

# Lukacs and the Marxist Criticism of Sociology

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This paper is situated in the context of three inter-related arguments. The first and central issue is epistemological, concerning the grounds upon which one theory of 'point of view' claims to be superior to others, to represent 'the truth', to be 'scientific', to produce 'knowledge'. The last decade has seen the emergence, within academic sociology on the one hand and Marxism on the other, of two radically opposed positions. The former can best be called 'agnosticism': the implicit relativism of much sociology is taken to its extreme on the grounds that its traditional dilemma is insoluble. If it is true, then it is false, since it would then be an absolute truth; if it is false, then it is true, since relativism itself would be relative. All that can be done is to accept it. The result is that no claims at all can be made about the superiority of one point of view over another; this seems to me to be a position implicitly shared by ethnomethodology (where it appears as 'indifference' to 'practical sociological reasoning') and by much allegedly 'phenomenological' sociology and by some forms of symbolic interactionism. Although all these approaches might offer their own prescriptions for sociological activity, they make no attempt to repair the relativist dilemma, either ignoring it or more or less explicitly accepting it.<sup>1</sup> Juxtaposed to this position, we find within Marxism, and particularly in the work of Althusser, the claim to be a rigorous science, with developed criteria of scientificity that clearly distinguish it from other ways of seeing the world and establish its superiority as a science.

My starting point is a dissatisfaction with both positions. There is, I believe, another alternative, Marxist and 'dialectical' in the proper sense of the word, the basis of which can be found in the work of the early Lukacs, especially in History and Class Consciousness, and which is rarely elaborated in a convincing and systematic way. This leads to the second argument, taking place within Marxism and concerning the nature of that work, which has been attacked precisely for its 'unscientific' and even 'anti-scientific' status. I will take Gareth Stedman-Jones' (1971) criticism as representative of this attack; it displays, I believe, a fundamental misreading of Lukacs, against which I want to offer a reading based on the work of Merleau-Ponty (1974a) developed, unfortunately often chaotically, by the group of writers around the journal Telos.<sup>2</sup>

The third argument concerns the practical consequences of Althusser's Marxism. Over the last few years, a number of articles and books have appeared criticising sociology from an Althusserian point of view,<sup>3</sup> all displaying to a greater or lesser extent certain undesirable tendencies: a tendency to misread what is being criticised (as Stedman-Jones misreads Lukacs) and thus not to criticise at all;<sup>4</sup> and a tendency to reject in toto the criticised position. This is undesirable on a theoretical level because - as I will try to show - Marxism's super-

iority lies not in its rejection of 'bourgeois knowledge' or 'ideology', but in encompassing and going beyond it; on a more immediate level, it is undesirable for its consequences in theoretical debate, 'ideological struggle'.<sup>5</sup>

My procedure will be as follows: to begin with, I will outline the agnostic position through a discussion and criticism of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. Mannheim, like other traditional theorists in the area, was aware of, and attempted to avoid the dangers of agnosticism, and the nature of his failures provides much of the strength behind the modern agnostic position. Further, Mannheim provides a useful comparison to Lukacs, with whom he might at first be thought to share a number of positions: he claims for the sociology of knowledge a superiority similar to that which Lukacs claims for Marxism, and each bases his claim on the nature of a specific social group which, because of its position in society, is able to produce a more adequate knowledge of that society than other social groups. In Mannheim's case, of course, it is the intellectuals, in Lukacs' the proletariat.

I will then present an interpretation of Lukacs that attempts to establish that, on the one hand, he avoids Mannheim's failures and robs agnosticism of its main justifications, and that on the other hand, his epistemology both foreshadows and goes beyond that underlying Stedman-Jones' argument and modern 'scientific' Marxism. Finally, I will attempt to outline the procedures involved in a Marxist criticism of sociology based on Lukacs' work.

These are by no means minor tasks and in the space of a paper I can make no claim to go beyond schematic arguments; in particular, I offer no systematic critique of Althusser, relying rather on a number of specific implicit and explicit criticisms although I will try to indicate the direction of a more systematic criticism. Unfortunately, the position for which I will be arguing suffers precisely from a surfeit of over-general schematisation. My justification for much of what is to come is less its intrinsic merit, but rather that, if understood properly, it enables the definition of some very specific and important tasks to which Marxist theory must address itself.

## From Mannheim to Agnosticism

The criticism which moves from Mannheim to agnosticism is really quite simple. According to Mannheim, the sociology of knowledge replaces relativism with 'relationism'; it appears when different points of view have invalidated each other by revealing each other's social roots and consequent ideological characteristics. It offers the only way out of the impasse by replacing the notion of absolute or eternal truth by one of a permanently developing truth. Thus:

'Relationism, as we use it, states that every assertion can only be relationally formulated.'

<sup>5</sup> Later in this connection, see Ranciere (1974); I will return to this point later.

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the clearest account of the agnostic argument can be found in Phillips (1974); the agnostic criticism of Mannheim, with which I deal later, is combined with similar criticisms of Mannheim and Mills.

<sup>2</sup> See in particular Arato (1972a, b); Feenberg (1971, 1972); Piccone (1972)

<sup>3</sup> See in particular Hindess (1972, 1973a, 1973b) and Hirst (1973)

<sup>4</sup> Hindess (1973a, b) are particularly clear examples of such misreading.

