

Politicality in the Late Thoughts of György Lukács

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the question of politicality in the late thoughts of the Hungarian philosopher, György Lukács and covers the period from 1961 to 1971 (the year of his death). It seeks to analyze the political “determinations” of the author, particularly in his work *The Ontology of Social Being*, where an attempt is made to clarify the more general features of his political understanding and highlight the theoretical basis and fundamental categories that underpin his reflections in this area.

Keywords

Lukács, Marxist thought, politicality

The final phase of the philosophical writings of György Lukács, (which are most clearly expressed in his voluminous work *The Ontology of Social Being*), features within Marxist thought as a special case, since it clashes with the orthodox understanding of Marx that prevailed throughout the 20th Century: as a result of this work, for the first time there is a clear statement of the ontological basis of Marx's reflections. The rediscovery of Marxian thought, as understood by Lukács, represents it as a new front to the multifaceted theoretical building that is underpinned by the theoretical postulations of Marx: as a point of departure, it sets out with the unusual statement that "nobody is involved with the ontology of social being as much as Marx". In the view of Lukács the ontological character of Marxian thought has been obscured by the rigid dogmas that have plagued almost all the currents of Marxism since the death of Lenin. Partly as the result of the influence of Stalinism, and partly owing to the prevalence of gnoseological and even neo-positivist questions, these currents of thought have precluded any discussion of ontology which has been regarded as ideological, idealistic or simply metaphysical. In reality, as Lukács himself suggests, this narrow outlook is nothing more than the legacy of the logico-epistemological reflections that began to dominate the philosophical climate from the 17th Century onwards – including both bourgeois science and Marxism in general. This involved taking energetic steps to combat "any attempt to base philosophical thought around the world of being", and asserting that "any question with regard to being should be treated as non-scientific" (LUKÁCS, 1978:6). In this case, it did not matter if there were deep divisions and divergences between these parameters, either with regard to political positions or underlying philosophical principles. In general terms, the basis of their postulated perspective was hardened, and at the same time diminished, by being undermined in this way, to the extent that they have found themselves trapped within logico-gnoseological discussions. Critics of Marx and his followers (together with other groups involved in a series of philosophical discussions on epistemological questions and the theory of knowledge) have been unable to understand the structural kernel of this thought, when it is articulated in a well grounded set of ontological formulations around the question of social being.

In the light of this, the purpose of the last great work by Lukács is to refute two opposing strands of thought: first, it stubbornly criticizes reductionist interpretations, particularly those originating from Stalinism and the characteristic "epistemologism" of the 20th Century. At the same time, it challenges the most significant objections made by Marx's opponents, by showing that the misunderstanding – or even refusal to understand – the "ontological" core of his reflections, is the outcome of social determinations arising from the socialized configuration of capital¹.

The struggle Lukács undertook against the predominance of logico-epistemological reflections in the field of philosophy and social sciences, entails reconciling the theoretical stance with practical necessity. Going back to the essential ontological problem or rather,

the question of being and the destiny of man, is a crucially important task that is required to counter the way science has been manipulated and made subservient to the world of capital. Hence, the construction of the ontology of social being does not simply originate from the personal interests of the author but is a proposition that places the question of the emancipation of man at the center of his concerns. Undertaking this task requires having a fresh look at a set of questions, both in the practical and theoretical realms, so that renewed thought can be given to the matter from a revised perspective. In the opinion of the Hungarian thinker, a task of this kind presupposes reverting to the problem of the relationship between the practical and theoretical spheres with the aim of establishing this question on a new basis.

135

The new means of conducting a Lukacsian analysis of social being raises serious issues with regard to philosophical thought at new levels. It introduced new dimensions to the wide complexity of human problems – such as ideology, alienation and by implication, politics – which until then had been obscured by the formal-mechanistic or gnoseologico-epistemic properties of a large number of Marxist constructions that prevailed throughout the 20th Century. In the case of ideology, for example, Lukács gives full weight to his determinations – questions that culminate in the assimilation of the issue of politicality. In other words, in the opinion of the Hungarian thinker, his theory embodies a particular kind of ideology. Thus it is worth clarifying the exact nature of the final thoughts of Lukács with a view to understanding his most general determinations in the realm of politics during the last stage of his thinking.

