

4

The Meta-Theory of Philosophy: Lukács Formulation

THE HERITAGE OF CLASSICAL GERMAN PHILOSOPHY

For Lukács traditional philosophy is in essence theory of culture that does not know itself as such. Philosophy is reflection on cultural structures misinterpreted 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' most important work is devoted to an extended analysis of the history of philosophy.

Lukács had, of course, an important predecessor in the Marxist study of the history of philosophy. In the foreword to *History and Class Consciousness*, he says that "it is of practi-

cal 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.')"¹ However, this statement is misleading to the extent that it would incline the reader to seek in Lukács a treatment of classical German 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 posed by Engels 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 prologomena to Marxism. For Engels 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 which it was supposed to assume. Engels presented Marxism as a science, comparable to the other sciences, while Marxist philosophy became for him a new 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 natural sciences and of historical and economic theory, and in combatting religion with materialism. 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.

The uncritical, or precritical theory of truth Engels postulated as the basis for the inheritance is particularly evident in those passages where he discusses the legitimacy of the proletariat's claim. For Engels the essence of the heritage is science, the sciences created by the bourgeoisie, 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 universality and honesty 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."² 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' 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.³ 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 had inevitably to fail 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."⁴ The resolution of the antinomies is the fundamental exigency of this philosophy, through which it attempts to found 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 the antinomies of reified thought, 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' own contribution consists in the appropriation of Hegel's dialectical critique of Kant and of reified thought generally from within Marxism.

From this standpoint classical German philosophy takes on a wholly new importance for Marxism. It does not belong to Marxism's prehistory, but rather poses for the first time, in a still relatively unconscious form, the fundamental problems that Marxism is called upon to solve. Lukács therefore reexamines the development of this philosophy, from Kant to Hegel, in order to understand the earliest formulations of the problems to which Marxism is addressed, and the general conditions of their solution. The study of classical German philosophy is a study of the outer reaches of bourgeois thought, as it approaches the point at which its transcendence in Marxism will finally show the way to resolve its antinomies. For Lukács, 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. These were already the goals which classical German philosophy set for itself and Lukács accepts them as valid, rejecting only the method by which this philosophy hoped to attain them.

The failure of classical German philosophy then demonstrates that reason requires, on purely *methodological* grounds, a step beyond bourgeois society, beyond philosophical speculation into revolutionary practice. Classical German 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."⁵ 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.

Lukács' Marxism thus refuses either to attempt a speculative resolution of the antinomies of philosophy, or to ignore them in the naive self-certainty of science. For Lukács 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' meta-theory of classical German philosophy consists in large part in identifying this level as social and demonstrating the continuing traces of their social origin in the most abstract concepts of this philosophy. This is the theoretical basis for what Lukács calls the unity of theory and practice.

THE REIFIED THEORY-PRACTICE RELATION

Lukács' 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 the point Lukács wants to make 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 will have to be specified further.

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' intent to reverse the terms of the equation in order to consider theory as a specific type of practice "raised to consciousness" and there 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 prevents 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 in fact do not appear to be practical problems at all, but rather to be philosophical problems? Already, the very form of these questions begins to indicate unaccustomed reasons why philosophy should arise through a process of abstraction from practical life, leading it ever further from its own material substratum. In a complementary fashion, one also begins to see 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.

Most abstractly formulated, the limit on everyday practice with which Lukács is concerned is reification. The previous chapter has discussed the ramifications of this concept in detail. Here I will confine myself to an exposition of those aspects of the concept most relevant to Lukács' meta-

theoretical critique of philosophy. These are the social origins of the reified theory-practice relation, and its consequences for what Lukács calls "reified thought," that is to say, thought which accepts reification as the horizon, the intrinsic limit of practice generally.

According to Lukács, it is the capitalist transformation of the work process which is the basis of all forms of reification. The reification of labor is therefore the origin and model of all forms of reification throughout the society. "The destiny of the worker becomes the general destiny of the entire society."⁶ 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. Ideologically, the capitalist class itself justifies its right to possess these means of production by claiming that they are the fruit of its own labor or that of its ancestors. 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."⁷

Lukács seeks the "*Seinsgrund*" of reified thought, even in its highest philosophical manifestations, in the structure of the capitalist labor process.⁸ 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."⁹

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 synchronic rationality of the given productive system is the diachronic development 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 his intervention. The capitalist then attempts to so position himself with respect to this predetermined outcome that he can profit from the objective evolution. Like the worker confronted with the autonomous activity of the machine, the capitalist is confronted by the autonomous activity of the market.