It becomes relativism only when it is linked with the older, static ideal of eternal, un-perspectivistic truths independent of the subjective experience of the observer, and when it is judged by the alien idea of absolute truth' (Mannheim 1972 p270)

Having asserted the 'perspectivistic' nature of truth, he still attempts to distinguish between at least more or less adequate knowledge, if not between truth and falsity. The criticism is straightforward: such a distinction is impossible given Mannheim's starting point. For Mannheim, more adequate knowledge is achieved by synthesising different points of view into an ever-widening totality of knowledge, and he suggests two ways in which this might be done. In the first place:

'What has been correctly but differentially perceived by the two perspectives must be understood in the light of differences in the structure of these varied modes of perception. An effort must be made to find a formula for translating the results of one into those of the other and to discover a common denominator for these varying perspectivistic insights. Once such a common denominator has been found, it is possible to separate the necessary differences from the arbitrarily conceived and mistaken elements which here too should be considered as errors' (p270)

Alternatively, we might achieve a synthesis through recognising the situational determinants in opposing or differing points of view, and, as a consequence, neutralising them.

Each alternative implies some 'neutral' area (in the second case, apparently immediately visible) between or within different points of view - an implicit 'real world' against which 'situational' determinants can be identified, or a neutral language which enables the same result. This implication remains despite his attempt to situate 'superior knowledge' in the perspective of intellectuals as a group: they are simply able to see more of the real world than others, or have easier access to the neutral language.

In this way, 'truth' and 'error' creep back, and having gone this far, it is no surprise that Mannheim reaches the point of advocating 'a direct

observation of the facts' (p256) in order to choose between different points of view. This is in direct contradiction to the earlier assertion of the perspectivistic nature of all truth which, moreover, Mannheim has taken to its logical conclusion in asserting that in an important way, 'facts' are constituted by conceptual structures (p91).<sup>6</sup> Other formulations - such as the argument that the superior point of view is the more fruitful or comprehensive of the alternatives - are even less satisfactory: the earlier formulations would imply that the terms can have no absolute meaning apart from the perspectives in which they occur, and they will of course have different meanings in different perspectives. Thus it appears that we cannot escape relativism, or agnosticism.

## Lukacs

The Lukacs of History and Class Consciousness is self-evidently concerned with the same problems as Mannheim, but they are answered in a less obvious way. It is not an easy work and it is not made any easier by the intrinsic difficulties of Lukacs' dialectical form of argument; at times his arguments are confused, and a great number of assumptions remain implicit. Superficially, he appears to reproduce Mannheim's central contradiction, insisting that all knowledge is rooted in its social context, but then arguing that it is possible to choose between different points of view, implying the existence of trans-contextual criteria. Stedman-Jones (1971 p47) puts forward what is perhaps the most common interpretation when he sums up Lukacs' 'startling but elegant' reply to relativism as:

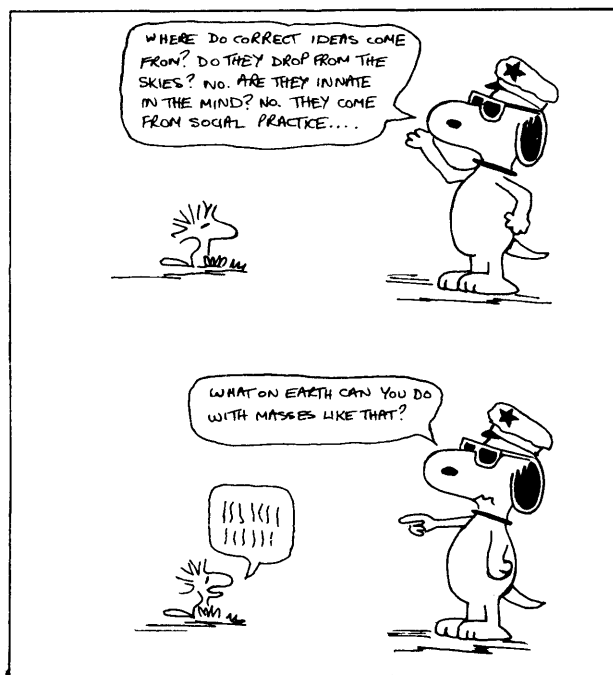
'... all truth is relative to the standpoint of individual classes; the proletariat is by its essence a universal class; its subjectivity is universal; but a universal subjectivity can only be objective'

I want to argue that this formulation is perhaps the least elegant and that Lukacs' position is in fact considerably more complex, often implicit in his practice rather than explicit in his argument. He suggests that there are a number of inter-related features which enable Marxism to avoid relativism and ensure its superiority over other forms of knowledge, one of which is a by no means simple relation between Marxist theory and the proletariat. I will deal in turn with these features: Marxism's grasp of the totality, its ability to transcend the dualisms of bourgeois thought, and finally its relationship to the proletariat implied in the notion of praxis.

### (a) The totalising movement of Marxism

Lukacs describes the notion of 'totality' as the most fundamental distinguishing feature of Marxism; whether or not he is correct is less important for present purposes than what he means by 'totality', and what is involved in Marxism's grasp of the totality. There is (or was) no shortage of bourgeois theories of 'society as a whole', so, self-evidently, there is more to it than that. It becomes apparent later in the book that 'totality' in the framework of Lukacs' thought is related to a more familiar Marxist claim concerning its method of producing knowledge. This production involves a totalising movement, which, in relation to praxis, he calls an 'aspiration towards totality' (p198), the first step

<sup>6</sup> Although he is always careful to avoid a thoroughgoing idealism.



of which is the penetration by thought of immediate 'external' appearance - the penetration of reification and the revelation of the determinations behind what bourgeois thought takes to be the given 'facts'. To take an oversimplified example, bourgeois economics takes as given the 'facts' of price and attempts to explain their fluctuations in terms of supply and demand (equally 'given' as 'facts'). Marxism, on the other hand, is able to grasp the way in which these 'facts' came to be in the first place - to grasp the origins of commodity fetishism, the way in which human relationships manifest themselves as relationships between things (price, precisely, expressing a relationship between things).

