 199.

[223] *HCC*, 208, 198-199.

[224] See A. Feenberg, “A Democratic Internet?”, *Information Society Journal*, forthcoming

2009.