Thus the activity of the individual subject in capitalist society is not the transformation of *reality*, in Lukács' 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 the taking up of an orientation with respect to reality. Where this orienting activity reflects unconscious social laws, massive regularities of behavior will 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 yet again as the presupposition of an individual calculus of losses and gains. Thus, "the attitude of

the subject becomes purely contemplative in the philosophical sense."¹⁰

Reified thought is thought which arises from just such a confrontation of individual and 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."¹¹

The individual bourgeois perceives himself as an active agent, a subject of history, while the activity of his class appears to him in its reified form, as an object. From the bourgeois point of view, activity can only be predicated of conscious individuals and only conscious individuals can appear as subjects. However, Lukács argues, individual activity in capitalist society consists primarily in adjusting to the necessary course of events, the better to profit from them. The conscious activity of the individual bourgeois therefore makes no essential contribution to the course of events but is exhausted in the more or less successful calculation of what will happen in any case. In this sense, the activity of the individual bourgeois is really passivity, is really an objective aspect of the social process and not a subjective, creative aspect.

The level at which the true activity of the bourgeoisie is to be found is precisely that of the class as a whole, of which the individual is only conscious as pure objective force. This level of true activity is unconscious because it results from the

mutual interaction of the thousands of decisions of the members of the class, and from the unforeseen consequences of these decisions. It is this which the individual bourgeois experiences as the objective laws of the economy which, like Bacon's nature, must be obeyed to be controlled.

These sociological considerations form the essential background to a discussion of Lukács' 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, and which can usefully illustrate Lukács' general approach.

From the standpoint of the reified theory-practice relation, the individual is condemned to accept the existing social reality in fact, free only to take up one or another inner attitude toward it. The reified objectivity of social reality takes the form of a pitiless determinism, indifferent to the needs and values of the individual, while these latter now appear to be purely subjective, inward, with no basis in a "reality" of any kind. 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."¹² 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 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 or what must necessarily come to pass within it. That way lies utopia, and the hopeless struggle against the inevitable. However, the psychic costs of the realistic capitulation before reification have also been calculated from Stendhal to the modern critiques of conformism, and found to be considerable. Society as a market, indeed a racket in selfhood, is ultimately what Lukács' discussion suggests.

The other horn of the dilemma is a utopian struggle to realize higher values in the world, against all the force of resistance of the latter. The individual may refuse the existing reality and oppose to it moral exigencies that would give it a meaning. However, Lukács argues, this attitude splits the subject in half, dividing its substance between empirical needs and desires that can best be satisfied in conformity with existing reality, and the authentic selfhood that derives from conformity with a 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."¹³

Lukács arrives by this route at a theory of alienation quite close to that of the early Marx. He shows how, from the structure of everyday practice in capitalist society, "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 . . ." ¹⁴ 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."¹⁵

REASON AND DOMINATION

So far the discussion of Lukács' 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, perhaps, not so surprising since practical reason is inevitably close to actual practice in its concepts and problems. However, more difficult will be 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. Lukács' meta-theory of pure reason is based on the demonstration of the intrinsic dependence of the philosophical subject-object concept on the capitalist technical "conquest" of nature. This particular way of dealing with the antinomy of subject and object links Lukács' work once again to the Frankfurt School, which has on various occasions called into question, if not denied, the achievements of technical progress and the universal validity of the natural sciences.¹⁶ At the same time, implied in Lukács' approach is also a remarkable critique *avant la lettre* of another tendency of contemporary social thought, structuralism, with its privileged emphasis on the moment of synchronic system in social life, and its attempt to

derive development from pattern. I will return to some of these themes in more detail in later chapters; here I will focus primarily on the epistemological aspects of what I take to be one of Lukács' most suggestive innovations in Marxist philosophy.