This movement beyond the immediate leads to the revelation of hidden, 'internal' relationships - relationships unavailable to immediate perception. To continue the example (and the oversimplification): as it reveals the nature of the wages system and the origin of prices in labour, Marxism at the same time reveals the foundations of social classes and, beyond that, through a grasp of the way in which the mode of production reproduces itself, it reveals those relationships that are usually subsumed by the terms 'base' and 'superstructure'. In this way, each immediately evident 'fact' is understood not in terms of its independent existence, or in terms of an external causal relationship; rather its existence is understood as the product of a number of relationships - a structure of relationships; in Lukacs' terms, its immediacy is mediated, and these relationships are in turn mediated by others. The 'totalising movement' of Marxist thought is precisely the steady exploration of these increasingly wider, more complex and more fundamental relations, and the discovery of these structural forms is the production of knowledge - there is clearly a variety of realist epistemology underlying Lukacs' understanding of the Marxist analysis of social formations, one which sees access to the underlying structures of the social world as a task of theoretical construction.

Thus what appears to bourgeois thought as 'real' - eg price - is shown to be abstract - ie isolated from the totality of relationships that determine its existence - and what appears to be abstract - eg social classes (since we cannot point to an existing object which is a class) - is shown to be real - ie a concrete determination of external appearances. This seems to follow closely Marx's own methodological statement in the introduction to the Grundrisse, frequently quoted in part by Lukacs, but worth quoting in full:

'... it seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete, with the real precondition, thus to begin, in economics, with e.g. the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production. However, on closer examination, this proves false. The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed. These classes in turn are an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest. E.g. wage labour, capital etc.... The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception.' (Marx 1973 pp100-101)

In other words, we start and finish with 'reality', the 'concrete' (or perhaps better, we start with 'reality' and finish with the 'concrete'), reconstructing it, in the process of theorising, through the relationships into which we place the immediately appearing phenomena. There is a significant difference here between Mannheim and Lukacs: apart from the one qualified assertion noted earlier, Mannheim nowhere investigates what is involved in the 'theoretical construction of reality' - thought remains a reflection of reality from a particular angle. For Lukacs, however, the reconstruction of 'facts' in theory is fundamental:

'... integration into the totality ... does not merely effect our judgment of individual phenomena decisively. But also as a result, the objective structure, the actual content of the individual phenomenon - as individual phenomenon - is changed fundamentally.'

Whereas for Mannheim, differences between theories are differences between points of view on the same 'facts', for Lukacs the differences lie in the extent and method of the reconstruction of the 'facts' and there is thus no road by which he can return to advocating a direct examination of the facts. In this case at least he escapes Mannheim's contradiction and, moreover, escapes without the implicit acceptance of agnosticism - the view that the 'real world' (if there is one) remains unknowable. The totalising movement of Marxism, the ability to understand and penetrate reification and grasp the way in which the facts we are reconstructing are produced as facts in the totality of their determinations, reveals that these facts are the product of human activity and that social classes are the subject of that activity. This places the 'facts' we study in the ongoing movement of history:

'... the function of these unmediated concepts that have been derived from the fetishistic forms of objectivity is to make the phenomena of capitalist society appear as supra-historical essences. The knowledge of the real, objective nature of a phenomenon, the knowledge of its historical character and the knowledge of its actual function in the totality of society form, therefore, a single, undivided act of cognition.' (p14; see also pp142-9)

It is the mediation of history that enables us to grasp the concrete interpenetrations of the dualisms which have typified bourgeois thought.

For Lukacs, then, what Mannheim calls the 'activist' element of thought is an awareness that thought is a reconstruction of reality and since that reconstruction leads us to history, we realise that thought is not the only activity involved in the reconstruction of reality, that it is only one moment of what Marx called 'sensuous human activity'. It is this activity - and not thought alone - which gives us access to the 'real' (in the sense of 'objective') world.

The totalising movement of Marxism thus leads us directly to the transcendence of the dualisms of bourgeois thought and to the concept of praxis.

#### (b) The Transcendence of dualisms

The most significant dualism that Marxism transcends, according to Lukacs, is that of subject and object, although, as we shall see, a number of other dualisms are left behind - in particular those

of truth/falsity, relative/absolute, thought/reality. It is the subject/object dualism and the attempt to overcome it which provided the impetus behind the development of bourgeois philosophy and although the solution remained unavailable, the problem was pursued to the point where it became possible for Marxism to realise the transcendence.

There is an implicit and, in the last analysis, superficial point of contact here between Lukacs' position and that of Althusser. The latter also sees bourgeois philosophy in terms of its entrapment in the problematic of subject/object, the 'empiricist problematic', of which traditional empiricism and traditional rationalism provide two variants. Lukacs is primarily concerned with German idealist philosophy, and in particular with the development of the contradictions of Kantian rationalism, but in the course of his argument he too reveals the close relationship between the two variants, the way in which an internal dynamic can lead to the transformation of one into the other. For Kant, the starting point is not that our knowledge must conform to objects but that objects must conform to our knowledge: he returns to the familiar principle that we can only know what we create; the object 'in-itself' remains unknowable and the world that we know is the 'product' of rational mind. But there is a 'necessary correlation' between the principles of rationality and irrationality according to Lukacs, and when rationalism claims to be the universal principle, the correlation becomes crucial and erodes the whole system. In Kant's case, the irrationality, the course of the erosion, is the unknowable 'thing-in-itself'; there is a radical separation between content and form, the overcoming of which would require the development of a concept of praxis. Failing that, all that can be produced from Kant's starting point is a structure of highly systematised formal laws which, because they are laws, exclude the creative subject (cf. 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' Part 11 passim). Knowledge thus becomes a matter of the passive contemplation of something outside the knower. This analysis is the basis of Lukacs' criticism of the way in which the natural sciences conceive of their activity and of Engels' use of the natural sciences to refute Kant's conception of the 'thing-in-itself'. His reference to Comte (p154) indicates that he sees positivism as one possible attempted solution to the dilemma of traditional rationalism.

