

Lukács' Ontology¹

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 - 2 Nicolas Tertulian (1929-2019) was a director at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, philosopher and writer. His main books focus on Lukács' later works and, others, with the Heidegger-Lukács intellectual relation.

Georg Lukács died in June 1971 without having given his imprimatur for the complete publication of his last, great philosophical work, *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins* (On the Ontology of Social Being).

We can ask ourselves if the voluminous manuscript of more than two thousand pages (including the *Prolegomena*, written in the year before his death) appears like a gigantic torso which still needed a basic revision and polishing; or if, on the contrary, we confront here a more or less completed work,³ a true *terminus ad quem* of an exceptionally long intellectual itinerary. In any case, study of the text which became Lukács' *opus posthumum*, his true philosophical testament, clearly indicates its importance apart from any hypotheses we can formulate on the ultimate intentions of its author with regard to it.

As concerns the genesis of the *Ontology*, more precisely the gestation process of the work and the deep reasons which led Lukács to undertake it, we can formulate a certain number of hypotheses in relation to indications present in his correspondence and in relation to the results of research undertaken in the Lukács Archives in Budapest. There is no doubt that the *Ontology* began against the background of the project of an *Ethics*. A letter sent by Lukács on May 10, 1960 to his friend Ernst Fischer enables us to specify the moment when he had

3 In a letter of August 5, 1970, he wrote to Frank Benseler, his editor in West Germany: "The work is going very slowly. I am rather dissatisfied with the manuscript." This letter, as well as others by Lukács cited below, are unpublished and were consulted by us in the Lukács Archives in Budapest.

finished the composition of the first part of his great *Aesthetics*.⁴ "I am still in the transitional period after a birth," Lukács wrote to Fisher,

The aesthetic manuscript is ready and I need now to place myself within the atmosphere of ethics. That is not an easy task, since the entire nervous system needs to be directed to perceive and to associate otherwise than it has been accustomed in recent years. I am afraid this rearrangement will take at least a few weeks, if not months. Only then can the really fruitful thought begin. Accordingly, this transition will be accomplished.

Concerning the lengthy period of work accorded by Lukács to the preparation of the *Ethics*, beginning in the spring of 1960, we have clues in a certain number of notes, which are available in the Lukács Archives under the generic title "Kleine Notizen zur Ethik."⁵ In this heap of tiny pages, several times we can find indications concerning the basic idea which progressively took shape in Lukács' mind during his work on the *Ethics*, and which led him to modify his initial plan and to write, in the first place, a voluminous *Ontology of Social Being*:⁶ "No ethics without ontology," "...the impossibility of positing an ethics without also positing a world-situation (*Weltzustand*)."⁷ In working on his *Ethics*, Lukács was led to the conclusion that it was not possible to work out a theory of moral action without a complete perspective on the essential components of social life, hence,

4 See his letter of May 10, 1960 to his friend, Ernst Fischer. We have quoted this letter in our article, "Georg Lukács et la reconstruction de l'ontologie dans la philosophie contemporaine," in: **Revue de métaphysique et de morale**, Octobre-Décembre 1978, pp. 498 ff. We have also quoted this letter at greater length in our article on Lukács' *Ontologie*, in: **Lukács**, Guido Oldrini (ed.), Milan, 1979, pp. 287-288.

5 "Kleine Notizen zur Ethik," 67. The first to refer to these notes are: E. Joos, in his **Lukács' Last Autocriticism: the Ontology**, Atlantic Highlands, NJ, Humanities Press, 1983, pp. 42 and 118; and Gyorgy Mezei, in his "Zum Spätwerk von Georg Lukács," in: **Doxa** No. 4, 1985, pp. 38-40 and *passim*.

6 See "Kleine Notizen zur Ethik,"

without sketching an ontology of social being. The letters sent at the end of 1964 and the beginning of 1965 indicate his decision to transform what was initially destined to be only an introduction to his *Ethics* into a major, autonomous work.

The change in orientation with respect to the initial project is not really a surprise. Lukács was surely aware that if he wanted really to abolish the rigid dualism between moral praxis and the other forms of praxis (beginning with those of daily life), between the noumenal world and the phenomenal world (in the terminology of the *Critique of Practical Reason*), it was necessary to redefine the fundamental categories of social life. It seemed to him indispensable to question the finalistic or deterministic prejudices of traditional Marxism on this topic. The particular character of moral action could not be identified otherwise than through its rootedness in other types of praxis. If he wanted to avoid the pitfall of moralism (whose basis seemed to him to be the transcendentalism of Kantian morality), as well as that due to the *Realpolitik* (which means capitulation before the social *status quo*), it was necessary to highlight the interconnection between moral and other kinds of values, by questioning the functioning of social life as a whole. Accordingly, he devoted himself to the project of an *Ontology of Social Being*.

But the project of an Ethics remained present until the end. In finishing the second main chapter of the theoretical part of the *Ontology*, on 'Reproduction', Lukács, in a letter of April 23, 1966 to Frank Benseler, expressed his confidence in the positive final result of his work, and added, in the guise of a conclusion: "I am going to rejoice a lot, because in this way the road towards the *Ethics* will be liberated."⁷

7 Letter of April 23, 1966 to Frank Benseler.

Several years later, in a letter he sent in January 1969 to Adam Schaff, he stated his intention to provide definitive form to the manuscript of the *Ontology* and to turn to the writing of the *Ethics*.⁸ He was able to write only the *Prolegomena* to the *Ontology of Social Being* during 1970, since illness and, almost immediately thereafter, death (in June 1971), kept him from realizing his project so long under consideration.

Lukács' initiative, in establishing the basis for an ontology of social being, a theoretical operation that the philosopher considered necessary for the elaboration of an *Ethics*, is neither an enterprise as solitary nor as unusual as the title of his work might lead us to believe. Georg Simmel, the first intellectual mentor of the young Lukács, had already, in his *Sociology*, posed the decisive question which haunted the thought of the *Ontology's* author: How is society possible? In the Thirties, Alfred Schutz, the well-known disciple of Husserl, had published an important work dedicated to the meaningful construction of the social world, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*. And the much more recent writings of Jürgen Habermas, after his contributions to a "reconstruction of historical materialism," up until his research on communicative action, also belong to the same direction. But it seems to us that the originality of Lukács' final philosophical synthesis ought to be sought for elsewhere, in another historical perspective.

Before we indicate the place that this work occupies in Lukács' intellectual biography, we are tempted to identify one of its deepest sources, if not its most important source, in an extremely powerful movement of thought, which today we can say literally transformed the German and international philosophical

⁸ See his letter of January 6, 1969 to Adam Schaff.

scene beginning in the 1920's. The resurrection of ontology as a basic philosophical discipline after decades of neo-Kantian thought is, in effect, linked to two great names, for which the future reserved, clearly, very different audiences, but which has each marked with his seal contemporary philosophical thought: Nicolai Hartmann and Martin Heidegger. In this way, those who know the philosophical trajectory of the Hungarian thinker were surprised to discover the profound intellectual solidarity which links the thought of the last Lukács to the ontological philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann.

Lukács encountered the ontological thought of Nicolai Hartmann rather later in his own philosophical itinerary; nevertheless, we can affirm that this encounter played a decisive role in his turn towards ontology. It seems that it was under the influence of his former East-German correspondent, the philosopher Wolfgang Harich, that he decided to study Hartmann's work more closely. Neither *The Destruction of Reason* nor the other philosophical writings published by the author before the 1960s referred to N. Hartmann's ontological writings. In becoming aware of Hartmann's *Ontologie*⁹ and the later writings,¹⁰ Lukács had the revelation of a method and a style of thought which, up to a certain point, agreed with his own philosophical objectives: a rigorously founded system of the categories of being was precisely what he needed in order to provide a solid philosophical basis for his project of elaborating a theory of social life as an entirety and an ethics.

9 See **Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie**, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1935.

10 See, for example, **Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit**, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1938; **Der Aufbau der realen Welt**, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1950; **Teleologisches Denken**, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1951.

Some readers will be surprised by this convergence between the thought of an engaged Marxist, deeply anchored in the idea of the historicity of being and of its categories, a form of thought marked by the great social and philosophical crises of the century, and that of a philosopher belonging to the pure tradition of the German university, much nearer by its ambitions to the *philosophia perennis*, even animated by an explicit distrust of "historicism." But we must believe that this distrust was above all directed to the form of thought begun by Dilthey, against which Lukács also adopted a strongly critical attitude, despite the seduction that it was able to exercise on him during his youth. However, Lukács found himself on familiar ground in Hartmann's ontological philosophy: the magisterial criticism developed by Hartmann against teleology in all its forms, including the thought of Aristotle and of Hegel, was fruitfully utilized by Lukács to question the teleological interpretation of history advanced by those who claimed allegiance to Marx.