How, on Lukács' terms, can one understand the subject-object relation of bourgeois philosophy, which claims to be founding for practice rather than founded by it? In an argument full of hesitations and obscurities, Lukács suggests an answer to this question which I will reformulate as a meta-theoretical critique of this philosophy's subject-object concept. A study of this argument will also show how Lukács derives the antinomies of pure reason from the structure of reified practice. This example will thus continue to clarify the sense in which Lukács' approach to "ideology" is based on a theory of practice rather than on a theory of the reflection of the base in the superstructures.

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. In precapitalist society, human beings carved out of nature only a narrow sphere of activity for themselves, frequently ascribing their power over this small humanized enclave of reality 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 for the first time to a Faustian ambition to overcome every residue of uncontrolled nature, to humanize it and submit it to desire, and this new project completely trans-

forms 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 exists practically only as a tendency. Theory comes to the aid of the still incompletely realized project of total domination by demonstrating its possibility in principle. This demonstration at first takes the form of 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 technique is striking.) 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.

In the theoretical sphere, the 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 in the previous section. 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."¹⁷

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 at least with respect to the laws of society. This possibility is foreclosed by reified thought which understands law in every sphere as the precondition, not the outcome of instrumental 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 naive and dogmatic, of formal, mathematical, rational knowledge both with knowledge in general and also with 'our' knowledge."¹⁸ 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 the earth leads to the theoretical exigency of 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 dominate reality within 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.

Lukacs 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."¹⁹

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. This is the major methodological contradiction that results from the antinomy of subject and object in reified thought. According to Lukács, the bourgeois social sciences exemplify this methodological contradiction. They all seek to understand their objects through their logical structure, in abstraction from the process of their historical becoming. The illusory priority of "structure" over "process" (and its romantic inversions) arise from a confusion in ontological levels characteristic of reified thought: the individual subject con-

fronts the products of the collective activity in which it unconsciously engages as though they were an objective reality, independent of man. 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 is fundamental for history.

What is really happening belies this approach. 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 as a fate by them. Of course, the individual does relate to the products of these unconscious activities, but not as to human products. Rather, all he perceives of the collective practice in which he is willy nilly engaged is its results, and behind these its *form*, imprinted on the objects of his control. This form appears as an impersonal and autonomous law which preexists and pre-determines social behavior.

Lukács argues that this form is not a law but a principle of practical synthesis of reality by an unconscious social practice. It is only insofar as the object has been submitted 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 a practice, as a creative historical intervention. 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. Thus in submitting to the formal rationality of reification, the 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' 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 its lawful form.

FROM KANT TO HEGEL

Lukács' 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 and which, in turn, necessarily determine the knowledge of the subject. What is the significance of this parallel?

Once again, it is necessary to insist that Lukács understands theory as practice "raised to consciousness," and not as the mere reflection of an objective condition. Thus Lukács does not claim that Kant's theory is an unintended or unconscious metaphor for realities of which Kant was only dimly aware. Rather, Kant's theory is a perfectly rational and conscious 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 emerge from reified practice and 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 that process 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. In short, 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 practice and the corresponding theory 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. 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 appearances. 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. In this section, I will recount the main lines of Lukács' discussion.

Considered as a grand hypothesis concerning the philosophical development from Kant to Hegel and Marx,

Lukács' philosophy of praxis is rich in suggestive ideas but also in problems and difficulties. Lucien Goldmann's study of Kant and the later Lukács' study of the young Hegel have given evidence of the fruitfulness of the general approach sketched below.²⁰ It is impossible here to evaluate this research into the history of philosophy, interesting as that would be. All that we can do now is to consider how Lukács' hypothetical history functions inside his own conception.

In brief, 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 comes into conflict 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 he regards the reified paradigm of knowledge as 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' extremely complex argument for this conclusion 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 and practical reason, and of 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 contradiction described above. As one after another attempt fails, the emphasis shifts from one to another of the elements of this structure, 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 Marxian solution to the problem of founding a new concept of reason.

Lukács begins his discussion not only with a critique of Kant, but with a critical appreciation of that aspect of Kantian philosophy which already anticipates dialectics. It is most of all the extreme rigor with which Kant confronted the contradictory demands of founding a universal concept of reason and the limits of his own reified conception of theory that leads him to the threshold of 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.)"²¹ 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 content of the concepts of the understanding arises from the seemingly "impenetrable" character of the empirical facts presented through these 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 in unconscious forms. Spinoza, for example, had 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.