Unlike Althusser, Lukacs does not step outside of (suppress, conceal) the dualism but attempts to transcend it through a grasp of the concrete unity of subject and object in the movement of history, reached in the totalising movement of Marxist thought (cf. p14 and pp142-9). Through history we can grasp the way in which the subject produces itself as object, the way in which humanity creates itself. Marxism further reveals that it is because of the internal expansionist dynamic of capitalism that a proper grasp of the totality becomes possible, and that for the first time the possibility exists that history may be made consciously, that the proletariat, because of its position in the production process, is the first class in history capable of becoming conscious of itself as the subject and object of history at the same time. Conversely, because of its position in the production process, the bourgeoisie is unable to achieve a theoretical transcendence of the subject/object dualism (pp134-6).

The precise nature of this unity of subject and object requires further exploration, for it is here that we come up against the central difficulty of dialectical thought that Lukacs himself warns us of:

'It is of the essence of dialectical method that concepts which are false in their abstract one-sidedness are later transcended. The process of transcendence makes it inevitable that we should operate with these one-sided, abstract and false concepts. These concepts acquire their true meaning less by definition than by their function as aspects that are then transcended in the totality. Moreover, it is even more difficult to establish fixed meanings for concepts in Marx's improved version of the dialectic than in the Hegelian original. For if concepts are only the intellectual forms of historical realities, then these forms - one-sided, abstract and false as they are, belong to the true unity as genuine aspects of it.' (p.xlvi)<sup>8</sup>

In this context, there is the possibility of two non-dialectical misreadings of a dialectical text. The first restores in toto the dualisms transcended in the dialectic. Gareth Stedman-Jones takes this tendency to its extreme: where Lukacs is attempting to transform, in a new synthesis, previously antinomic tendencies of bourgeois thought into a dialectical science of society, Stedman-Jones sees only an anti-scientific Romantic coming into confused contact with Marxist science (and in the process, he reduces Marxist science to the positivism that Lukacs is attacking). Where Lukacs tries to develop a political practice and a theory of organisation from his philosophical position, as he does in the later essays in History and Class Consciousness and also - arguably - in his book on Lenin, Stedman-Jones can see only an unbridgeable gap.<sup>9</sup>

The second misreading involves the opposite tendency: to read the claim to have transcended the dualism as an assertion of the simple, immediate unity of opposites. In the case of the subject/object dualism, Lukacs can be read as asserting an a priori unity rather than a unity grasped in the concrete, in history. Matters are not helped by the fact that this is the way in which the older Lukacs came to read himself (p.xxxlii). Stedman-Jones again takes this misreading to its extreme, taking, without understanding, Lukacs' argument that a change in the self-consciousness of the proletariat involves a change in the world that is known through that self-consciousness and transforming it into the crassest idealism. According to Stedman-Jones Lukacs' argument is that:

'... once the proletariat fulfils its vocation as the identical subject-object of history by acquiring an adequate consciousness of capitalist society, it abolishes capitalism in a final interiorisation of it. The exact analogy of this procedure with the movement of Hegel's Spirit needs no emphasis. All that it omits is the brute, material struggle for power...' (Stedman-Jones 1971 p53)

<sup>7</sup> Paul Piccone (1972) suggests a rather odd reading of Lukacs' notion of totalisation, implying that it involves a simple compound of immediate appearances. It is difficult to see how this stands up to the quotation. The 'reconstruction' of course takes place in thought; the 'external' world remains the same as it comes to be known and is 'transformed' insofar as that knowledge is a moment of praxis in the world. Further dimensions of the relationship of 'sameness' and 'transformation' will be explored later.

<sup>8</sup> The last sentence hints at an important point on which Lukacs can be criticised: a regular confusion of the relationship between theoretical and historical development.

<sup>9</sup> On the second point, see in particular Feenberg (1972), Piccone (1972). See also the latter's polemic against Stedman-Jones (pp119-20).

Of course, Lukacs holds no such bizarre position:

'For a class to be ripe for hegemony means that its interests and consciousness enable it to organise the whole of society in accordance with those interests. The crucial question of every class struggle is this: which class possesses this capacity and this consciousness at the decisive moment? This does not preclude the use of force. It does not mean that the class interests destined to prevail and thus to uphold the interests of society as a whole can be guaranteed an automatic victory. On the contrary, such a transfer of power can often only be brought about by the most ruthless use of force (as e.g. the primitive accumulation of capital). But it often turns out that questions of class consciousness prove to be decisive in just those situations where force is unavoidable and where classes are locked in a life-and-death struggle.'

(Lukacs 1971 pp52-3)

But the problem still remains of exactly what the transcendence of the dualism means. There can be no doubt that he talks of the identical subject/object, but it is apparent that it is meant in its peculiar Hegelian sense. Lucien Goldmann (1971) talks about the partial identity of subject and object, and although he makes no attempt to conceptualise the relationship, he offers a clue. Despite his use of the term 'identical' and his later self-criticism, Lukacs does not offer an a priori unity but insists that it be discovered in history; in other words it is a mediated unity, the primary mediation being history itself. The proletariat becomes conscious of itself as both subject and object through the mediation of the developing social and economic structures of capitalist society, through the mediation of its own developing relationships with other classes. Its discovery of itself as an object produced in the past, and as the object of present production processes, is the precondition of its action as subject to produce itself as a new, future object through a transformation of those production processes and their accompanying social structures. The relationship of subject and object is in this sense one of identity and separation at the same time<sup>10</sup> - a formulation which Lukacs approaches on several occasions (cf. esp. p142).