Of course, the crucial philosophical problem concerning the proper relation between teleology and causality was present in Lukács much earlier than his awareness of Hartmann's analyses with which he was to find himself in agreement (although he criticized Hartmann in a fundamental manner for neglecting the decisive role of work in the articulation of this relation): it is enough to refer to the important chapter devoted in the book *The Young Hegel* to the problem of work in Hegel.

The lively interest by Hartmann for Hegel's *Logic* and for the inexhaustible richness of the Hegelian analyses devoted to the categories, as well as his faithfulness to a certain fruitful attitude in Spinoza's thought, could only find a

very favourable echo in Lukács—not to mention the exemplary value of the philosophical itinerary traversed by Hartmann, who was able to detach himself completely from the neo-Kantian Marburg School and from Husserlian phenomenology, in providing a radical critique of idealist philosophy. As concerns the precocious interest manifested by Hartmann for Hegel's *Logic* and for the fashion in which he consummated his radical break with transcendental idealism and effected his turn towards ontology, we find extremely interesting indications in the correspondence with Heinz Heimsoeth.¹¹

It is correct that the extraordinary effort displayed by Nicolai Hartmann throughout a corpus of great richness, to displace the centre of the philosophical problematic from epistemology towards ontology, to interrogate above all the *ratio essendi* of things, by subordinating to it the *ratio cognoscendi*, and to re-actualize accordingly the great metaphysical tradition which stretches from Aristotle through medieval ontology until Kant and Hegel's *Logic*, did not seem to have the results and effect intended by its author. If we judge by the silence, weightier and weightier, which surrounded Hartmann's *corpus* in the decades following his death in 1950, we can even believe that his effort to re-establish ontology with its full rights resulted in failure.

The pre-eminence of existentialism and of neopositivism on the contemporary philosophical scene furnish the required proof. Martin Heidegger's situation is, certainly, entirely different, since the influence and audience of his thought did not cease to grow. But we must admit that after the famous *Kehre* (after the conversion in the period following *Being and Time*), after the author had

11 See **Nicolai Hartmann und Heinz Heimsoeth im Briefwechsel**, Frieda Hartmann u. Renate Heimsoeth (eds.), Bonn, Bouvier, 1978.

himself renounced the concept of "fundamental ontology," which he held to be still too deeply rooted in the metaphysical tradition of philosophy, and certainly after he had undertaken in numerous texts the "deconstruction" (or, more precisely, the destruction) of this ontological tradition, we began to forget how much the resurrection of ontology in contemporary philosophy is linked to the decisive impulse of the thought of the first Heidegger: the deep affinities which link it on this level, despite their great differences, even their oppositions, with Nicolai Hartmann's thought, seem to us to be evident. It is certainly now, thanks to the publication within the series of complete writings of the course of lectures from the period of 1924-1930, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (lectures given in Marburg in 1925), *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (course from 1927, also in Marburg), without forgetting the more recent *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit* (course from 1929-1930 in Freiburg), that the weight of this eminently ontological aspect of Heidegger's thought can be appropriately measured.

Four decades after the appearance of Nicolai Hartmann's fundamental study, *Wie ist Kritische Ontologie überhaupt möglich?* in 1923, and after the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927 by Heidegger, Lukács again takes up, in his *On the Ontology of Social Being* (which he began to write in 1964), with different intellectual instruments, the program of these two thinkers, that is, to reconstruct ontology as the fundamental discipline of philosophical reflexion. If it were a question of situating the ideal geometrical site for Lukács' ontology with respect to those of his two predecessors, we could say, in an extremely compressed and approximative formula, that he undertook to elaborate an "analytic of being there" (but Heideggerian *Dasein* was understood this time in

the spirit of Marx, by definition as social being), with categories and concepts much nearer to Nicolai Hartmann's realist ontology: by forcing things a little, we could say that it is a question, in Lukács' *Ontology*, of validating an ideal *tertium datur* between two antagonists, Hartmann and Heidegger, while underlining energetically the infinitely closer relation linking him to the former.

The Heidegger-Lukács *rapprochement*, on the other hand, should not seem too risky if we recall the repeated speculation concerning the resemblances between the problematic of the critique of reification in the work of Lukács' youth, *History and Class Consciousness*, which appeared in 1923, and the Heideggerian analysis of the tension between inauthentic existence and the authentic existence of being-there, developed in *Being and Time*. If his attitude respecting Heidegger remains very critical in the *Ontology* (essentially he restates, on the strictly philosophical level, the criticisms formulated in his book *The Destruction of Reason*), we should not, in effect, forget that as an ontology of social being, Lukács' work takes form, in its most interesting part, as a philosophy of the subject, through attributing a more important place to the analysis of what we can call the phenomenological levels of subjectivity: acts of objectification, of exteriorization, of reification and of alienation or of the dealienation of the subject. This problematic inevitably recalls the Heideggerian analyses of the ontological structure of *Dasein*, specific to the period of *Being and Time* (although the fundamental differences separating their respective philosophical positions are evident), while in Nicolai Hartmann's work, if we are not mistaken, the concepts of reification and of alienation appear very rarely as such. The sources of these Lukácsian concepts are evidently in the writings of Hegel and of Marx (Lukács devoted the final section of his important book on *The Young Hegel* to

Hegel's concept of alienation), and not in Heidegger. But in passing we can recall the concepts of *Versachlichung* (thingification) and of *Vergegenständlichung des Geistes* (objectification of the mind) in the *Philosophie des Geldes* by Georg Simmel (a book which strongly influenced the first Lukács) and that of *Verdinglichung* in the study by Husserl entitled "*Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*" (which appeared in the journal *Logos* in 1910-1911, the same year as Lukács' essay on the "*Metaphysics of Tragedy*"), two authors who strongly influenced the young Heidegger.

At the end of his life, Lukács was persuaded that it was in his *Ontology* that he had furnished the essential and definitive form of his thought¹² (even if, as we have noted, he was not entirely satisfied with his manuscript). He was used to saying that it was the privilege of several philosophical geniuses such as Aristotle or Marx to have clarified early on, at twenty years of age, the essential part of their original thought; for the others, for ordinary mortals, it could happen, as was the case, as he said not without humorous intent, that this could occur only towards the age of eighty that they could succeed in clarifying the essential part of their philosophy. In effect, Lukács' intellectual itinerary exhibits so many transformations and spectacular conversions from the neo-Kantianism and the *Lebensphilosophie* of his first youthful writings (besides Georg Simmel and Max Weber, he counted among his professors and friends Emil Lask, the least orthodox of the neo-Kantians of the *Sudwestdeutsche Schule*, who strongly influenced Heidegger), in passing by the strongly Hegelianized Marxism of his book *History and Class Consciousness*, until the rigorous Marxism of his mature

12 At one of our last meetings, in March 1971, he said: "As a philosophical science, ontology is still young. I did not succeed in expressing my ideas as I did in the *Aesthetics*... ."

period (a period which begins at the start of the 1930s), so we can ask ourselves under what angle we need to scrutinize his social ontology in order to see in it the final moment of a laborious process. There were also apparently extra-philosophic reasons to want to read this ontology.

The intellectual destiny of Lukács was so strongly marked by his participation, during more than fifty years, in the Communist movement (he became a member of the Hungarian Communist Party in December 1918 and remained one until the end of his life, with the exception of a suspension of eleven years, after the events of October 1956, when he was Minister of Culture in the government of Imre Nagy), so we could hope to find in the philosophical discourse of his last *magnum opus* an enlightening response to a hotly debated question. As the conclusion of a long pathway, the *Ontology* should enable us to decide finally if Lukács' thought had effectively undergone, after the abandonment of certain views in his book, for a long time the most famous one, *History and Class Consciousness*, and after his long passage through the Stalinist epoch, a corruption of its fibre, a philosophical evolution, equivalent to a veritable act of *sacrificio dell'intelletto* (to take up again the expression of his aggressive adversary Theodor W. Adorno, although it was already a little bit the thesis, in a much more nuanced form, of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Adventures of the Dialectic*); or, on the contrary, if his thought had ripened in the good sense, in being capable, through the *Ontology*, of furnishing a really universal theory of the categories of existence, capable of immunizing consciousness against all forms of alienation by political power: in a word, if he reached the end, notably thanks to the formulation of a concept well articulated in the real *humanitas* of *homo humanus*, what Lukács calls the *Gattungsmässigkeit-für-sich* (the human species-

for-itself), the *point d'orgue* of his *Ontology*, which should be taken in effect from above, in dissipating the distrust which has so long surrounded it. We can, in this sense, deplore the fact that one of his most recent adversaries, Leszek Kolakowski, in his voluminous *Main Currents of Marxism*, in three volumes, has not seen necessary to take into account the *Ontology* in order to test the central thesis expressed in his strongly hostile chapter devoted to Lukács: "Lukács or Reason in the Service of Dogma." It is true that the full text of the work was not and has only recently become, available in its original German version;¹³ nor is there an English or French translation; with the exception of the three chapters published separately in three small volumes by Luchterhand, of which two have also been translated into English; for a long time we disposed only of the Italian translation in three volumes, besides the translations into Hungarian and into Romanian, of which the latter is only a partial translation.