Lukács sets out to analyze and bring to light the real meaning of the complex concept of ideology in Marx, an undertaking that puts him at odds with the immense realm of traditional philosophy and of Marxism itself, which is almost always founded on gnoseological assumptions. The exploration of the issue of ideology in Lukács, does not involve elaborating a “false profile” theory which is widely accepted in the most important philosophical debates on the question. On the contrary, by opposing precisely this aspect of the gnoseological character, his analysis is able to characterize ideology as a means of heightening social awareness and providing an advanced generation with new ideas about the social practices of men. The author believes that “ideology is above all a kind of ideal elaboration of reality which serves to make social and human praxis conscious and capable of action.” (LUKÁCS, 2013: 465). Lukács takes account of the exact meaning of the reasoned determinations of Marx in the *Preface* of his work *Critique of Political Economy*. The passage where the author takes note of his ideas corresponds to the moment when during a discussion of social crises in history, he comments on the radical changes that occur before a revolutionary situation and highlights the duality of the dynamics in play on these occasions: material and “ideological forms”. It is worth recalling here the words of Marx as directly transcribed by the Hungarian thinker:

The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic — in short ideological forms, in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. (Marx, 1971: 9-10)

According to Lukács, these considerations express the core of the Marxian understanding of the phenomenon of ideology: they demonstrate with clarity that the ideological

question is not restricted to the political dimension of social domination and much less takes the form of a discussion circumscribed by problems of agnoseological order. Ideology entails a much broader question that encompasses other important dimensions of sociability such as law, politics, art, philosophy and religion. It is primarily an instrument to settle conflicts arising from within the history of social being. What determines a given set of ideas or ideology is its social function and not its character of falsehood. In this way,

136

The purest of objective truths can be handled as a means of settling conflicts, or rather as an ideology. This is because, since it is an ideology, it in some way constitutes a fixed social property of spiritual forms which owing to its long-established ontological essence, has a social function and is not a type of being. (LUKÁCS, 2013: 564)

The author concludes in a decisive way:

Neither from an individually true or false standpoint nor as a hypothesis, theory etc., does true or false science constitute in itself — or for itself — an ideology: however, it can become an ideology as we have seen. It can only be converted into an ideology after it has been transformed into a theoretical or practical vehicle to tackle and overcome social conflicts, whether they be of a greater or smaller import, factors that determine the destiny of the world or single episodes. (LUKÁCS, 2013: 467)

Ideology can be understood as a social responsibility, since, for instance, it is able to form a wide range of ideas on the basis of which people can decide how to carry out their activities and react to the world with a degree of consciousness that enables them to set about resolving the conflicts of their social praxis. This breaks away from the idea of ideology as a static phenomenon with a well determined pattern of practical human activity, as well as refuting the notion that ideology can be regarded as a particular attribute with determined elements of social practice. Ideology constitutes an ideal occasion for people to carry out practical activities; any reaction or response — whether it is caused by science, philosophy, religion, tradition etc. — is expressed as a way of dealing with problems raised by socio-historical situations. It can become an ideology when it provides the elements and conditions for a consciousness of social practice and the need to govern it and put it into effect.

As a result, “the central determining factor of ideology”:

takes on more disparate forms in the course of history and can be expressed as an interpretation of traditions, religious convictions, scientific theories and methods etc., which however, always represent forms of struggle before anything else. The question to be decided by them was always expressed in social terms “what is to be done?”, and the decisive factor for phatic confrontation is the social substance of “what is to be done?”; the means of providing a foundation for this desire to convey the social praxis remain in a situation where the method, constitution etc always depend on the social *hic et nunc* of the type of struggle, or the question “what is to be done ?” that is contained in it. (LUKÁCS, 2013: 465-6)

It is worth stressing that the meaning of ideology in Lukács thus has a broad character that goes beyond the significance that is popularly attributed to it. It constitutes a particular dimension and is a real attribute of social existence in every human shape and form.

Clearly, ideology is expressed in a distinct way in the course of history and takes on shapes that reflect in a direct manner, the social *here and now*, which is always a historical manifestation of what is experienced by the social being. It would be impossible for

society to function if there were not efficacious means to allow its members to follow (on a voluntary basis) the prescriptive measures needed for its reproduction; these means should thus go beyond merely punitive forms so that these requirements can be fulfilled. An ideology includes the following: being responsible for making individual decisions, coordinating them in people's general lives, making an effort to explain to each member of this society how it is necessary and indispensable for them to judge their own existence and to adapt their decisions to comply with collective interests. In higher forms of social practice, where class conflicts are shown to be decisive factors, ideology begins to be expressed as an ideal apparatus through which people who are embedded in the class system, can confront their social struggles. In the historical manifestation which is peculiar to these social classes, the ideology has a restricted sense or rather, "it consists of men becoming conscious and, with the aid of an ideology, being able to overcome social conflicts, the roots of which must be sought in economic development" (LUKÁCS, 2013: 471).