The fact that the subject/object identity is mediated - by economic and social structures and other classes - provides the 'space' for the 'brute material struggle for power'. It further makes necessary a comprehensive grasp of the mediating structures - there is no question of an immediate reading of 'essences' from history:

'... the categories of dialectics must be applied to man as the measure of all things in a manner that also includes simultaneously a complete description of the economic structure of bourgeois society and a correct knowledge of the present. For otherwise, any description will inevitably succumb to the dilemma of empiricism and utopianism, of voluntarism and fatalism...' (pp190-91)

Thus the initial theoretical penetration of reification reveals that history is the product of a human praxis and at the same time it reveals the power of, and the need for, a precise analysis of those structures

produced by praxis and underlying immediate appearances. Such an analysis is the task of Marxist science and this will be elaborated later; however its foundations and its necessity are revealed precisely by a philosophy of history (or praxis), by an anthropology which produces a dialectical conception of the subject/object relationship. Such a conception seems beyond the comprehension of Althusserian thought and the absence accounts for its apparent inability to attempt any sort of founding enterprise in relation to Marxist scientific knowledge; instead, we are left with a number of magically bridged gaps, the epistemological break, the chasm between the real object and the object of knowledge. It is this dialectical conceptualisation which, I would suggest, represents the real break with what Althusser calls the empiricist problematic, not leading directly to Marxist science but providing the foundation for it, providing an initial revelation of the 'area' that will constitute its object.<sup>11</sup>

It is now possible to identify a second way in which Lukacs avoids Mannheim's contradictions and agnosticism. The latter both remain caught within the same fundamental dualism. Mannheim attempts two false solutions which from within the dualistic problematic appear mutual exclusive. It is possible to reinterpret his position in terms taken from Lukacs' critique of Kant: in the first place he (Mannheim) holds that objects must conform to our knowledge of them, and he talks about the way in which our 'categories' can construct facts: he then returns to the contemplative stance that is the reverse side of the same position - knowledge is a 'reflection' of the object, albeit from different points of view, and since both knowledge and object must conform to a system of objective laws (implied but not explicitly recognised by Mannheim) the situational elements may be eliminated and 'truth' discovered. The transformation the development of which is traced by Lukacs remains 'behind' Mannheim's work as a static contradiction. Agnosticism, on the other hand, gives priority to and confines itself to the first half of the contradiction.<sup>12</sup> It should be evident by now that on the basis of Lukacs' work, it should be possible to construct a coherent synthesis of both positions; it should become evident that such a synthesis transcends each position insofar as it is able to grasp thought as one moment of a wider praxis.

### (c) Praxis

It was argued earlier that the ability to penetrate reification led theory to become conscious of itself as one moment of 'sensuous human practice'. It is this practice as a whole, uniting various levels of 'thought' and 'action' that Lukacs seems to embrace in his concept of praxis; praxis is what unites 'abstract thought' on the one hand and the 'concrete', the world of structures and appearances, on the other, into a developing totality that trans-

<sup>11</sup> This is an appropriate point to say something about the nature of Lukacs' conception of totality - which depends in turn on the concept of mediation. Mediation implies the existence of elements which are united in their separation, just as the subject/object unity is mediated. Far from reducing each aspect of the totality to an essence, mediation maintains at the same time the unity of the totality and the relative independence of its levels: '... the category of totality does not reduce its various elements to an undifferentiated uniformity, to identity. The apparent independence and autonomy which they possess in the capitalist system production is an illusion only insofar as they are involved in a dynamic dialectical relationship with one another and can be thought of as the dynamic dialectical aspects of an equally dynamic and dialectical whole' (Lukacs 1971:12-13; my emphasis)

<sup>12</sup> In his criticism of relativism, Lukacs demonstrates how the irrationality of the unknowable 'thing-in-itself' is a central assumption, and how it (relativism) rests on an implicit absolutism - an absolutism of 'man'; thus the necessity for the categories of dialectics to be applied to 'man as the measure of all things'. See esp. pp186ff.

<sup>10</sup> Arato (1972a) presents a sophisticated discussion of the problem, although largely unsympathetic to the standpoint taken here; Colletti (1973) offers a more sophisticated version of Stedman-Jones' interpretation. Revai (1971), in an early review, despite - or because of? - his Hegelian position offers a formulation similar to that offered here.



cends both. It is here that we find the relationship between Marxism and the proletariat, the nature of which Lukacs tends to gloss; to this extent, there is a justification for some of Stedman-Jones' criticisms (cf. esp. Stedman-Jones 1971 p48), but there is already a reply implicit in History and Class Consciousness, particularly in the final essay, 'Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organisation', and it is made explicit in a striking way by Merleau-Ponty.

Lukacs moves to and fro between the most abstract levels of philosophy and an analysis of the class position and experience of the proletariat. The implication is not that the proletariat can immediately and spontaneously achieve a fully developed theoretical awareness of its position, otherwise there would be no point in Lukacs turning, in the later essays, to the problem of the nature of the revolutionary party. The relationship, as always, is mediated. The proletariat is a class which in its immediate experience of acting in the world, achieves a practical consciousness of itself as subject and object at the same time; its very existence opens up the possibility of a theoretical transcendence (carried out by theorists) of the subject/object dualism and - since the existence of the proletariat presupposes the existence of capitalism as a potential world system - the possibility of a theoretical grasp of the totality of social relationships as a coherent whole. The existence of the proletariat reveals the way forward for thought; in turn, thought reveals the way forward for the proletariat - i. e. raises to a theoretical consciousness its potentiality as the revolutionary subject of history, and articulates the means by which that potentiality may be realised and the problems involved in that realisation. In this sense, Marxism as a theoretical system is fully conscious of its social roots and its existence as one moment of a wider praxis, and it gives a concrete articulation to this consciousness precisely in the revolutionary party, where theorist and proletariat come together, the former to theorise the experience of the latter, the latter to base its practice on the knowledge produced by the former.<sup>13</sup>

If thought is one moment of a developing totality, its ability to grasp the concrete conditioned by the concrete, and its relationship to the concrete articulated in a praxis that changes the concrete, then there is a constant movement of thought from an adequate to an inadequate and from an inadequate to an adequate grasp of the concrete; in other words, thought moves from 'true' to 'false' and from 'false' to 'true', from 'absolute' to 'relative' and from 'relative' to 'absolute'. Knowledge is 'true' insofar as it claims to offer only an incomplete grasp of its object, 'false' insofar as it claims to offer a total knowledge; 'absolute' insofar as it has reached the limits placed upon knowledge by historical development, 'relative' insofar as that development will continue and the limits placed upon knowledge change; 'true' insofar as it was once 'absolute', 'false' insofar as it is now 'relative'; 'absolute' insofar as it is 'true', 'relative' insofar as it is only partially 'true'.