Kant rejects this assumption of earlier systematic philosophy and shows that the concepts of the understanding cannot be related abstractly 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." ²² 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 rationalistic systems were constructed. And, 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."²³

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 concepts of the understanding have been tied to their content, and this content cannot be deduced from these concepts. 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 in another way 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 brings 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 exigency of a unity of subject and object, of a philosophical validation of the power of reason must be fulfilled 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 tran-

scendental thing in itself."²⁴ In contrast to the dogmatic metaphysics of the seventeenth century, which begins by accepting the reified form of objectivity of its objects and then attempts to unify subject and object by deducing this form of objectivity from reason, the new philosophy will attempt 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.²⁵

Responding to this dilemma, Kant turned from epistemology to ethics, from the thinking subject to the ethical 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 operates. No merely given facticity, resistant to subjectivity and independent of it appears to trouble the genesis of reality.

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."²⁶ 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 an unethical 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 in a passage already cited in a previous chapter, the significance of which should now be clearer: "For precisely in the pure, classical expression it received in the philosophy of Kant it remains true that the 'ought' presupposes a being to which the category of 'ought' remains *inapplicable* in principle."²⁷

Ethical practice does not successfully fulfill its function in the system, but rather reproduces the same contradiction that arises in the sphere of pure reason. All that this ethic can show "is the point where the real interpenetration 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."²⁸ 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 all experience. The ethical solution to the form-

content problem which arises 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."²⁹ The principle of practice is not discovered through the mere transcendence of the theoretical orientation toward reality, unless this transcendence is toward a kind of practice which is "tailored to the concrete material substratum of action, in order to impinge upon it to some effect."³⁰ Nevertheless, Kant's move beyond pure speculative metaphysics and reified contemplation toward practice represents important progress in the direction of a solution he could not work out. It was left to his successors to attempt to find it.

Kant's aesthetics provided 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."³¹ 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 'produced,' and which . . . is spontaneous (i.e. active) and not receptive (i.e. contemplative) both as regards knowledge and perception."³² 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, saw and exploited the possibility of using it to resolve 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 specialization 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 generalize the non-formalistic intuitive understanding of aesthetic practice and to make of it a new concept of reason is not successful. 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, if not that of calculating reason, still that of aesthetic appreciation.

Fichte, who also attempted 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 which 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. The unique feature of this dialectic is its self-conscious 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 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 Lukacs explains it, German 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 constitu-

tion. This is the starting point for the elaboration of the Hegelian dialectic. However, Hegel is able to arrive at his dialectical conception only by taking an important step beyond earlier philosophy. He realizes that the demand of the principle of practice cannot be fulfilled starting out from the individual subject, however much this subject may be sublimated in the transcendental. The dialectical unification of subject and object cannot take place at this individual level, but requires a subject which 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.³³

In sum, not a mythologized transcendental subject modelled on the individual, but some larger, collective principle alone can be adequately imagined as the basis of the resolution 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.³⁴ If thought and things are no longer defined as ontologically independent and primary domains of being, in what form then can they be grasped? Hegel employed what I have called a meta-theoretical procedure to answer this question. He "released" the correlated attributes of subjectivity and objectivity from their reification in the hypostasized 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 could then be 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 "things" identified with the 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.³⁵ 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 Hegel found to be uniquely suited to the elaboration of this approach was 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 which 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.³⁶

Thus Hegel chooses to treat history as *reality*, as the ontological region in which the antinomies are resolved, because here the rational genesis of the object by the subject and the self-moving, self-producing activity of practice are one.

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 an ideal object to which to apply 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.

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 in principle conscious of the truth of its deeds, but only comprehends them 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 Peoples to attain ends which this latter does not understand. (Hence the phrase "cunning of reason.") Between the activity of the historical subject and its own self-consciousness 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.

History itself never really achieves self-consciousness. 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.³⁷

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 and dialectical 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 pure and eternal forms abstracted from any specific content and from the real becoming of the world. The time of this dialectical process is a purely ideal time, no longer corresponding to a real practice of objectification.