The discussion that is taken forward by Lukács, ushers in issues of great significance for the ideological phenomenon, such as politics, law, art and philosophy. It is not possible for us to linger long over these last ideological forms, although they should be taken into account, at least as topics, so that the "conceptual" separation outlined by Lukács, can be highlighted. The author designates law and politics *as particular ideological forms*, while in contrast, describing art and philosophy *as pure forms of ideology*. The particular forms are characterized as expressions that are geared towards direct action for the economy and its inherent social structures; this is because the pure forms of ideology cannot have a direct effect on these social dimensions and the unfolding of the functions themselves can only take place in practice through political action or even by means of the law.

It should be noted from the explanations given above that Lukacsian reflections do not bestow autonomy on the political dimension by circumscribing it within a broader dimension of the complex of social being. It does not mean this at all or suggest any downgrading or evidence of secondary importance regarding the subject, but rather an understanding of the locus that emerges from the political dimension within the framework of the human dynamics of mainstream society.

Politics as a particular kind of ideology corresponds to these sets of activities and processed ideas, by means of which people become aware of the conflicts in the whole of society and are willing to confront them. In these terms, the realm of politics constitutes an arena of conflict that corresponds to the dimension of social action which involves (and takes place in) the entire social formation.

These hasty considerations are not enough to arrive at an understanding of the full extent of Lukács' conclusions about the problem. When characterizing the issue of politics in his work, it should be borne in mind what connotations the whole of human activity had for Lukács, and how this was the result of a teleological positing. The author thinks a distinction should be drawn between primary and secondary teleological positings. In the social activity of superior practices in society, human actions are not only aimed at setting in motion the causal nexus of nature but also, in particular, of acquiring an awareness of other individualities. The objective is to ensure that people are in practice responsible for their decisions and behave in the necessary way to obtain the desired results. Lukács aimed to design practical human action, the goal of which is to give priority to the consciousness of individuals as a subordinate teleological positing. Politics of course, plays a part in the realm of the subordinate teleological activities.

The legality of higher social practices originates from the singular acts of individuals themselves in so far as the decisions between alternative positions of individuals in their singular practices, sets in motion other general social “determinations” which transcend the immediate occasion of the decisions. This leads to “other structural alternatives of an analogous structure and gives rise to a causal series where legality ends by going beyond the intentions contained in the alternatives”(LUKÁCS, 1995: 618; LUKÁCS, 2013: 346)². Once it has been constituted, the totality of the socially active tendencies produces a “processual” dynamic which appears before men as a set of causal nexuses; this gives rise to problems to which people seek answers so that they can create the conditions needed for the reproduction of their lives. As a result of this dynamic, there arises a causality in the social processes that has a character that is distinct from natural causality: it is a question of a “tendential legality” which is caused and set in motion by singular acts of individuals; this in turn acts in a retroactive way within the social network itself and appears as the driving-force of the teleological positings of men — in this sense, it is social causality.

In summary, the most general trends in the economy are determined as the combination of a myriad of singular teleological positings which are put into effect during the history of the progress of mankind. One must italicize the word ‘singular’ here because the process does not have any *telos*, or final destination where it can drag along its individualities with it. It is the outcome of singular teleological positings that are accepted by the individuals; moreover, through their immediate practical decisions, they are responsible for steering the process, since they are at the same time determined by the totality of the complex of the social being that is constituted in this way.

In Lukács’ understanding, the political praxis is a teleological positing that modifies the “phenomenic” world, which is the *locus* of the conflict par excellence. The political action is the driving-force for alternative positions through the essence of the social processes and has the clear aim of transforming this essence.

The phenomenic world where the conflict is unfolded, is shifting its alternative positions by means of a social essentiality while, at the same time, its aim is to change the essence itself. In addition, the essential relationship and phenomenon which Lukács seeks to retrieve from the Hegelian — Marxian tradition in so far as it establishes a real *tertium datur* regarding the question of ideology, provides evidence that there does not exist the material basis of a mechanical determinism with regard to a superstructure. On the other hand, since human activities are not carried out purely on the basis of the will of a singular individual or group of individuals, (or assembly of groups), there is a contradictory relationship between need and possibility [the teleological positings] of a political kind, that expresses and renews the “shaped and moulded work of men”. (VAISMAN, 1989: 426-7)

This thesis is directly involved with the problem of the dialectical relationship between essence and phenomenon: both the essence (tendential legality) and phenomena found in the social fabric, form the same basis and are interwoven and interact through a determination of reflection [*Reflexionsbestimmung*]. Individual acts which have a field of action that is the immediacy of the phenomenic world, engender the “legal tendencies” of the economic processes and at the same time, produce a gamut of determinations and particular events that are characteristic of the historico-social *hic et nunc*. (LUKÁCS, 2013: 491-6)