If Marxism is the possibility of the full self-consciousness of the proletariat, then it must be able to take account of its own relativity, its own developing falseness, and again it is through the revolutionary party that this is achieved: through

its relationship to the class's experience of the developing social totality, it is able to theorise that experience and development. It is here that we can understand the meaning of one of Lukacs' most obscure statements:

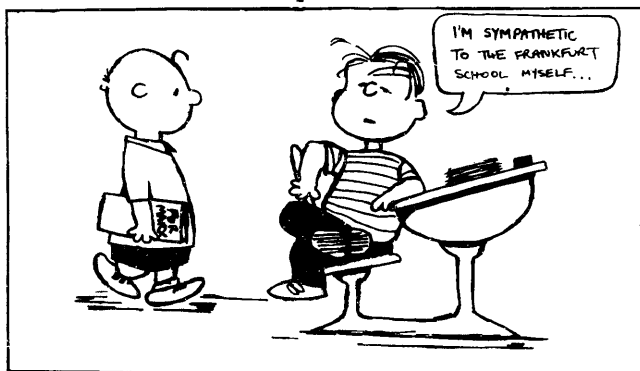
'Let us assume for the sake of argument that recent research has disproved once and for all every one of Marx's individual theses. Even if this were to be proved, every serious 'orthodox' Marxist would still be able to accept all such modern findings without reservation, and hence dismiss all of Marx's theses in toto - without having to renounce his orthodoxy for a single moment... Orthodoxy refers exclusively to method.' (p1)

This is immediately dismissed as nonsense by Stedman-Jones:

'In fact, such a credo would simply be an intellectual suicide for Marxism: what scientific method in history has been able to survive the systematic disproof of every one of its findings? What possible charter could there be for it?' (Stedman-Jones op. cit. p47)

Allowing for Lukacs' deliberate exaggeration, the charter is this: as the totality of social relationships develops, so our knowledge of it will move from adequacy to inadequacy; through its relationship to the practices conditioned by, comprising and acting upon that totality, (i. e. through praxis) Marxism is able to revise itself in a consistent rather than an arbitrary or piecemeal way. Thus the superiority of Marxism does not lie in its individual statements about the world, but in its ability to revise those statements as soon as they become inappropriate without creating destructive internal contradictions, without fragmenting its insights; uniting each through its totalising movement which is not achieved once and for all but is rather a ceaseless movement of totalisation and retotalisation (cf. esp. p24).

Thus there is a complex of reciprocal developing relationships between 'thought' and 'reality', the motor of which, identified at its most general level, is 'praxis'. It can be seen now that Lukacs avoids agnosticism by breaking with the latter's 'problematic', directing us to a complex of new and different questions. For agnosticism, there are two poles: 'thought' and 'reality', and problems can only concern the correspondence or lack of correspondence between them, the problem of 'truth' and 'falsity'. From Lukacs' position, truth and falsity are intertwined and the questions that enable a grasp of that intertwining concern the conceptual structure of knowledge, the extent to which it remains caught in or goes beyond immediate appearance, its awareness of its own multidimensional relationships with what it grasps as the 'concrete', its articulation with other moments of praxis.



<sup>13</sup> In the later essays, it becomes apparent that this is a very abstract synthesis between a naive spontaneist and a Leninist conception of the revolutionary party - not, as Piccone suggests, a straightforward capitulation to the Stalinist 'seeds' present in Lenin's thought.

## The Marxist Criticism of Non-Marxist Knowledge

It might still be possible to interpret the exposition of Lukacs to this point as implying that Marxism is superior to bourgeois thought because it meets certain criteria that the latter fails to meet. If this were the case, he could still be accused of reproducing Mannheim's contradiction, of putting forward absolute criteria by means of which we can assess knowledge in an argument explicitly asserting that knowledge is always rooted in a changing social context and therefore itself always changing. However, none of the features of Marxism so far discussed can be regarded as 'objective' measures against which we can lay Marxism on the one hand, bourgeois thought on the other and find the latter wanting. It must be emphasised that they are all features internal to Marxism, not properties achieved once and for all but potentialities the fulfilment of which is an ongoing (and never ending) process. It has already been argued that the movement of totalisation must be consistently renewed; and the renewal of this movement involves a steady deepening of our grasp of the relationship between the dualisms transcended by Marxism; for example, one need only look at the work of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre to realise that Lukacs' grasp of the subject/object relation remains at a very simple level.<sup>14</sup> In the same way, the fully self-conscious relationship between theory and practice in the revolutionary party is not an immediate achievement, but a permanent task, an ongoing struggle that may be diverted into innumerable forms and combinations of dogmatism and blind activism. This can be established by the most casual glance at the history of the revolutionary movement.