In Lukács' papers, there is a revealing indication concerning his own intellectual biography, an indication which can help us better to understand the place of the *Ontology* in his evolution. In referring, in a letter to his editor, Frank Benseler, to a parallel between the intellectual itinerary of Ernst Bloch and his own, with an explicit reference to the different significance of the Marxist conversion for each of them, Lukács wrote:¹⁴

During my entire youth, there existed in me a profound conflict, never able to be resolved, between the aspiration towards philosophical generalization in the sense of the great philosophies

13 In the meantime, Luchterhand Verlag in West Germany has finally published the entire text of the *Ontologie*, including the *Prolegomena*, in two volumes: **Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins**, 1. Halbband, 1984, and 2. Halbband, 1986.

14 Letter of November 21, 1961 to Frank Benseler.

of antiquity, and the tendencies to pure scientificity. If you compare the passages of my old book¹⁵ on the drama and the style of *The Soul and Its Forms* (the two books were written in the same period) you can become clearly aware of this conflict.

And in speaking of his adhesion to Marxism, he adds: "For me it represented the solution to the central interior conflict of my youthful period, for Bloch much less, since at the time of the *Spirit of Utopia*,¹⁶ he could simply incorporate Marx into his apocalyptic fantasy." Lukács' letter is dated November 21, 1961; it accordingly belongs to a stage when the relations between the two old friends were undergoing a certain deterioration, characterized by more and more accentuated philosophical differences, visible also in Lukács' Preface to his *Theory of the Novel*, written shortly after the same period.

The significance of the interior conflict from his *Jugendzeit*, of which Lukács speaks, ought not to be underestimated, since it in effect can provide us with the hermeneutical key needed to understand his philosophical trajectory until his final works. The coexistence within him, in the beginning, of two different natures—that of the sociologist of literature, imbued by a desire for positivity and methodological rigour (his concerns in this sense derive from concepts due to Marx and Simmel, or rather of a Marx "filtered through Simmel") and that of a metaphysician of tragedy or of a mystic moralist, which his absolute thirst led to search in the paroxysm of pure interiority for a secure foundation for a life freed from all inessentials—is in effect visible if we juxtapose the fragments entitled "Zur Soziologie des modernen Dramas" (the whole book, in its definitive form, was

15 Lukács is referring here to his book *Entwicklungsgeschichte des modernen Dramas*, of which only parts appeared at the time, in the **Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik**, Bd. XXXVIII, 1914.

16 Bloch's book, which was first published in 1918.

published in 1911) and the essay "*Metaphysics of Tragedy*," or the dialogue on "*The Poverty of Mind*," (writings which date from the same period). Between the two philosophical "souls" which were at war within him, one turned towards the empirical and the other toward pure transcendence, it is perhaps the second one which at the time was dominant, as witness the ardour with which the young Lukács sought successively in the "intelligible self" of Kant (with which he identified the tragic self), in the *Abgeschiedenheit* (the solitude) or the "poverty of mind" of Meister Eckhart, or in the figures like Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin or Kierkegaard's Abraham, a form of expression for his aspiration towards the meta-psychological or the trans-empirical. The refusal of psychologism or of empirical determinism of the soul (visible above all in the dialogue on the "*Poverty of the Mind*" published in 1912) and the fervour with which he tried to secure the stable point of his tragic self, a superlative expression of the essence of life, in a zone situated not only above "natural" life, but also above culture (in this sense he wrote¹⁷ to Leopold Ziegler in mid-July 1911 that the tragic could not be for him a "concept of the philosophy of history"), enable us to foresee, through their radicalism, certain views which Heidegger's fundamental ontology will later develop: the distrust by Heidegger of psychologism and the desire to define the "fundamental articulations of Being" (*die Grundartikulationen des Seins*), beyond any cultural or empirical considerations, justify such a *rapprochement*. The common matrix can perhaps be found again in Georg Simmel's thought, since in his essay on "Kant and Goethe" he tried to circumscribe a space for "supra-empirical relations" (through the fusion of Goethe's "vitalism" and Kant's

17 See the letter of mid-July 1911 to Leopold Ziegler in the book **Georg Lukács Briejwechse/ 1902-1917**, Hrsg. v. Eva Karadi und Eva Fekete, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1982, pp. 232-233.

transcendental idealism) and he was the first to speak of the “tragedy of culture” as an irreducible conflict between authentic life and cultural objectivation.

But Lukács never ceased being traversed by the dualism of a relativistic sociological vision of cultural values and of an acute awareness of their ability to transcend the space and time of their genesis: this hiatus was not resolved by the thought of the young Lukács. The particular sensitivity manifested rather early in regard to the Hegelian distinction between objective mind and absolute spirit—the former materializes in social institutions (the law, mores, the State, etc.), whereas the latter is incarnated in the higher forms of consciousness: art, religion, philosophy—belongs to the same context. How can one be able to satisfy the demands of “absolute spirit” (those of pure morality, for example, of the “soul”—*der Seele*—or of the “second ethics” in the terminology of the young Lukács) without leaving the hard ground of real history? The problem never ceased to haunt the author of the essay “*Tactics and Ethics*,” published in 1919. We can note here that the reflections on the Hegelian duality objective spirit/absolute spirit, with the dilemmas to which it gives rise for the young Lukács (for example, the choice between the first ethics—the duties with regard to institutions, the State, etc.—and the second ethics—the pure imperatives of the soul) are present as well in the youthful writings (in the manuscript of the book on Dostoevsky) or in the review of Croce's book *Teoria e storia della storiografia*, which dates from 1915, as in the last part of the book *The Young Hegel* (where Lukács defends the demands incarnated by absolute spirit against the relativism of vulgar sociology) or in different places in the *Ontology*: for instance in the final chapter, where the author emphasizes the significance of the movement of sects and of heresies against the established Church, in underlining

that they incarnate the aspirations of the human species-for-itself (*Gattungsmässigkeit-in-sich*)—the Lukácsian variant of the Hegelian “absolute spirit”—against the values of the social *status quo* which the Church institutionalizes as manifestation of the aspirations of the human species- or-itself of the “objective spirit” of the epoch of which it would be the bearer. We can now better understand the meaning of the passage quoted above from a letter to Frank Bensele. The affirmation that the thought of Marx offered him a solution to the duality of the tendencies which he mentioned becomes intelligible, especially in terms of the project of the *Ontology*: the structure of the work shows us, in effect, that Lukács begins from the analysis of the most elementary forms of social activity (beginning with work) and tries progressively to reconstruct the genesis of the principal social complexes (economics, politics, law, mores, etc.), by climbing the ladder towards superior forms of conscious activity (art, philosophy, the great moral acts).

It is accordingly thanks to a method which we can call ontological-genetical, by proceeding from below towards above, with the aim of successively specifying the articulations and the intermediary links between the elementary forms of social life (object of empirical sociology, hence of a more or less rigorous science) and superior objectivations (traditionally the object of philosophical reflexion), that Lukács hoped to overcome the hiatus to which he alluded in his letter. If he desired to distance himself from Bloch, it is because Bloch, preoccupied by the same problem, stressed, in the last chapter of his *Spirit of Utopia*, the reattachment to Marxian economic analysis of the values traditionally incorporated by religious transcendence.¹⁸ In denouncing the unilaterality of

18 *L'esprit de l'utopie*, Paris, Gallimard, 1977, pp. 293-294

economism, Bloch was able to write that "Marxism [has been brought—*N.T.*] into the neighbourhood of a critique of pure reason for which no critique of practical reason would yet have been written." Now, the attempt by Lukács, in the *Ontology*, will precisely be to provide a bridge between the categories of pure reason and those of practical reason (to keep the Kantian terminology) through a purely immanent method, by providing a series of genetic mediations between the two levels, up until the higher forms of intersubjectivity, without any concession to religious transcendence. It is this which profoundly separates it from Bloch's thought: in a passage of the *Ontology* he will later explicitly reject the Blochian idea of the phenomenological autonomy of the soul, set out in *The Spirit of Utopia*, by seeing there an unacceptable concession to idealism.¹⁹

This might be the place to say something about the relations between Lukács and Bloch. These relations, which extended over an exceptionally long period, more than sixty years, included both highs and lows, in following a rather complicated trajectory.²⁰ If we note here only the aspects concerning the end of their careers, we can say that Bloch welcomed with surprise and with a real interest Lukács' initiative in writing an *Ontology*, all the while expressing a deep discontent with the attention accorded by Lukács to the work of Nicolai Hartmann. On this point, he became aware of Lukács' intentions only through rumors, because the text of Lukács' work was still not accessible in its entirety at the time.²¹ Bloch did not at all value the writings of Nicolai Hartmann in which he

19 See Georg Lukács, **Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins**, 2. Halbband, S. 521.

20 For a brief overview of this problem, see N. Tertulian, "Ernst Bloch—Gyorgy Lukács une amie de 60 ans," in: **La quinzaine littéraire**, Paris, No. 455, January 16/31, 1986, pp. 21-22.