Hegel's philosophy ends up in the supra-historical realm of pure thought not because his construction of the problems is essentially reified or false, but rather because he has not discovered the true subject of historical practice. 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 suffice to develop the basic outlines of the principle of practice.

However, not until the actual subject of this practice is also discovered can reason be founded rationally. This, Lukács believes, required 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 to history 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 levelled at Kant and Fichte."³⁸

THE FAILURE OF CLASSICAL GERMAN PHILOSOPHY

Lukács' 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 the progress of this philosophy 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. Lukács tries to show that the antinomies of this philosophy are vast generalizations of the practical "antinomies" of life in this society. Where the individual confronts the opposition of value and fact in day to day practical activity as the undecidable alternative of principled and realistic behavior, the opposition of subject and object as the impossibility of fully controlling and understanding the alienated rationality of the capitalist world, philosophy confronts these same contradictions theoretically and raises them to their concept. But philosophy cannot overcome them where it accepts reification as the only possible framework for thought and action.

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."³⁹

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 at-

titude?"⁴⁰ 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."⁴¹ In this exigency is contained the condition for a transcendence of conceptual mythology toward a solution to the riddle of philosophy. 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. This critique consisted in redefining the subject and object of philosophy in terms of their concrete social substratum, relating the redefined subject and object according to the forms of philosophy of identity, and then "setting in motion" historically the redefined concepts in order to resolve the contradictions of this philosophy. Now Lukács reaches much the same sort of 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

Lukács' concept of subject-object identity is a particular target of attack for critics ranging from the Althusserian to the Frankfurt School. The former explain Lukács' identity philosophy as a consequence of his supposed "romantic" rejection of natural science; the latter reject identity philosophy as rooted in the project of domination of nature of the bourgeoisie, and assert the insuperable separation of subject and object in opposition to any and all theories of identity. In his 1967 "Preface" to *History and Class Con-*

sciousness, Lukács himself dismissed his own earlier theory of identity as an "attempt to out-Hegel Hegel," as a philosophical flourish designed to cap off an overly abstract argument without regard for the realities of social life.⁴² In contrast to all these critics, I will argue that the Lukács of 1923 revised the concept of subject-object identity to explain the basis of the possibility of a socialist social practice and to elucidate its philosophical implications.

Puzzling as his concern with this abstract conception may seem, Lukács has good reasons for not simply abandoning it as a historical curiosity. There is more to this demand for identity than the capitalist project of the domination of nature. (The error of the Frankfurt School's critique of identity philosophy is to accept this narrow restriction of the concept at the outset.) More generally, the identity aimed at includes the larger project of establishing the rationality of reason, the universality of its claims and the freedom of the human species from mystical powers, including those of outer and inner nature and of society as well. More concretely formulated, the identity of subject and object means that humankind is or can be at home in the universe, that it can hope to understand the world and itself, and to subsume both nature and society under the exigencies of its own expanding life process. Once again, the form of this subsumption is not necessarily to be identified with capitalist technical domination.

I would like now to turn to Lukács' meta-theory of identity philosophy. My discussion will be limited to those aspects of the theory most relevant to the concerns of this book.⁴³ The discussion will have to be divided into two complementary parts. Lukács' arguments works from two sides at once, closing the gap between philosophical speculation and history. On the side of philosophy, abstract conditions are posited, while on the side of history a reality is identified satisfying these conditions. The argument as a whole proceeds, as does Marx's similar one, to bring philosophy down

to earth by discovering realities which possess the dignity of the Concept. In the remainder of this chapter and the following ones I will reconstruct the argument in its two phases, philosophical and sociological, beginning here with the former.

The philosophical argument contains an ambiguity to which I will return in the concluding chapters of this book. As we have seen, bourgeois identity philosophy establishes only a commonality of form of subject and object. Lukács' 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" with which Lukács works? Two answers are possible, and I will review them both here. On the one hand, Lukács' discussion of the principle of practice leans toward an idealistic concept of production as creation of the object. On these terms, the identity of subject and object implies the radical preeminence of the subject in the theoretical system. Yet even in the passages that argue most consistently for this conclusion, Lukács is careful occasionally to qualify the argument, to note that as an object in the world the subject of practice operates under given historical conditions that determine the limits of its creativity. These qualifications are elaborated into an alternative interpretation of the concept of production in other parts of Lukács' book. In these passages the concept of production is taken to mean *not the creation but 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 is also and necessarily an object. It 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. The significance of this distinction for social theory is discussed in the remainder of this chapter; its

relevance to the philosophy of nature is taken up in the conclusion of this book.