If these criteria are potentialities within one form of thought, then how can they provide the basis for establishing the superiority of that form over others? Since they must be defined by the form that contains them, what relevance can they have for other forms? Lukacs offers, but does not elaborate (except implicitly in his own critical positions) an answer. Marxism does not reject bourgeois knowledge but accepts it and goes beyond it, including it as a moment within Marxism:

'If, then, the standpoint of the proletariat is opposed to that of the bourgeoisie, it is nonetheless true that proletarian thought does not require a tabula rasa, a new start to the task of comprehending reality and one without any preconceptions. In this, it is unlike the thought of the bourgeoisie with regard to the mediaeval forms of feudalism - at least in its basic tendencies. Just because its practical goal is the fundamental transformation of the whole of society, it conceives of bourgeois society together with its intellectual and artistic productions as the point of departure for its own method.' (p163)

And again:

'... the "falseness", the "one-sidedness" of the bourgeois view of history must be seen as a necessary factor in the systematic acquisition of knowledge about society.' (p164)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Sartre's work (esp. Sartre 1960) develops a number of notions that remain implicit in *History and Class Consciousness* - in particular, the concept of totalisation.

<sup>15</sup> These quotations have self-evident implications for Stedman-Jones' argument that for Lukacs, capitalism is never progressive. It should be clear by now that everything that Lukacs says about Marxism requires the existence of capitalist society and its advances over pre-capitalist formations.

These points indicate a central danger in the way in which I have approached the problem: if the superiority of Marxism is contained within certain of its potentialities, the establishment of that superiority must be in the realisation of those potentialities - in the 'practical' criticism of a specific study or theoretical system, not in the formal exposition of the potentialities. It is this that gives the discussion of Lukacs so far its rather glib, self-satisfied air. It has remained a purely formal exposition and as a consequence is likely to appear a purely verbal solution, particularly since the all too obvious difficulties of a 'practical' realisation have not been considered (and in the last analysis, these are the difficulties of the revolution itself). As I indicated at the beginning, the justification for approaching the issues in this way is that it enables a preliminary definition of the problem that is an alternative to the Althusserian definition in terms of 'scientificity' alone. The significance of the problem should not be underestimated: it is the problem of what exactly we are doing and should do when we engage in criticism or debate with non-Marxist points of view, the problem of theorising an everyday practice vital to our political action. Even at the present level of generality, the discussion has not been pursued as far as it could be, and there are still apparent contradictions in the argument: what are we to make of the statement that Marxism must accept bourgeois knowledge as its starting point in relation to the earlier comments about the reconstruction involved in theorising? How can knowledge be accepted and remain the same, and be reconstructed at the same time? The examination of this problem will reveal a major theoretical gap in Marxism; a revelation which is perhaps the most significant result of the present project. I will continue to confine myself to the discussion of the Marxist criticism of sociology, since it was developments within sociology that occasioned this paper in the first place, and as I indicated earlier, it is the area in which much Marxist criticism has recently appeared.

Perhaps the best starting point is the dismissal of a fallacy common to both Mannheim and agnosticism: that to situate a work in its social context, to reveal its social roots, is by and in itself a criticism of that work, a proof of its lack of 'objectivity'. The consequence of this assumption - which in turn implies the whole framework of relativism and agnosticism - is a concern to reveal only that a work does have social roots, at the expense of any grasp of the complexity of its relationship to those roots. A Marxist form of the same fallacy involves the dismissal of non-Marxist thought as 'bourgeois' or 'academic', almost invariably in the form of a dogmatic assertion since to argue the position through to its logical conclusion would lead to an unacceptable relativism.

Althusserian criticism, on the other hand, rejects the fallacy, but at the cost of not situating the work in any satisfactory way at all. Instead, criticism is confined to the conceptual level with the result that eventually the very reification that Marxist theory begins by penetrating is re-introduced at its very centre. With, perhaps, the exception of the conjuncture which makes an epistemological break possible,<sup>16</sup> knowledge and its development

<sup>16</sup> And when it comes to concrete conjunctures, such as that which saw the appearance of Marxist science, Althusser's specifications are very loose, amounting to little more than a gloss on Lenin's generalisations. (see Althusser: 1969, 1974)

become contingent, unintelligible in the sense that Kantian rationalism ends as unintelligible from the perspective of its starting point: knowledge develops according to, and its correctness is guaranteed by, formal laws which 'just happen to be the case'.<sup>17</sup> Criticism becomes a matter of reducing a work to its 'problematic', the formal rules of discourse that make it possible; a work is read only to discover these rules behind it.<sup>18</sup>

To overcome this unintelligibility, two steps must be taken. The first is taken by Lukacs himself: the rules of discourse, the problematic, must be related to the immediate experience (practical consciousness) of a particular class. However, once a problematic has been articulated, there is no necessary relation between the class position or origins of the individual theorist and the fact that the work occupies a position within that particular problematic; the first step is a very general situating which points the way to the second step, that of situating the work in the more immediate social context within which it is produced. If we remain at the level of the underlying problematic and its general social origins, the specificity and complexity of a position within that problematic are lost. A work is only truly intelligible when we can grasp - through the project of the writer and the conditions in which it is pursued<sup>19</sup> - why it should occupy this position within this discourse, why it is produced at this time by this individual, why it should have these peculiarities, features not directly necessitated by the underlying problematic. Such an exercise, not in itself criticism, is a necessary preliminary. What is unintelligible, what cannot be understood, cannot be coherently criticised. The next step is the conceptual criticism itself, which is a matter of identifying the partial and one-sided nature of what is being criticised, its 'unconscious' relativity and its internal contradictions, in turn rooted in its reliance on unreconciled dualisms.