21 On this point, see the text of a conversation with Ernst Bloch from September 24, 1971, "Ernst Bloch kommentiert Gelebtes Denken" in: **Ernst Bloch und Georg Lukács. Dokumente zum 100 Geburtstag**, MTA, Lukács Archivum, 1984, pp. 296-323, especially pp. 315-318.

saw only the epigonic continuation of the ancient static ontology, preferring rather to dip into the work of the other Hartmann, Eduard von Hartmann, whose Schellingian inspiration in the theory of the categories was much closer to his own cosmogonical fantasies.

We can even ask ourselves if the decision by Bloch to write *Experimentum mundi*, a work which is largely an exposition of the categories of being (the book was written between 1972 and 1974; it was therefore begun a year after the death of Lukács), was not stimulated by the undertaking of his old friend to write the *Ontology of Social Being*: there is in the *Experimentum mundi* a direct, positive reference to Lukács' *Ontology* and to this way of approaching the theory of the categories in an objective (ontological) manner and not only reflexively (as the idealist tradition would want), without forgetting the fact that the other last great work by Bloch, *Das Materialismusproblem* of 1972 is precisely dedicated to his "friend from my youth, Georg Lukács."

A comparison of the two works of ontological character written by the two thinkers at the end of their lives would however be of the sort to show that, despite all that linked them together in their common fidelity to Marx' thought and his socio-political intentions, profound philosophical differences subsisted between them until the end. The autobiographical notes drawn up by Lukács several months before his death, which had the title "Gelebtes Denken," in fact referred explicitly to these divergences, whose origins went back already to the period of their youth, especially in mentioning Bloch's conception of nature.

The Blochean idea of a possible isomorphism between man and nature, through which would occur a felicitous encounter (if not a fusion) between the

human subject and the “subject of nature,” through a radical metamorphosis of nature itself, was profoundly contradictory to Lukács' basic anti-teleologism. Indeed, the very idea of a *Natursubjekt* would have seemed to Lukács to be a contradiction, since it would signify an illegitimate anthropomorphization of nature.

But we can go even farther in order to discover the matrix of these divergences: we can hardly see, for example, that Lukács would accept Bloch's idea that the categories of the world are the progressive objectifications (Bloch called them experiments) of a primordial will (the final substrate that Bloch calls, following Eduard von Hartmann, *das Thelische*, the equivalent to a “hunger for existence”), while for Lukács the categories of the prehuman world are only the progressive articulations of a purely causal substrate, deprived by definition of a teleological intent. The crypto-teleology of Bloch's ontology, which necessarily led to a utopic vision of a final happy apocalypse, until the end remained profoundly alien to Lukács' ontology.

The judgments on Bloch which Lukács advanced in his private correspondence, especially in the 1960s (in his letters to Frank Benseler, but also, for instance, in a letter to Professor Podach of Heidelberg),²² in a period when Bloch also began to make public his reservations with respect to the overly narrow form of Lukács' Marxism, manifest a constant ambivalence. Lukács did not cease to question the extravagance and the precarious nature of Bloch's philosophical views, all the while expressing his admiration for the unshakable

22 The letter of January 13, 1964 to Professor Podach was quoted in our **Georges Lukács. Etapes de sa pensée esthétique**, Paris, Le Sycamore, 1980, p. 292: “Was Bloch betrifft, war ich in meiner Jugend mit ihm gut befreundet. Er ist sicher ein geistvoller Mensch und ein guter Stilist. Aber für *Prinzip Hoffnung* kann ich kein Interesse aufbringen.”

fidelity of his old friend with respect to his left-wing beliefs. This paradoxical melange of a "left-wing ethics" and of a "right-wing theory of knowledge," in the words utilized by Lukács in 1962 in his Preface to the *Theory of the Novel* (where Bloch was explicitly targeted), never ceased to intrigue Lukács. Here, for example, is what he wrote to Frank Benseler on March 9, 1962, after having become aware of Bloch's opuscule *Philosophische Grundfragen I, Zur Ontologie des Noch-Nicht-eins*,²³ the first publication by Bloch after he left East Germany in order to settle in the West:²⁴ "It is an Italian salad with a fascinating decorative effect, composed of a subjectivism which pretends to be objective and a very poor and abstract objectivity. I had the pleasure of seeing that Bloch has still not abandoned his left-wing ethics." Several years later, in a letter sent November 21, 1965 to the same correspondent, Lukács formulated in an even sharper fashion the same idea, without any hesitation in indicating even the structural affinities between Bloch's philosophical romanticism and that of their great common adversaries, from Spengler to Heidegger:²⁵

It is correct that you speak of romanticism. With his talent, Bloch should without doubt have been able effectively to compete with all the right-wing dreamers (*rechte Phantasten*), from Spengler to Heidegger. He stood, however, without flinching, always on the extreme left wing, even if the essence of his philosophy was much closer to those on the extreme right wing than to Marx. I have always admired from the ethical perspective this paradoxical constancy in Bloch's thought (*denkerisch paradoxe Ausharren Blochs*) and I have always seen there a phenomenon completely unique for our time.

23 Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1961.

24 Letter of March 9, 1962 to Frank Benseler.

25 Letter of November 21, 1961 to Frank Benseler.

Several letters sent the same year by Lukács to Benseler indicate his mistrust with regard to the conjunction between the “principle of hope” of Bloch and the religious needs of the epoch, as Bloch's work seemed to him to nourish the illusion of a “religious socialism.”²⁶ “You are entirely correct when you fear that the Blochean radicalism could engender a quietism.”

In writing his *Ontology of Social Being* Lukács tried to answer a certain number of questions of an apparently purely speculative nature, but whose practical significance is immense: as the product of the teleological activity of individual subjects, does the history of society acquire a univocal sense, an imposed formality due to the sovereign action of subjects on social matter (of which the teleology of the Hegelian philosophy of history remains the superlative example)? Or, on the contrary, is it a product of the objective causal chain which is able to impose its effects beyond consciousness and the desire of individuals, so that the history of society develops according to a rigorous determinism which in the final analysis surpasses the finalistic activity of consciousness? In attempting to avoid the trap of teleology as well as that of determinism, and to rescue the interpretation of Marx' thought from what he considered to be two symmetrical deformations, Lukács was not able to complete his project without a radical interrogation concerning the categorial foundations of social life.

The autarchic existence of being with respect to consciousness—this is the basic thesis of realistic ontology, that of Nicolai Hartmann as well as that of Georg Lukács (who prefers, himself, to speak of materialist ontology). Nicolai Hartmann never ceases to insist in his writings, with inexhaustible energy and so firmly since it seems to him to shake a number of prejudices essential to a

²⁶ See his letter of August 6, 1965 to Frank Benseler.

teleological ontology or traditional rationalism, on the sovereign indifference of the categories of being with respect to their cognitive apprehension. Lukács could have been struck by the astonishing similarity between the definition of the categories that we find in Marx: *Daseinsformen, Existenzbestimmungen* (= forms of being-there, determinations of existence) and the central thesis of Nicolai Hartmann on the categories as properties intrinsic to being itself (the distinction between "categories of being" and "categories of knowledge," despite their partial identity, returns like a leitmotif in the works of Hartmann). Heidegger in turn, in his courses from the period of *Being and Time*, speaks of the apprehension of the "fundamental articulations of being" (*Grundartikulationen des Seins*) as the aim of his fundamental ontology, but in an entirely different sense than Hartmann or Lukács.