In Lukács there is no willingness to identify the essence with the necessity; this kind of categorization would endow his determinations with a rigid and absolute determinist character, — a position which is diametrically opposed to his analysis of the historical

necessity category. From the Lukacsian perspective, it is not possible to draw a distinction between essence and phenomenon by only taking the sphere of necessity as a reference-point because:

139

The sphere of contents that men can put to themselves as the aim of the *praxis*, is determined — as horizon — by this necessity of development of the essence, but precisely while the horizon, as field for maneuver of the possible real teleological positings within it [the horizon], not by an inevitable general determinism of all practical content. Within this field, every teleological positing presents itself as a form of an alternative, which is the only one possible. Thus it ends up by excluding all predeterminants and the necessity of the essence, in an obligatory way, assumes the form of possibility to human individuals. But in addition, it should be stressed that the positings, in so far as they are determined by the development of the essence, are not simple mediations which in following the path of what should occur, really take place in compliance with the necessity. On the contrary, these take place through both direct and indirect means in accordance with decisions about the essence, while they help to determine the “how” of this phenomonic world, in which, without this incarnation, the essence could not any longer attain its full reality and exist-in-itself. It is for this reason, as we have seen, that this phenomonic form is not only reality in general but extremely concrete historical reality and the teleological positings which are thus effected, are also able to act as the concrete path of their own essence. But this is not in the sense of being able to close it, divert it etc for ever or even less to give it another kind of content. Rather by intervening in its concrete phenomonic form, they give this path a kind of inequality (one can think of the wide diversity between English and French capitalism which is glanced at above). (LUKÁCS, 1995: 425-6; 2013: 475)

Necessity is in a close relationship with the field of possibilities produced by essence and it is precisely in this dimension that people’s decisions have an impact on the essence and determine it. The relationship between essence and phenomenon unfolds in the form of a reciprocal determination. In this way, the teleological positings can have a direct influence on the nexus itself of the phenomonic sphere and at the same time, play an active role in the determination of its essence and hence are not simply its passive outcome.

On the basis of these fundamental determinations, Lukács concludes that

The decisive qualitative difference is thus shown by the fact that the tendential character of legality that is ontologically founded on human/teleological positings and its affirmation as a tendency — with inevitable fluctuations — is expressed in the general structure of “if ... then”. The non-teleological character of the combined process also clarifies this “if ... then” nature of the legality of the essence. If its manifestations are those of a “finalistic” process aimed at its own end, there cannot be either deviations or paths of development without an exit. (LUKÁCS, 1995: 328; 2013: 368)

Politics thus appears as a practice that in the last instance, is geared towards a social totality; however, it can only act on this totality and on the overarching tendential characteristics of this totality, by acting within the plane of immediacy which sets in motion “the social phenomonic world as a terrain for changed acts — that is, to conserve or destroy what exists in each case; nonetheless, the *praxis* that is triggered in this way, is inevitably driven in a mediated way by the essence as well, and also has its essence in view in a similarly mediated way.” (VAISMAN, 1989: 502-3).

It is worth sounding a note of caution: Lukács’ ideas cannot be regarded, from the

standpoint of a narrowly “practicist” character of politics, as “pure mindless pragmatism, bereft of ideas”, which only attaches importance to immediate practical success. The ideological substance of political action is decisive and the underlying reasons that determine activities in the field of politics play a crucial role. By issuing these warnings, Lukács seeks to avoid the risk of running to the opposite extreme of denying that gnoseology forms the basis of ideology. This entails showing how the ideal course of political activity, (or in other words, the ideal apprehension of the objective social nexus of the processual fabric of society), is a decisive factor in the political dimension. Two criteria are of fundamental importance for all political action: effectiveness and duration. (LUKÁCS, 2013: 505-7)

140

With regard to the first criterion, the famous saying of Lenin that “the chain is only as strong as its weakest link” illustrates the meaning that must be given to efficacy as a parameter of political activities. Through this saying, Lenin intended to characterize practical action in the political sphere and show that it was able to throw light on the “nodal point” of social tendencies, the implementation of which has a “decisive effect” on the way the more general processes of society unfold. The author gives a significant example to explain his conception. This example is taken from Lenin’s own political activities during the Bolshevik Revolution. Once the objective possibility of the revolution had been defined, the cunning of Lenin lay in his ability to find the “link in the chain” that was able to allay the anxieties of the working-class and peasant farmers, by making both groups decisive “agents” in the revolutionary processes of Czarist Russia. The catchphrase that was coined by him, “peace, land and bread”, effectively reflects the desire for peace of the workers and the clamour for land on the part of the peasant farmers. In the terms of Lukacs, the brilliance of Lenin’s insight goes beyond being an ideal kind of political propaganda because it recognizes the backcloth of the objective tendencies and possibilities of his time, and does not feature in any way as a simple sentimental appeal or mere emotional inducement aimed at the feelings of his people. It is an effective recognition of reality and a clear understanding of the nexus required and set in motion to attain a secure basis for the concrete transformation of his society. This example clearly shows how the criterion of efficacy corresponds to the immediate dimension of político-ideological practice, “something which is said to be a real conflict caused by factors that are, in the last analysis, economic, and can be confronted and overcome by political means”(LUKÁCS, 2013: 506).