The core of Lukács' argument is common to both these conceptions of the identity of subject and object. In briefest compass, Lukács' argument might be paraphrased as follows. 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. Lukács' point might be reformulated to say that reification arises from the unintended consequences of individual activities feeding back into the latter and giving them the form of a law-governed process. Reified theory also arises on this basis as the conceptualization of the reified form of objectivity that the objects of this practice acquire as such. This form 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 separated as though they were metaphysical realities. In grasping the unintended consequences of these processes as a law, it hypostasizes ontologically what is in reality only a dimension of a specific type of practice.

What Lukács suggests, following Marx, is 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' 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 it? 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 "outside." 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."⁴⁴

Practice as Production. The central question left unanswered by this brief description of the theory concerns the nature of the "action" in which thought would consist. As noted above, Lukács offers two different answers to this, question. The first of these proceeds from the analysis of the failure of classical German philosophy to elaborate an adequate principle of practice. 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. This 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, as

an autonomous order of reality which it cannot alter. 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 by its action not only its own orientation toward reality or partial segments and 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 there always exists a social world on its margins which is founding for it and which it cannot touch. 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, persists as a reified residuum, a thing in itself. In Lukács' 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. Only where history is *the* reality can the demonstra-

tion of the identity of subject and object in history have the general significance required to resolve the antinomies of reason. This means, however, that all other subject-object relations must be derived from that of the historical subject and object, that they must all be 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 the identical subject-object of history. The knowledge of a self-conscious collective subject of history would also be a practice affecting the substratum of reality. For it theory and practice would be united: the immediate repercussions on its behavior of its own self-understanding would transcend the gap between mind and matter, creating a new type of practice unlike the technical one of reification. 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.

Practice as Mediation. Interpreted along these lines, the Lukácsian concept of subject-object identity leaves more questions open than it answers. 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' 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.⁴⁵

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' theory leads to an essentially romantic assertion of the proletariat as free creative power, breaking the chains of capitalist convention in a unique act of untrammelled self-expression. In fact it is essential to Lukács' 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.

On this basis, Lukács redefines the proletariat as a knowing subject to explain its "true" consciousness as a function of its social insertion rather than in terms of the usual concept of scientificity. For this class knowing cannot be understood as liberation from existence but rather as a concrete mediation within existence. Thus the transcendence of the premises of capitalist culture in proletarian class consciousness implies no epistemological withdrawal to a free *cogito*, to a *pregiven*,

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.⁴⁶

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

Lukács' 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 freedom. 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."⁴⁷ 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 his-

torical objectivity. 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.⁴⁸

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 preconditions of a process of subsumption and transcendence of a wholly different order. 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 transcendence of objective conditions through their incorporation into the project of a life process.

With this, the philosophical "deduction" of the identical subject-object of history is completed, and the sociological work of fleshing out that concept must begin. This second phase of the argument is discussed in detail in the next two chapters. For it Lukács relies primarily on traditional Marxist contributions to understanding how the experience and life

conditions of the working class prepare it to engage in a new type of conscious collective social practice that might ultimately replace the market as the organizing principle of an industrial society. Lukács tries to show that such practice is de-reifying by its very nature, overcoming the gap between private decision-making processes and therefore capable of transcending the horizon of reification.

What is lacking in Marx's own discussion is a theory of the possibility of the proletariat becoming conscious of these objective potentialities of its class situation, the "revolutionizing of the elements themselves" Marx identifies as the precondition of social revolution. Lukács focusses precisely on this dimension of the problem. Thus the sociological counterpart of his concept of subject-object identity is presented as an analysis of proletarian class consciousness. This argument reaches the same conclusion as the preceding one, but from the "below" of history instead of from the "above" of abstract conceptualization.