In following an ontological procedure, Lukács decided to set out a theory of the levels of being, of the progressive stratification (inorganic nature, biological nature, social being), with as the principal objective to specify the categories constitutive of social being, in their irreducible specificity. Ontology understood as a theory of the categories (*Kategorienlehre*)—here there is a common trait between Hartmann and Lukács. The center of gravity of his Ontology becomes an analysis of work, considered as originary phenomenon and as the generative cell of social life: work appears to him, of course, also as the key to anthropogenesis.

Lukács accordingly locates at the base of social life "teleological position" (*die teleologische Setzung*), the finalistic activity of the subject: for the first time, thanks to work, consciousness abandons the role of simple epiphenomenon in the objective causal series (which it still conserves among the higher animals) in

order to acquire a dimension intrinsic to it, that of *antiphysis*, of a factor active and constitutive of the real. Nature in itself (what Nicolai Hartmann calls *das Ansichseiende*) is characterized, by definition, by teleological and axiological neutrality. Through work, teleology, as the activity which provides meaning to sense and values, erupts into the chain of the objective causal series.

Teleological activity interrupts, or breaks with, the spontaneous causality of nature in introducing into it entirely different relations, inconceivable through the simple play of natural causality. The distinction between spontaneous causality (that of nature-in-itself) and instituted causality, thanks to teleological activity, here plays a capital role. Lukács sees in finalistic activity, which erupts with the appearance of work, the ramified nucleus of social life, on all its levels, from material action on nature (work in the precise sense) up to the most complex forms of intersubjectivity, where it is a question of acting on the consciousness of others.

Opposed to a simple passivity or pure automaticity, the concept of “teleological position” seems rather near to that of the intentionality of consciousness, taken over from the psychology of Brentano by the phenomenology of Husserl and of Heidegger. But Nicolai Hartmann and Lukács decline to disassociate in radical fashion the intentionality of consciousness and causal objectivity, comprehension and explanation, while recognizing all the while their qualitative heterogeneity. The originality of their position is to have stressed, with extreme energy, the narrow connection which exists between efficient finalistic activity of the subject and the respect for objective causal determinations. The emergence of teleological acts implies by definition the interpolation of an ideal moment in the objective causal series (the aim in the

process of work); otherwise consciousness would effectively be only an epiphenomenon of the determinism of nature. But the ontological import of the final nexus (the result of the projected action) depends on the valorization of the intrinsic properties of the objects themselves – the *energeia* can only base itself on the *dynamis*.

Nicolai Hartmann furnished in his little book *Teleologisches Denken* (the complement to his *Philosophy of Nature*), a work which Lukács regarded highly, a subtle demonstration of the fact that the particularity of the finalistic activity of consciousness only appears when we abandon prejudices concerning a finalism or a rationality immanent in the world. Teleological activity, the privilege of the active subject, only represents a segment in the infinite becoming of the world. The ontological pre-eminence of the category of causality over that of finality seems to Hartmann self-evident: he undertook a spectacular operation to rehabilitate the ontological import of the category of causality in underlining the infinite productivity of the objective causal series with respect to the inherent finitude of teleological acts.

In situating an act of ideal nature at the base of social life, namely the “teleological position” (*die teleologische Setzung*, the finalistic activity of consciousness), which, however, is intimately associated with material determinations of objects (work is the paradigm of this intimate fusion of the ideal and the real), Lukács inevitably is able to make the “should-be” (*das Sollen*) and the value of categories constitutive of social being. The institution of a goal necessarily signifies the emergence of a should-be and by definition is accompanied by the appearance of a value. Nature, the empire of pure causality,

knows neither one nor the other. But it is precisely the inexistence of an absolute sovereignty of consciousness (it is always rooted to begin with in a material *hie et nunc*) and the absence of a transcendent empire of values (this would be to admit the existence of objective teleology), which is able to open the way to a realistic explanation of the genesis of values. We do not think that we are wrong in affirming that it is the non-sovereignty of teleological activity, the fact that it is ceaselessly nourished by the resistances and obstacles opposed to it by the network of objective causality—in a word the relation of dialectical tension which forms between the teleology of human aims and the causal series of reality—which furnishes the true source of values. Nicolai Hartmann could in this sense, at a certain time, affirmatively state that it is “the failure of the instinctive reaction which is the precipitating factor of finalistic activity (*der Erwecker der Zwecktätigkeit*).”²⁷

The principal aim of the ontological-genetical method developed by Lukács in his last work is to show how, in beginning from the elementary act of work, social life constitutes itself as a tissue of objectifications of greater and greater complexity, as inter-human relations better and better articulated, thanks precisely to the relation of dialectical tension between the teleological-activity of individual subjects and the network of objective causal determinations. The definition even of man—*ein antwortendes Wesen* (a being which answers)—illustrates well this direction of his thought. We find ourselves here in the zone of the actual confluence between the metaphysical ontology of Nicolai Hartmann and the ontology of social being sketched by Georg Lukács. In apparently paradoxical fashion, it is the autonomy of the infinite causal series of the real

27 Nicolai Hartmann, **Teleologisches Denken**, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1951, p. 88.

with respect to the inevitably finite character of the teleological activity of the subject, the fact that the finite consciousness (circumscribed) can never be entirely coextensive with infinite reality, which explains the incessant proliferation of teleological acts and the renewed multiplication of values. The productive nature of consciousness is stimulated by the resistance of the real and by the infinite character of its determinations: the objective causality, so criticized for its "mechanical" character or unilinearity, reveals itself, rather, as an inhibiting factor or inhibition, a stimulating terrain for the exercise of freedom.

Lukács considers the teleological acts of individuals as the *principium movens* of social life, thus stopping short of any determinist conception, of a mechanist or fatalist kind, of society. The assimilation of the functioning of the laws of society to that of the laws of nature, through the pure and simple identification of society to a "second nature," becomes ontologically impossible. But the focus of conceptual risk can be found in the analysis of the teleological act: by utilizing the ontological model of work, he makes the idea of the alternative choice into the essence of their act. Thanks to work, man has acquired distance with respect to the objective causal linkage, the distancing necessary in order to choose between several possible acts. The pre-eminence of the ideal moment, the representation *in mente* of the aim is obvious. In his book, *The Young Hegel*, Lukács criticizes Spinoza for having too quickly interpreted the *causa finalis* as simple variant (or continuation) of the efficient cause, through covering up its irreducible specificity. Hegel, on the contrary, is strongly praised for having, through the analysis of work developed in his Jena writings, brought out this particularity.²⁸

28 See Georg Lukács, **Der junge Hegel. Über die Beziehung von Dialektik und Ökonomie**, Zürich/Vienna, Europa, 1948, pp. 433-434.

Lukács detects in Spinoza an underestimation of the moment of the emergence of the *causa finalis*; the intransigent determinism of Spinoza pushes him to denounce the illusion of the autonomous emergence of the *causa finalis*. Now, Lukács, all the while acknowledging the beauty of Spinoza's reasoning, wants to bring out the particularity of the "teleological position" (*die teleologische Setzung*), irreducible to the pure linkage of efficient causes. The emergence of an aim signifies an interruption in spontaneous causality, an act which breaks the pure linkage of efficient causality: the moment of choice, of invention in the "teleological position" never can be reduced to a simple effect of an efficient cause. Hegel would have been the first to stress the qualitative novelty of this act, while, following Lukács, Hobbes and Spinoza would have underestimated its irreducibility. But it must be added that Lukács always manifested a great admiration for Spinoza's work, in acknowledging his great debt towards it (for example in the Preface to his *Aesthetics*).

The alternative decision, the essence of the teleological act, implies by definition deliberation, progressive experimentation, hesitation (eventually) between several possibilities: at the same time it takes form inevitably as a horizon of concrete circumstances which the subject finds before it and which he did not himself create. In making of the alternative decision the dynamic principle of social life and the constitutive moment of the act of freedom itself, Lukács contests ab initio rectilinear causality as the law of social development.

It is interesting to recall that in the pages devoted to the problem of freedom in the chapter on "Work" in his *Ontology*, Lukács rejects the famous Hegelian definition of freedom as the "truth of necessity," as well as its too faithful reproduction by Engels. He begins by admitting that each free act must

base itself on adequate knowledge of the circumstances in which it takes place: he admits accordingly a correlation between freedom and necessity (in admitting in this sense that Engels is correct). But he finds the analyses of Hegel and of Engels too restrictive. He objects against Hegel to the excessive extension of the concept of necessity. The real does not only include the necessary relations between phenomena, but also the latent or virtual possibilities (of which the Aristotelian category of *dynamis* is the expression), as well as a mass of accidents. The appanage of the free act is to valorize all modal categories of the real, through exploring the latencies as well as the contingent phenomena (with respect to the fixed aim): Raphael knew how to draw an unprecedented profit from the form of the windows in the rooms where he painted his famous frescoes "The Parnassus" and the "Liberation of Saint Peter" (a disadvantageous accident was accordingly transformed into a value for the original organization of the space). The affirmations of Hegel on freedom as the "truth of necessity" or as the expression of "true necessity" ("internal" necessity opposed to purely exterior or "blind" necessity) are tributaries of a too logical mind and certainly of a hidden finalism, which considers that the mission of each category (in fact, that of necessity) is only to prepare the ascension towards the higher category: a finalism of this kind, symmetrical with univocal determinism, is profoundly unacceptable, and Lukács opposes to it a more flexible and more nuanced representation of the free act.