Efficacy does not mean the immediate change of essence — this only takes place in exceptional cases — on the contrary, it is hard for this to be recognized clearly in the real course of historical evolution, since it is only learnt when the full range of its effects are set in motion and displayed in the course of time. This factor returns us to the second criterion mentioned here: duration. Duration as an effect of political activities should not be taken to mean a lapse of a period of time when understood in strictly quantitative terms. This criterion involves taking account of the unfoldings caused by teleological acts. Moreover, it is able to act through the concrete tendencies of the social dynamic and have repercussions that, to a significant degree, determine the course of the development of the essence. In other words, duration involves being able to set in motion the processual nexus of the fabric of society leading to a chain of consequences which serve to maintain societies in their current form. Alternatively, when confronted with the opportunities existing there, they act by transforming this sociability and giving it a new course of direction.

It should be stressed that there is a complete lack of anything of a voluntarist character

in these political considerations of Lukács. Every political activity entails the recognition – although this may not be fully expressed – and the effective operation of an objective social nexus. There is no space for utopia in the arena of these practical acts because this operational sphere involves objective opportunities that are concretely positioned by the social dynamics of a determined historico-social context. In these terms, every revolution is not a mere fulfilment of a utopia but a causal nexus that is present in the social fabric that is set in motion and leads to essential tendencies, a new course of action and a new orientation.

141

When thinking about revolution in the case of Lukács, it is necessary to take account of both the “objective maturation” of its possibility of transformation and the “subjective maturation” of this process. The subjective factor in the large processes of political change are of great significance in Lukacsian thought. In his understanding, the changes caused by it are not in some way mere mechanical effects posited as the necessary unfolding of the economic forces of production. They thus open the doors to the transformative action of individualities and for the “subversive” praxis of individuals. From this standpoint, as Lukács does well to warn us, “the great world-historical lesson of revolutions is that social being is not altered but is modified in a reiterated way” (LUKÁCS, 2013: 524). For this reason, although in the dynamics of the social process, development occurs in the economic sphere, it can create conditions and situations that are in reality revolutionary. However, they fail, in an immediate and necessary way to produce the subjective factor that is needed to carry out the revolution effectively. In Lukács, there is not a unilinear determinism, which underlines the importance of a historico-social evolution through – and this is of no small importance – revolutionary material and social conditions. However, this can only come about and be achieved in real terms through making a direct intervention and obtaining the right conditions by means of the “subjectivities”. The subjective factor, which is so dear to Lukács in his reflections on political activities, is expressed in a more significant manner by means of the alternative character of all human activity. In other words, it is always shown as a key moment in itself, in so far as it sets in motion human activities that always depend on a group of individuals to take direct action in their social practice.

In the light of these established points, an argument can be made out in response to those who claim a) that the thinking of Lukács lacks any systematic or precise reflections in the area of politics, b) that the traits revealed by the author in his *Ontology* fail to provide a theory of the State and c) that the author fails to provide an autonomous treatment of issues about “politics” as an essential human dimension. The reply to this is that these are not lacunas or inconsistencies in his thinking but rather a new way of determining the territory of politics within the ontology of social being.

This factor is revealed in an even clearer way in the observations made by the author about the historical character of politicality. The analysis of the differences between the unfolding of politics in the sociability of capital, compared with previous social formations, makes clear how the dimension of politicality is rooted in the historico-social *hic et nunc*:

Capitalism is the first economic formation where the process of reproduction does not have a link of this kind with things of the past and in which – for the first time in history – the ends defined by the teleological positings that pervade the political praxis, (according to its political condition), cannot be geared towards restoring some past but rather, must be aimed at establishing some kind of future. At all events, to start with, this only takes place in accordance with the objective tendency – which is still unknowable.