Similarly, Paul Feyerabend's ever more radical critiques of positivism come closer and closer to suggesting that the senses should be treated as cultural, and not as biological organs of perception, a perspective which I will take up in the conclusion to this book. From an entirely different angle, under the influence of phenomenology, ethno-methodology in the social sciences has developed a critique of the range and limits of various forms of rationality in social life. (See, Harold Garfinkel, "The Rational Properties of Scientific and Common-Sense Activities," in Anthony Giddens, ed., *Positivism and Sociology* (London: Heineman, 1975).) Another convergent line of thought has developed in France, around the work of Claude Levi-Strauss, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, all of whom have discussed the forms of rationality in cultural terms. (For a brilliant short statement of the problems as they appear in France, see Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences," Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds., *The Structuralist Controversy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1972).)

22. Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Marxism of the Early Lukacs: An Evaluation," *New Left Review*, no. 70 (1971), p. 44.

23. Lucio Colletti, *Il Marxismo e Hegel* (Bari: Laterza, 1969), p. 342.

24. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1904), p. 293. For a similar approach to the interpretation of this passage, see Andrew Arato, "Lukacs' Theory of Reification," *Telos*, no. 11 (1972), pp. 31-32. A thorough discussion of Marx's theory of appearance, from a somewhat different perspective, is to be found in G. A. Cohen, "Karl Marx and the Withering Away of Social Science," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, 2 (1972).

25. Marx, *A Contribution of the Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1904), p. 302.

26. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. by W. H. Johnston and L. G. Struthers (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961), vol. II, p. 135.

27. *HCC*, p. 83.

28. 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.

29. *HCC*, p. 177.

CHAPTER 4

1. *HCC*, p. xiv.

2. Frederick Engels, "The Peasant Question in France and Germany," Marx and Engels, *Selected Works* (New York: International, 1969), p. 648.

3. *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.

4. 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."

5. *HCC*, p. 121.

6. *HCC*, p. 91.

7. *HCC*, p. 100.

8. *HCC*, p. 112.

9. *HCC*, p. 89.

10. *HCC*, p. 130. The implications of this Lukácsian concept of contemplation for the development of the Frankfurt School's theory of authority will be discussed in the next chapter.

11. *HCC*, p. 63.

12. *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 Dostoievskian type. Lukács' later idea of unity of theory and practice is an attempt to de-mythologize this early notion by supplying concrete mediations through which it could be realized. For more on Lukács' messianism, see Michael Lowy, *Pour une Sociologie des Intellectuels Revolutionnaires* (Paris: PUF, 1976).

13. *HCC*, p. 134.

14. *HCC*, p. 87.

15. *HCC*, p. 135.

16. For a sensible review of the position of the Frankfurt School, see William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (New York: Braziller, 1972), chapters 7 and 8. The appendix also summarizes and contributes to the debate over Marcuse's position on the ideological character of modern technology.

17. *HCC*, p. 129.

18. *HCC*, p. 112.

19. *HCC*, p. 128. Once again the parentage of Adorno and Horkheimer's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* should be clear from its quite similar analysis of the contradictions of formal rationality and technological control.

20. Lucien Goldmann, *Mensch, Gemeinschaft und Welt in der Philosophie Immanuel Kants* (Zurich: Europa Verlag, 1945) and Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel* (Cambridge: MIT, 1975).

21. *HCC*, p. 115.

22. *HCC*, p. 116.

23. *HCC*, p. 117.

24. *HCC*, p. 122.

25. *HCC*, p. 126.

26. *HCC*, p. 124.

27. *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' own critique of sectarianism as a disguised ethical idealism is to be found in *HCC*, pp. 320-322 and 326-328. I have discussed this problem in Andrew Feenberg, "Lukács and the Critique of 'Orthodox' Marxism," *The Philosophical Forum* III, nos. 3-4 (1972), pp. 431-432. That same issue also contains a typical discussion of Lukács' purported sectarianism. Cf., Adam Schaff, "The Consciousness of a Class and Class Consciousness."

28. *HCC*, p. 134. This interpretation of Kant's ethics is of course alien to the 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. Baillie (New York: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 615 ff.

29. *HCC*, p. 126.

30. *HCC*, p. 126.