The structure of social being is hence defined by fundamental ambivalence: no determination occurs in social life which is not founded on the teleological acts of individuals; however, the social process in its entirety does not have a teleological, but a strictly causal, character.

Individuals model reality in reordering the objective causal series as a function of their respective aims, but the effects of their actions surpass the initial intentions. The heterogeneity of objective causal series (which are *ex definitione* infinite) with respect to teleological acts (whose horizon, always by definition, is finite) can at first glance explain the existence of such disparities. Unforeseeable examples, even sometimes in contradiction with the intent, can be found in the field itself of interaction between man and nature: to illustrate the ontological autonomy of the unfolding of causes with respect to intentional acts, the possibility of certain contrary effects, even harmful, with respect to teleological positions, Lukács cites at a certain point, in the chapter on "Work," the example of "the corrosion of iron." Sartre is also concerned, in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, with such phenomena, which he labels "counter-finalities." In the field of social life, envisaged from the point of view of inter-social relations in the narrow sense, the disparities between the intentions of individuals and the results of their actions take on a specific character: the actions of an individual or of a group of individuals interfere with those of another individual or of another group of individuals; this multiple interaction leads to a new reality, a final consequence, which necessarily surpasses the initial intentions and the individual desires.

The objectivity of such a result can be called *sui generis*, inasmuch as it is not the product of spontaneous causality as happens in nature, but a synthesis of numerous individual acts whose sum in reality constitutes itself autonomously, with a necessary character (notably in the sphere of economics). This is in fact the interpretation which Lukács gives to the celebrated Marxian thesis which affirms that "men make history, but not in conditions chosen by them... ."

The author of the *Ontology* affirms, in order to support his thesis, the three fundamental tendencies of the historical process, defined as follows: the reduction of the work time necessary for the reproduction of life, ever greater socialization of social life by the repression of nature and the progressive unification of various types of society in an integrated humanity, which would be affirmed as the necessary result of social development, in independence from the conscious intentions and aims intended by individuals.

Lukács strives to remain in permanent contact with two poles of social reality so defined, namely: on the one hand, the objectivity transcending individual intentions and, on the other, subjectivity—the constitutive factor of social life in its entirety. He re-actualizes accordingly in this latter domain the Hegelian distinction between essence and phenomenon, while attributing to it new nuances. The system of objective relations into which individuals are drawn in the course of the process of production and self-reproduction and which in its final correlations could have been engendered independently of the intentions and aims of these individuals, represents the level of the essence; the plurality of individual reactions, the variety of social institutions created in the interior of this level of the essence and which are inseparably linked to it, represents the level of the phenomenon. On the level of the essence, a relative stability would be characteristic (Hegel had spoken of the “calm” of the essence), while the phenomenal world is diversified, in perpetual movement and inexhaustible in its swarming variety. Lukács considers for example that the appearance and the survival of surplus work (the fact, in other words, of producing more than is necessary for existence) follows from the level of the essence, while the variety of

historical forms instanced by the phenomenon of *Mehrarbeit* would belong to the level of the phenomenon.

The question which we cannot avoid is the following: does the relative autarchy, the coercive power which Lukács attributes to the level of the essence in the stratification of social life, not bring us back to the old rigid determinism of “historical necessity,” understood as a sort of *Deus absconditus* of social life, an implacable force, a force transcendent to intentions and to individual aims? Do we not here find a restoration of the “ontology of necessity” that the four authors of the text *Aufzeichnungen für Genossen Lukács zur Ontologie* (F. Feher, A. Heller, G. Markus, Mihaly Vajda) denounced as in flagrant contradiction—according to them—with the other ontology’ which criticizes the “naturalism” of a certain Marxist “orthodoxy”?²⁹

Lukács strives to defend himself (perhaps he foresaw the possible objections) against such an error, in stressing that in social life the world of the essence, unlike necessity in nature, constitutes itself equally as a result of the activity of individuals. Even if the constitutive correlations appear independently of their intentions and conscious aims, they are nevertheless indebted to their activity, inasmuch as individuals react, by definition, to the objective reality of which they are obliged to keep track, by looking to submit it to their transformative actions.³⁰

But we should not forget that such independence with respect to conscious acts supposes even these as its ontological foundation,

29 See F. Feher, A. Heller, G. Markus, M. Vajda, “Notes on Lukács’ Ontology,” in: **Lukács Reappraised**, Agnes Heller (ed.), NY, Columbia UP, 1983, pp. 137 ff.

30 See Georg Lukács, **Zur Ontologie** ... 2 Hb. S. 327

hence that social being on the level of its highest and purest objectivity can never possess the total independence from natural events with respect to its subjects.

However, Lukács has not entirely elucidated the dialectic of the relations between the level of necessity (or that of essence) and the individual or collective actions of the human subject. Since he speaks of “the final irresistible tendency” (*letzthinnige tendenzielle Unaufhaltsamkeit*) of the essence, we can correctly compare the essence to a profound subterranean current of historical life which advances implacably, despite the different currents at the surface and the eddies caused by individuals. The former cannot modify the form of the process, the phenomenal world of essence; the development of capitalism in Western Europe would be one of the implacable processes deriving from the essence, the different fashions of its manifestation in France and in England, for example in the agrarian domain, would illustrate the role of the alternative activity of individuals and, for this reason, would embrace the phenomenal world. How can we reconcile such a fashion of envisaging the problem with Lukács' tendency to “de-absolutize” historical necessity, by showing its circumstantial and relative character—as a function of the given conditions (it is what he calls, by utilizing a concept similar to N. Hartmann's, *Wenn-Dann-Notwendigkeit*, in other words “the necessity of the if-then”), in other terms, with the idea that the historical necessity itself (the essence) finds itself submitted to the impact of human actions?

History takes on in Lukács' *Ontology* the aspect of an extremely ambivalent process, sometimes malefic or paradoxical, in the course of which individuals make an effort to impose their will and to attain their ends, but see themselves, since in principle the result is different from their intentions, always constrained

to take up again—in new conditions and on a higher level – their constituting efforts.

Lukács' *Ontology* results necessarily in a theory of subjectivity and its constitutive levels. In making of the always renewed tension between the finalizing activity of individuals and a social reality which inevitably surpasses them the motor of the historical process, he pursues in subjectivity itself the progressive effects of this process: the articulation of its different levels, up to the full affirmation of the true *humanitas* of *homo humanus*. It is here perhaps that the confrontation with Heidegger imposes itself most fully. The courses from the period of *Sein und Zeit* show, in effect, how much the problem of the being of consciousness, or what Heidegger liked to call “the subjectivity of the subject,” was on the first level of his interests. A recent course published in the series of complete works, that entitled *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics, World-Finitude-Solitude* (given in Freiburg in the Winter semester of 1929-1930 and dedicated to the memory of Eugen Fink), offers us the surprise of seeing Heidegger undertake a detailed comparative analysis of three levels of being: inorganic being, that is *weltlos* (a stone is taken as an example); organic being (with ample excursions into biological science); and human being, the only one invested with the ability to constitute a “world.” Such an ontological analysis of a comparative type recalls as well the object of Nicolai Hartmann's reflections, and enables us to specify the divergences and the oppositions between the three philosophers. Lukács' method, in his analysis of the levels of subjectivity, remains genetic: he even criticizes Nicolai Hartmann for a certain blindness concerning the genetic point of view. In the analysis of passages between the different levels

of being, in deploring above all the absence of such a point of view in the analysis of the *Finalnexus*, of the "teleological position."