Strictly speaking, the ideological expression also seeks, at this time, to restore the past state. It is thus in the ideological grounding of these positings that the false consciousness that is displayed in them acquires importance. This is because in reality they do not wish to return to an earlier period when their own social development flourished but are concerned with a mode of social being conceived as “ideal”, traces of which can be found in traditions and literature. This was the condition of ideology in the radical heretical movements of the Middle Ages, and also constituted the ideologies of the great bourgeois revolutions of the 17th and 18th Centuries in England and France respectively [*i.e. the English Civil War (1642-51) and the French Revolution (1789-99)]. The fact that the latter was the first not to be based on religion but on the secular world of classical antiquity, represented a first step towards a phenomenic mode that is closer to the reality of the new orientation of the political praxis. (Another kind of transition entails turning one’s back on history through the conception of being aimed at the future, as a fulfilment of the age of enlightenment) In effect, it should not be forgotten that when Christianity was dominant in Europe, the past also featured as an ideal state, from the Greek myths to some kind of future. However, the past acted as a model to give renewed force to actions in the present – which definitely did not take place in a way that was independent of the longlasting supremacy of a socially-conditioned praxis, aimed at reviving the past. The deep roots of this mentality which was mediated in a socio-economic way, was inclined, in everyday life, to attribute the origins of the past to a moral-spiritual superiority from the mere fact that people tend to give more respect to an heir descended from great ancestors than to a *self-made man*. Although this representation is being undermined by economic development every day, it still exists and in several ways exerts an influence on the whole of ideology through a “conception of the world” based on everyday life. (LUKÁCS, 2013: 517-8)

142

The historical character of history, the “motility of its processual dynamic”, is not only revealed in the great revolutionary events of universal history. These transformations can occur through the unfolding of certain social formations, even though they are less apparent than those that occur in events that radically alter society. As Lukács says:

Naturally this change does not only involve shifting from one formation to another. In the course of bringing about a formation, a gradual evolution seems to follow while the framework remains substantially the same; however, this appearance of stability is deceptive. As a result of these gradual changes within a “formation”, changes of a largely qualitative kind can take place in the framework with increasing frequency and on more important occasions. Hence, the transformation of the feudal structure very often begins, (depending on its external shape), as a struggle within feudalism that makes use of means that are overwhelmingly feudal, and only attains its genuine form in subsequent stages. Thus the capitalist separation and empowerment of bourgeois society is mainly expressed as achieving a *laissez faire* system, which would subsequently provide the conditions for a strong intervention by the State – one thinks of the *New Deal* –, which at all events, has nothing in common with previous ways of binding the State to society etc. In addition, in the case of these kinds of change, any attempt at a “formalist systematization” leads to errors. The only way of understanding the alterations is in a concrete ontological-social form, as comprising determined moments of the great process in which the inner substance is formed by overcoming natural obstacles, and the growing socialization of society etc. (LUKÁCS, 2013: 515)

The contrast between the effectiveness of different capitalist policies, as well as the previous social formations (such as the alterations that are evident in the heart of the capitalist society itself), can help bring out the duality of the political dimension. On the

one hand, it always involves a structural change in the socio-economic hallmarks of a society where a formation offers politics something new. On the other hand, despite these transformations, its principle and more fundamental ontology remains unaltered.

143

It is necessary to break away from these prejudices that presuppose there can exist some policy that can preserve, without any alterations, decisive traits of its essence from the beginning until now or that the policy can be simply a period of each concrete structure and not be applied in any way to other structures. (LUKÁCS, 2013: 511)

The dialectic outlined by Lukács between the universality of principles based on given ontological dimensions of social being and the process of historical transformation, is set out by means of Marxian “reasonable abstractions”. Discussing universal principles in general terms, must be undertaken cautiously to avoid universalizing “essences” in an inflexible way. Above all, the Hungarian thinker warns us, “it concerns an abstraction which although constituted from its own process of being”, cannot be classified as the process itself. The “general policy” must be understood in the same way as that analyzed by Marx’s famous 1857 *Introduction*, when he describes production in general as a “reasonable abstraction”, in which:

the primordial, ontological moments of the process are the economic structure, its transformation and its continuity. Hence, this “reasonable abstraction” must never be judged or applied in accordance with its abstract or logical features etc.; before anything else, the whole generalized criterion is always the continuity of the real process itself. (LUKÁCS, 2013: 512)

In summary, the universality of the principles of the policy can only be duly established through an analysis of the socio-historical reality of human achievements. As Lukács points out in several parts of his *Ontology*, it concerns a process of continuity within discontinuity, and of permanence within change. The political dimension of social being is always processual; its effectiveness relies on the responsibility of man to man to keep it as an essential human attribute without necessarily involving the inflexibility of his essential human traits.