31. *HCC*, p. 137.

32. *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 a 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 and 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 of the period. 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.

33. *HCC*, p. 142.

34. The accuracy of this interpretation of Kant is not the issue here since this was in fact how Hegel understood critical philosophy. Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Glauben und Wissen* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1962), pp. 20-21.

35. See Herbert Marcuse, *Hegels Ontologie* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1968), pp. 40-43 and especially, pp. 133-134.

36. *HCC*, p. 155.

37. *HCC*, p. 147.

38. *HCC*, p. 17.

39. *HCC*, p. 18.

40. *HCC*, p. 201.

41. *HCC*, p. 155.

42. *HCC*, p. xxiii. For an evaluation of Lukács' self-criticism, see the concluding chapters of this book. Here it is necessary to point out the error of Lukács' assertion in this passage that Hegel rejected the postulate of subject-object identity, for Hegel did admit a mediated identity.

43. For a discussion of the historical background to Lukács' concept of

subject-object identity, see James Schmidt, "The Concrete Totality and Lukács' Concept of Proletarian *Bildung*," *Telos*, no. 24 (1975), pp. 2-40.

44. 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, cf. Martin Jay, "The Frankfurt School's Critique of Marxist Humanism," *Social Research* XXXIX: 2 (1972).

45. *HCC*, p. 21.

46. *HCC*, p. 163.

47. *HCC*, p. 185.

48. *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 Sartreianism, 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.) More recently, 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 been attempting to think through the implications of this new position. A brief summary of Bourdieu's position and his relation to structuralism is contained in Pierre Bourdieu, "Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge," *Social Research* 35:4 (1968), especially pp. 703-706. Foucault summarizes his perspective somewhat paradoxically as follows: "The positivities that I have tried to establish must not be understood as a set of determinations imposed from the outside on the thought of

individuals, or inhabiting it from the inside, in advance as it were; they constitute rather the set of conditions in accordance with which a practice is exercised, in accordance with which that practice gives rise to partially or totally new statements, and in accordance with which it can be modified. These positivities are not so much limitations imposed on the initiative of subjects as the field in which that initiative is articulated (without, however, constituting its centre). . . . I have not denied—far from it—the possibility of changing discourse: I have deprived the sovereignty of the subject of the exclusive and instantaneous right to it." Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, A. M. Sheridan Smith, trans. (New York: Pantheon, 1972), pp. 208-209. Without claiming that Lukacs (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.

CHAPTER 5

1. HCC, p. 52.
2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T. M. Knox, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1971), p. 11.
3. Cf., for an example, Karl Kautsky, *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, trans. by H. J. Stenning (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1964). For a detailed discussion of the problem of mechanical determinism in this period, see Lucio Colletti, "Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International," Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, trans. by J. Merington and J. White (New York: Monthly Review, 1972).
4. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International, 1968), p. 14.
5. Engels, "Engels to J. Bloch," in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works* (New York: International, 1968), p. 693.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 692. Recently, Dissatisfaction among Marxists with mechanistic theory of ideology has been especially pronounced and fruitful in literary theory. See, for example, Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1977).
7. HCC, pp. 201-202.
8. Cf. Shlomo Avineri, "Consciousness and History: *List der Vernunft* in Hegel and Marx," in Warren E. Steinkraus, ed., *New Studies in Hegel's Philosophy* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1971).
9. Engels, "Engels to J. Bloch," *op. cit.*, p. 693.

*Lukács, Marx
and the
Sources of
Critical Theory*

ANDREW FEENBERG

ROWMAN AND LITTLEFIELD
Totowa, New Jersey

Copyright © 1981 by Rowman and Littlefield

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the permission of the Publishers.

First published in the United States 1981 by
Rowman and Littlefield, 81 Adams Drive, Totowa, New Jersey 07512.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Feenberg, Andrew.

Lukács, Marx and the sources of critical theory.

(Philosophy and society)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Lukács, Gyorgy, 1885-1971. 2. Marx, Karl, 1818-1883. 3. Frankfurt school of sociology—History. 4. Dialectical materialism—History.

I. Title. II. Series.

B4815.L84F43 335.4'1 80-22747

ISBN 0-8476-6272-1

Printed in the United States of America