The dialectic between the pressure (or the constraint) of objective circumstances and the alternative choice, as an active response to this pressure, is at the centre of Lukács' reflection on the genesis of teleological positions. He proposes to observe at the interior of each teleological position two distinct, although closely associated, moments: objectification and exteriorization. If the former expresses the action of modelling the objective causal series or the given situations in order to inscribe there the aim in view (each efficacious teleological act implies such an objectification), the latter marks the retroactive effect of this objectivating activity in the constitution of the subject. The most elementary acts of work imply, besides the objectivating activity (to forge a new object with respect to pure natural determinism), exteriorizations of the subject: skill, inventiveness, even a certain personal "style" imparted to the product, *etc.* But despite their narrow connections, these two acts: objectification and exteriorization, can develop themselves in different ways. The structural polarity of social being, the fact that the final consequence of individual acts necessarily surpasses their initial aims and that individual spontaneities find themselves thus ceaselessly confronted with unexpected situations, explains the possibility of this tension between objectification and exteriorization. Because of the imperatives of social reproduction (because of economic constraint, in the first place) individuals are pushed to acts of objectification (in the context of the division of labour for instance), to which do not necessarily correspond acts of true exteriorization (slavery is a limiting case); the expression of aptitudes and of individual qualities in this case is reduced to a minimum. On the other hand, the

same process of objectification can be accompanied by a very diversified spectrum of acts of exteriorization (self-expression) which, when it does not attain an adequate objectivating expression, in the material nature of the structure of society, remains in the state of virtuality or latent subjectivity. Lukács offers us accordingly an image more supple and more finely articulated of the relations between the objective and subjective factors of social development than that to which we were accustomed.

The most original part of this phenomenology of subjectivity (or epigenesis of subjectivity), pursued across the inquiry into the history of social being, is furnished to us by the definition of alienation. The non-coincidence between objectification and exteriorization is pursued this time in the interior of the act of exteriorization itself, postulated as the possibility of a contradiction between the development of qualities (of capacities of the individual which can accumulate themselves in heterogeneous fashion) and their synthesis in the homogeneous unity of the personality. Lukács makes the self-affirmation of personality, which is understood as a synthesis of more or less heterogeneous qualities, the *terminus ad quem* of social development, its ultimate finality. The ontological place of alienation (the object of the last chapter of the *Ontology of Social Being*) is specified there where the multiplication of the qualities of the individual, the result of the relation of dialectical tension with his milieu, functions exclusively in order to assure its survival and its social reproduction (it hence has a pure existence-in-itself, since it is born of the game of the division of work and the struggle for self-preservation), in concealing what should have been its central finality: the auto-affirmation of particularity as autonomous individuality or as personality.

The center of gravity of Lukács' reflections is the tension between what he regards as the two fundamental levels of the human species: the human species-in-itself and the human species-for-itself (*Gattungsmässigkeit-an-sich* and *für-sich*). Lukács pursues in the interiority of the subject the migration of the main social conflicts: the rendering subservient of the subject to the imperatives of social reproduction can be accompanied by a proliferation of the qualities and the aptitudes of the individual (it is the stage of the human species in itself, deprived still of the transcendence of the for-itself); but the telos of social life remains the surpassing of this more or less heteronymous stage of existence in order to reach the self-affirmation of the individual as a person, hence as an entity which conditions itself and fulfils itself freely (which thus raises itself to the stage of the human species-for-itself). In the tragedy of Sophocles, Ismene, through her spirit of self-compromise and the fervour with which she spreads to her sister the submission to existing law, that of Creon and of the reason of the state, incarnates the stage of the human species-in-itself (all *Realpolitik* leads to such a conservation of the existent), while Antigone, through the irreducibility of moral demands, which transcend all empirical calculations, by going as far as the annihilation of oneself, incarnates the irrepressible aspiration towards the human species-for-itself.

The Lukácsian distinction is fundamentally based on the development of Marx' famous thesis concerning the transition from the reign of necessity to the reign of freedom. But one here finds as well a central thread of his own youthful reflections. The "second ethics" of which he spoke in the manuscript on Dostoevsky and in his letters to Paul Ernst, opposed to the logic of the institutions of the state (the "first ethics"), always expressed this powerful

aspiration towards a moral utopia, which led his friend Ernst Bloch to call him at the time a "genius of morality." In the notes for the book on Dostoevsky, there is a revealing proposition: "Dostoevsky and Dante: the second ethics an *a priori* of the epic stylization."³¹ The ethical and the aesthetical were in effect always associated in intimate fashion by Lukács (without the specificity of the two spheres in any sense being diminished): he pursued in the interior movement, the most secret of works, the existence of moral substantiality (thereby finding, without knowing it, one of Croce's central theses: "*fondamento di ogni poesia è la coscienza morale*").³² This is the reason why not only has he always defended the point of view of Jesus against the realistic and cynical pragmatism of the Grand Inquisitor, in commenting on the celebrated scene from the novel the Brothers Karamazov by Dostoevsky, not only did he praise the figures of Jesus and Socrates in his *Ontologie* as paradigmatic expressions of the human species- or-itself, but he sees in literary personages such as Electra, Antigone, Don Quixote or Hamlet so many incarnations of an interior moral incorruptibility, so many expressions of the human species become aware of its highest requirements.

Paul Claudel in a letter to Andre Gide, concerning the dialogue between the Grand Inquisitor and Christ, defended the point of view of the Church, in writing:³³

Dostoevsky has however sensed the grandeur of the Church in his dialogue from the *Brothers Karamazov*, although he had the

31 See Georg Lukács, **Dostojewski. Notizen und Entwürfe**, Budapest, Akad. Kiado, 1985, p. 39.

32 Benedetto Croce, **Aesthetica in nuce**, Editori Laterza, 1985, p. 18

33 See his letter to Andre Gide of July 30, 1908 *in*: **Paul Claudel et Andre Gide, Correspondance, (1899-1926)**, Paris, Gallimard, 1949, p. 85.

meanness to refuse faith to the Grand Inquisitor. He was absolutely correct against this false Christ who troubles for an ignorant and prideful speech the magnificent order of redemption. The Church means union. Whoever does not join with me divides. Whoever does not act as a member of the Church cannot act in its name, he is a pseudo-Christ and a divider.

Lukács very clearly rejected what he regarded as a closure in the *status quo* of the human species-in-itself incarnated by the existent Church. In upholding against Claudel the message of the Dostoevskian Jesus, he introduced his statement on the contestational vocation of sects and heresies, and profited from the occasion to provide vibrant praise of Simone Weil.³⁴ It should not be forgotten that the young Lukács had strongly nourished his thought in the writings of such unorthodox mystics as Meister Eckhart, Johann Tauler, Sebastian Franck, Valentin Weigel, or Saint Francis of Assisi: the *Ontologie* considers the sects as so many expressions of the aspiration towards the human species-for-itself, but which because of their intrinsic religiosity desires to burn the mediations linking the stage of the human species-in-itself and that of the human species-for-itself. It is thus that Simone Weil established a solution of continuity between authentic faith and devotion for a social cause: now, for Lukács, the essence precisely resides in the discovery of mediations linking the two stages of the evolution of the human species.

We can only be struck by a certain parallelism which exists between Sartre's approach in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and Lukács' project in his *Ontology of Social Being*. The two works were born from a common ambition: to put an end to the reductive schemata of a sclerotic Marxism and to rehabilitate the infinite

34 See Lokacs, **Zur Ontologie** ... 2. Hb. S. 626.

complexity of the historical process. Lukács indicated in a letter of September 19, 1964 to Frank Benseler his intention, at a certain point, of writing an article on Sartre's *Critique*, but he added that he had given it up as he did not feel himself capable of doing so.³⁵ "The book is very much alright (*sehr anständig*), but extremely confused and boring." Three years earlier, he had written to the same correspondent on April 3, 1961:³⁶ "... I have read the first two hundred pages of Sartre's book, but without drawing any great lesson" (to his interlocutors, Lukács said that he had not continued his reading). We can say that Lukács was in error in abandoning the reading of Sartre's work: the similarity of the problematics between Sartre's and his own are evident. The dialectical tension between the teleological activities of individuals and a stratified social field on several levels, the result of relations between practical organisms and inorganic matter, is also the centre of Sartre's *Critique*: the extremely nuanced distinctions between the field of the *practico-inert*, where individuals lead a serial existence, under the sign of the impotence and exteriority, and the group, where he affirms the totalization of individuals' aims in view of the realization of a common project (the group in fusion), between the constituting dialectic and the dialectic constituted (or dialectic of passivity, that of alienated praxis), between the collectives and the groups, inevitably cut across the analyses that Lukács will develop on the bipolar nature of the social being and on the transition of the human species-in-itself to the stage of the human species-for-itself. It is not possible here for us even to sketch a comparative analysis of the two works, nor to indicate the great differences which separate them both on the level of method and on that of the

35 See letter of September 19, 1964 to Frank Benseler.

36 See letter of April 3, 1961 to Frank Benseler.

results obtained, and we will confine ourselves merely to indicating the interest of such a *rapprochement*.