The questions considered above make us aware that an analysis of the politicality of Lukács cannot, to some extent, be reduced to the more general determinations of the categories involved in this issue. It requires reflection on a series of other passages and explanations in Lukács, where the policy is treated in its due *locus*, which might be the *hic et nunc* of the processes of social interaction. The question thus opens up at least two other ancillary matters of extreme importance: first, the problem of how men can take practical steps to overcome the sense of alienation caused by the sociability of capital; second, and to a large extent directly linked to the first, it involves an analysis of the political writings of Lukács, where the author directly reverts to thoughts about the historico-social situation of his time.

The first of these, as already mentioned, seems to be a direct result of key issues raised by Lukács in his pages on the problem of revolutionary action – the specific domain of politics – with the problem of overcoming the alienation and reification caused by capitalist sociability. Without attempting to evade the problem and even to give a more detailed account of the question of alienation in Lukács, for the purposes of this study, it is enough to give a general outline of the characterization given by the author in his work.

In explaining the problem, Lukács refers to a significant passage in *Theories of Surplus*

Value, in which Marx confronts the thoughts of David Ricardo with those of the French economist Sismondi. The latter who adopts the usual stance of a romantic anti-capitalist, “contrasts the well-being of the individual with social needs regarded in their totality” [OSS II, 561]. Marx, in opposition to Sismondi, supports the scientific character of Ricardian thought where the core of his outlook on the question of economic prospects can be found in his stress on the primacy of “production for the sake of production”. Quoting directly from the Marxian text, the author highlights the following:

144

It cannot be thought that although this development of the capacities of the “male” gender initially occur at the cost of a large number of human individuals and certain classes of men, it will thus overcome this antagonism and coincide with the development of the “singular” individual, or rather, the higher development of individuality and thus only be achieved by a historical process during which individuals are sacrificed. (MARX *apud* LUKÁCS, 2013: 580)

In the opinion of Lukács, Marx really demonstrates how “the continuous development of productive forces leads directly to the growth of human capacities while at the same time, it can, in the process, sacrifice individuals (as well as entire classes)” (MARX *apud* LUKÁCS, 2013: 580). The maximum degree of human capacities historically accomplished involves a corresponding non-fulfilment of individualities or a contradictory fulfilment with regard to the potential of the human gender. In the final analysis, alienation can be described as an antithesis between development and making the capacity and development of the personality possible.

The discussion of alienation raises the question of the relationship between the individual and gender which is addressed by Lukács on the basis of concepts of “gendering in-itself” and “gendering for-itself”. The spontaneous process of “objectivations” carried out by people in their social activities leads to a “gendering in-itself” of man which is radically different from the mere gender change that is the characteristic of nature. The formation of this “gendering in-itself” – which can be defined as a growing human socialization combined with its iterative processes – does not involve the most consistent development of individualities. On the contrary, from an economic standpoint, the development of the former occurs to the detriment of the “humanization” of individuals. In other words, the acts of “objectivation” create the conditions for supplanting the gender change of nature, although from a social standpoint this only leads to human “gendering in-itself”. The production of “gendering for-itself”, which supersedes this developmental ambiguity, depends on the practical acts of people that they accept in their everyday lives.

By employing these strange terms, Lukács reverts to the problem of shifting from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of liberty. This is regarded as the beginning of the true story of the human responsibilities of man, as sketched out in general terms by Marx in *Das Kapital*. It is exactly in the realm where the conditions are created for the implementation of “gendering for-itself” that Lukács believes is where revolutionary political activities are situated. These are practical acts that can lead to the effective emancipation of individualities.

It is worth noting the observations made by the author in the final section of the last chapter of his voluminous work, where he seeks to point out practical courses of action for overcoming different types of alienation. In this passage the author suggests that:

Without a surrender to the “cause” of the social objective, however insignificant it may be, man

remains fixed within the particularity of his own nature and is defenceless when faced with any tendency towards alienation. However, the more he surrenders to a “cause” such as an elevated principle above his own particularity, he will never operate as a universal principle which is abstract in itself, since what he is capable of doing as an individual is the result of a duplicated dialectic. However intense, pure and selfless etc is the surrender of the man to the “cause”, at the same time, (in an indissoluble way despite all its contradictoriness) what this cause represents is really social development. (LUKÁCS, 2013: 782)

It is clear that when expressed in these terms, the alternative “cause of a social objective” still seems like a generic demarcation where its nature remains indeterminate. The opposite of this (as expressed here by the author) is the need to highlight the fact that the human social praxis is a decisive means of overcoming its own alienation. The devotion to a “social cause” involves, to some extent, abandoning the restriction of its own gender while, to some extent, confronting the individual with his/her own gender. The modifying phrase “to some extent” is added here because the way these causes are constituted and what they include, are key factors in determining if this surrender to a specific cause can serve to uproot people from their “particularization”, or if, depending on what they include, they may even lead them to old or new kinds of alienation. It is enough here to think of the “literary extreme case” of Don Quixote, where the surrender to anachronistic causes, now superseded by new historical currents, lead to a tragic-comic situation. In the opinion of the Hungarian philosopher:

when an authentically progressive “cause”, in social terms, results in an authentic surrender in someone, he behaves as if he, (as an individual too), is able to establish an organic link with the big questions regarding the development of human gender. As a result, despite all the problematic ethical phenomena analyzed here — it has become possible to find a plausible way of overcoming “particularity”. Hence a clear direction for the suppression of being alienated can be found in these movements of interaction between the singular person and the gender, without precluding the rise of new species of estrangement. In contrast, a cause that is fundamentally retrograde will necessarily contain in itself an inclination to maintain the old alienations because what it wants objectively is to conserve the old forms of plunder and oppression — with or without the corresponding “reforms” of his era. (LUKÁCS, 2013: 784)

At the end of his account, Lukács considers how an authentic social cause is something that can lead people to devote themselves to the “cause” of humanity. With regard to this, the author states that “socialism has a peculiar position within this complex of problems”(LUKÁCS, 2013: 784).

Insofar as scientific knowledge of reality is converted into the principle of the praxis, and his objective is to restore man to his true state by freeing him from the distortions caused by socio-economic factors, he determines the conduct of life of the men who accept these aims. It is as if the tendency to overcome their own particularity — no matter how far this occurs in a conscious way — is stronger in these men than the overall average. Naturally this stance does not protect either “singular” men or groups from theoretical errors, moral waywardness etc. However, although at least some features of the basic stance with regard to the cause remain active, there will arise patterns of ideas and behavior that despite all the deviations from the correct image of Marxist socialism, will be left at a socially higher human level, both as a result of bourgeois irrationalism and as a bourgeois manipulation. But viewed from the perspective of our current problem, they will in fact be superior from the standpoint of the “cause”, as well as when regarded as a human agent. (LUKÁCS, 2013: 785)

Whereas capital intensifies “particularization” as the supreme fulfilment of individualities – the individualism that is characteristic of the so-called post-modern societies – in Lukács, the effective accomplishment of the human takes place in an opposite sense. The individual is always potentially more individual but has a fuller range of possibilities when he comes close to human “gendering”, abandons his “self-centredness” and “particularization” “and rises to the level of social forces created by gender.

146

Matters related to this whole problem can be found in the pages on ontology in Lukács. The second additional issue referred to above, leads to other key moments in his late theoretical production – his political writings. In particular, there is a work of great importance written at the same time as the composition of *Ontology: The Process of Democratization*³. This work portrays

a mature Lukács who is aware of the problems resulting from his intended transitions; this is a Lukács who on returning to the writings of Marx himself (in which the links between the political sphere and what is strictly speaking the social sphere, are restored to their due genetic *loci*), was able to stumble into an analysis of the ontological nature of politics. The thesis, or rather the democratization of everyday life, supports a desperate attempt at the end of his life, to revive the memories of the advice, which he himself had received in Hungary in 1919, and thus reform the “socialism that existed at that time”, by overcoming and rectifying the distortions introduced by Stalin and the Stalinists. (VAISMAN, 2009: 177)

Here the issue of “politicality” is not found to be restricted to its general outlines but enters directly into the field of practical action as an understanding and search for answers to the great problems of the time – in this case, closely linked to the dilemmas of real socialism. Hence it should be underlined that, at first sight, the two orders of ideas found in Lukács, or rather, the most general considerations about the place of politics in the framework of activities of social being and the direct practical action that is a feature of his political writings, are never entirely separate. The political writings of Lukács seem to keep this decisive feature which involves seeking an understanding of the real opportunities that can be found in immediate phenomenic manifestations. Moreover, by taking place in this “immediacy”, it seeks the means to make changes and introduce new guiding principles to the essential tendencies that order and provide the parameters for the unfolding of the social order in force.

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Notes

147

1. "If we carefully analyze the recurring theories of the ruling political, military and economic classes of our time, it will be discovered that, whether consciously or unconsciously, they are determined by neo-positivist systems of thought".
2. Lukács characterizes this process as social causality: "Every social event arises from individual teleological positings, but in itself is of a purely causal character. The globalization of society is a causal process that has its own normativity but is never objectively geared towards achieving its end purposes". (LUKÁCS, 1995) (Ed. Bras. LUKÁCS, 2007)
3. The work was published for the first time in Portuguese in a collection compiled by José Paulo Netto

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