The true antipode of the method developed by Lukács in his *Ontologie* is found in the thought of Martin Heidegger, although profound similarities of problematic appear here (as we have already noted). The more and more virulent criticism developed by Heidegger, beginning in his courses of the 1920's, against the hegemony of *logos* and of *ratio* in the interpretation of the world and his demand to come back to a more originary reflexion on the Being of this being has a certain parallelism with the critique of logo-centrism and of exaggerated rationalism pursued by Nicolai Hartmann in his ontological research, a critique taken up again we have already noted, by Lukács. We must not forget that there is in this sense a distancing by these three thinkers, so different, even opposed between themselves, with respect to neo-Kantianism, positivism and neopositivism, and even with respect to Husserl's phenomenology (it is the thesis of Husserl on philosophy as "rigorous science" which provoked, in 1925, the recriminations of Heidegger, who began to disengage himself more and more from the thought of his master). The refusal of Nicolai Hartmann to accept the Aristotelian identification of the substantial form of phenomena with their logical essence, a refusal reiterated in the name of the conditioning of form by matter, is at the basis of his critique of finalism and of rationalism. Lukács roundly criticizes as well logicism, in the name of an ontological materialism, throughout his last work. It is no less significant to note that the Hegelian identification of ontology or of metaphysics with logic, more precisely the dissolution of ontology in this sense in a "science of logic," is questioned in 'turn by each of the three thinkers: Hartmann, Heidegger, and Lukács.

The critique of alienation (or, in a more restricted sphere of reification, of *Verdinglichung*) is another central theme that the views of Heidegger and Lukács have in common. Both present alienation as a process of radical occultation of what in their eyes constitutes the essence of human existence. (Heidegger often employs the word *Verdeckung*, occultation, to describe this process.) But here large differences appear, even a radical opposition, which separates the two philosophers. Faithful to his ontological-genetic method, Lukács sets out a dialectical conception of the genesis of human being, including reification and alienation, a conception based on the tension between teleology (the finalistic activity of the subject) and objective causality. Heidegger explicitly rejects dialectic (in his course from 1929 he postulates the impossibility of dialectically surpassing the finitude consubstantial to human existence:³⁷ "*Endlichkeit macht die Dialektik unmöglich, erweist sie als Schein*"), in privileging an *a priori* conception of human being and of its fundamental structures under the aegis of inauthenticity as well as of authenticity. The description in particularly striking terms of the different aspects of inauthentic existence, which is developed in the horizon of banal everydayness (*Alltäglichkeit*) under the sign of indecision and indecisiveness, is intimately linked by Heidegger to the critique of what he calls "the ontology of the subsistent being" (*Ontologie der Vorhandenheit*), of which the principle of causal explication is an essential component. This is the ontology which allegedly dominated Western metaphysical thought from Plato and Aristotle to Kant and Hegel: in desiring to pluck man from different forms of inauthentic existence and in aiming on the level of thought at a rupture with "vulgar intellect" and the "surpassing of metaphysics," Heidegger appeals to a

³⁷ Martin Heidegger, "*Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt-Endlichkeit-Einsamkeit,*" in: **Heideggers Gesamtausgabe**, Frankfurt, Klostennann, 1983, Band 29/30, p. 306.

metamorphosis of human being (in his courses from the end of the 1920s he speaks of a *Verwandlung des Menschen*), through a return to his originary dimension. The distrust of the principle of causal explanation (or *das Erklären*, to which he opposes in decisive fashion comprehension, *das Verstehen*) finds in Heidegger pregnant expression, for instance in a part of his course on Holderlin.³⁸

Now, it is precisely the principle of causality, and the desire to found on the dialectical relation between teleology and causality a rational ontology of social being, which are the basis of Lukács' thought. He defends with no less energy than Heidegger the singular irreducibility of human existence with respect to other forms of existence. But the teleological act (*die teleologische Setzung*), the central notion of the Lukácsian *Ontologie* (which inevitably borders on the notions of intentionality, project, transcendence or temporality, familiar in the phenomenological or existentialist literature), does not arise for Lukács *ex nihilo*. It has a genesis, it develops in a context, that of work and of the multiple interactions between practical organisms and the ambient milieu, on the foundation of objective and subjective causal chains. Teleology and causality are inextricably linked. We can speak of an epigenesis of subjectivity in Lukács: its nature is *par excellence* dialectical, since the interrogations and the answers successively formulated by human being take shape under the impulsion of the resistance of the real and of possibilities or of existential latencies in the immanence of objective causal chains. The great *Aesthetics* in two volumes furnished a first example of such an archaeological and epigenetic study of

38 See Martin Heidegger, "Holderlins Hymnen...", in: **Gesamtausgabe**, Bd. 39, Frankfurt, Klostennann, 1980, pp. 246-247.

subjectivity. The *Ontology of Social Being* is the continuation and at the same time the foundation; the apologists of the young Lukács have still not furnished the least plausible argument for the wilful decision to ignore these two works.

To illustrate the cleavage between the position of Heidegger and that of Lukács we choose a last example in the zone which might appear marginal or entirely eccentric: the philosophical interpretation of biological research. The readers of Heidegger can discover for the first time, in reading his course from 1929 devoted to the three fundamental concepts of metaphysics, world-finitude-solitude, clearly expressed, his strongly negative attitude with respect to Darwinism. The fashion in which Heidegger privileges biological research like that developed in the work of Jakob v. Uexküll (who attributed to the organism a sort of immanent power, quasi-musical, to articulate its milieu) and the refusal of the theory of the "natural selection" of organisms, elaborated by Darwin, seems to us to have a rather precise philosophical significance. Heidegger's refusal, without embarrassing himself with any scientific scruples, of the Darwinian theory of the evolution of the species, bases itself, among other things, on the fact that Darwinism would seem to support what Heidegger calls³⁹ "the economic approach to man:" a genetic theory of the formation of the qualities of organisms could only be repudiated by a thinker who held in such little esteem the genetic point of view, as well as that of dialectic. The approach to multiple interactions between the organism and the ambient milieu is the basis of the Darwinian theory, which anticipated, on the methodological plane, *mutatis mutandis*, the ontological-genetic conception of the development of the human species. It is hence entirely comprehensible that Nicolai Hartmann and Lukács, in solid

39 See Martin Heidegger, **Die Grundbegriffe** ... p. 377.

agreement on this point, have such a deep interest in and profound agreement with Darwinian theory.

Through his contributions to the *Ontology of Social Being* Georg Lukács pursued several objectives: to unveil, in all their ramifications, the true philosophical bases of Marx' thought, to counter neopositivism and structuralism, as well as ontologies founded on phenomenology and *Existenzphilosophie*, and to develop a critique of historical reason, inspired by the fundamental principle of the historicity of being and of its categories. But the work wanted above all to be a vast introduction to a future *Ethics*: the analyses that we have called the phenomenal levels of subjectivity in the Lukácsian *Ontologie* come back ceaselessly to this *Ethics*. We can say that Lukács has won his bet: the ontological-genetic method developed in his *opus posthumum*, as well as in his *Aesthetics*, has shown itself fruitful in the analysis of social life and its ever more complex objectifications, in conferring on the author an important place on the scene of contemporary philosophy (even if it is still marginal).

There remains the incontestable fact that these two works make themselves known with difficulty: the *Ethics*, on the other hand, was never written (Lukács was 85 years old when he wrote the *Prolegomena* to his *Ontologie*). But is the immediate audience or popularity necessarily proof of the significance of a philosophical treatise?

Schopenhauer needed to wait nearly forty years before the *World as Will and Representation* acquired an audience. The non-finito character of the Lukácsian project also does not seem to us to be a decisive argument. The history of philosophy contains many examples of unfinished great projects: Were not the

three *Critiques* of Immanuel Kant conceived as preparatory studies to a future metaphysics, which the author was never able to write? Sartre never wrote his ethics, nor did he see published the second volume of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

Victrix causa diis placuit, sed victa Catoni (the cause of the victors pleases the gods, but that of the vanquished pleases Cato). Lukács, who, since his first reading, still as a child, of Homer's *Iliad* felt a profound sympathy for the cause of Hector, the vanquished, and not for that of Achilles, the victor, loved to cite in his later writings this maxim from Lucan: he had a great affinity for the Stoic ethics of Cato. Neither his *Ontology* nor his *Aesthetics* for the moment belongs to the victor's camp, in the contemporary philosophical discussion: but perhaps the enormous patience and the strength to fight against the current, Stoic virtues of which he made great use in writing his works will be finally repaid, and the anti-pragmatic ethics of Cato will reveal itself, yet once more, in the end, as worthwhile.