There are a number of different ways in which knowledge may present a partial and one-sided view of its object, each rooted in its failure to go beyond the immediate. Lukacs does not deal in a detailed or systematic way with the identification and transcendence of 'partial' knowledge, but an examination of his arguments in relation to the fragmentation and false separation of disciplines in the social studies, combined with the earlier exposition, makes it possible to follow up more rigorously some of its implications. The unification of the fragmented disciplines is not simply a matter of adding together, rather they must be 'transformed inwardly' by an 'inwardly synthesising philosophical method' (p109). It might be inferred from such an argument that Marxism is a philosophical method and nothing else, and that knowledge produced by science is worthless until it has undergone a philosophical transformation. Lukacs' critique of scientific knowledge tends to support this interpretation: the subordination of philosophy to science is seen as a product of reification: to accept uncritically the results of science is to accept the reified world. Yet there is a lack of clarity in his argument, almost a contradiction, that

<sup>17</sup> Cf. esp. Glucksmann (1972)

<sup>18</sup> Hindess illustrates the danger (Hindess 1973a, 1973b). In the former, Husserl's 'Crisis' is reduced to the problematic of 'transcendental empiricism' when its significance for the development of phenomenology is precisely its apparent partial abandonment of transcendentalism. In the latter ethnomethodology is condemned as leading, through its notion of 'background assumptions' to an infinite regress; in fact the starting point of ethnomethodology is the recognition of such an infinite regress as inevitable. It then seeks to identify the 'glossing' operations which are employed to avoid it - a project which Hindess simply fails to recognise.

<sup>19</sup> These conditions are, of course, exceedingly complex; a network comprising all levels of the social formation.

leaves room for a different conception of science. We have already seen that he recognises that the reified world is open to analysis, indeed that such an analysis is necessary and that it is founded upon his philosophical method. At the same time, he states that his argument is based on the analysis that Marx presents in Capital.<sup>20</sup> If the latter is Marxist science, a 'truly scientific study' (p8), then it appears to have its own specific role 'within' Marxist philosophy, the relationship of dependence/independence between them remaining to be properly conceptualised. The following paragraph is quoted in full because it shows the possibility of my interpretation and the ambiguity of Lukacs' position:

'Marxism, however, simultaneously raises and reduces all specialisations to the level of aspects in a dialectical process: this is not to deny that the process of abstraction and hence the isolation of the elements and concepts in the special disciplines and whole areas of study is of the very essence of science. But what is decisive is whether this process of isolation is a means towards understanding the whole and whether it is integrated within the context it presupposes and requires, or whether the abstract knowledge of an isolated fragment retains its "autonomy" and becomes an end in itself. In the last analysis, Marxism does not acknowledge the existence of independent sciences of law, economics or history etc: there is nothing but a single, unified - dialectical and historical - science of the evolution of society as a totality.' (p28)

The implication is that the philosophical method is the 'highest' moment of totalisation and that its object is precisely the knowledge produced by Marxist science; there are also implicit and explicit distinctions between Marxist and non-Marxist science, and this in turn implies that a preliminary transformation of the knowledge produced by the bourgeois disciplines is necessary before the philosophical transformation may be operated.<sup>21</sup> These different levels of 'science', the philosophy/science relationship, and the different levels of transformation are frequently blurred by Lukacs. For our present purposes, sociology can be taken as 'bourgeois science', and the lower level transformation is the problem. I will try to work out an initial, schematic clarification of what is involved, firstly in relation to empirical sociology, then to theoretical sociology.

Sociology's entrapment in the immediate is most obvious in what is conventionally called 'empirical' sociology: sociology concerned with revealing, describing and relating 'facts'; it lies in the deliberate isolation of 'facts' as dependent and independent variables, the dividing up of the empirically 'given', the separation, for example, of 'social interaction' from 'social structure' and the separation of different aspects of human activity from each other; the sub-disciplines of sociology - the sociology of the family, of deviance, of religion, industrial sociology etc - are excellent examples of the fragmentation of a discipline according to 'empirically given' (leaving open, for the moment; what is meant by 'empirically given'). It lies also in the relationships that are sought between the 'facts' in, for example, statistical correlation, or

<sup>20</sup> Cf. esp. p84. This relationship of mutual foundation between philosophy and science is much clearer in Sartre (1960) although, like Lukacs, he is primarily concerned with the philosophical totalisation. It is a conception that owes a debt to Hegel, and the specification of the differences between the Hegelian and Marxist versions would be an intriguing and far-reaching exercise.

<sup>21</sup> The distinction implicit in Lukacs between the natural and social sciences indicates that a different type of transformation will be required for each.



vaguely understood 'interpretive procedures', the latter either assumed (eg Goffman) or sought empirically (eg ethnomethodology). These are 'formal', 'empty', 'abstract' relationships in the sense that there is little or no attempt at rigorous conceptualisation - they are taken for granted or presented in a 'story telling' form. The fragmented and partial nature of such work is self-evident; the task for Marxism is to integrate these partial descriptions into a totalising thought in which the 'meaning' of the starting point is inevitably transformed.

Now this transformation is not a straightforward transformation of the 'object of knowledge', in which we end with a different 'object', abandoning the one we started with. The latter remains because it is 'given' not only in thought but also in the world, it is an aspect of the way in which the world initially presents itself to us. If this were not the case, if it were given only in thought (ideology), or if it were given by the world and passively perceived, we would fall back into the dualistic irrationalism already described. The transformation is not of the 'given' in either of these senses but of the mediations grasped as determining it. The most abstract, general mediation that is transformed is the specific form of the subject/object dualism that lies behind the production of the partial knowledge with which we start. The knowledge produced by positivist sociology, for example, rests on the separation of the object and a contemplative subject; the participation of the subject in the creation of the object is ignored and part of the work of Marxist criticism is to reveal this contribution. Perhaps the simplest example concerns the results of questionnaire surveys: significant here are the ways in which the choice and organisation of questions limits possible answers, the effects of the construction of the setting in which the questions are asked, the less general theoretical presuppositions behind the questions and the interpretive procedures involved in making sense of the answers.<sup>22</sup> Many of the tools needed for such criticism have already been developed by the various interpretive 'alternatives', and by Althusserian Marxism itself, but with the aim of rejecting rather than re-interpreting the product of positivist procedures.<sup>23</sup> In the case of the various forms of interpretive sociology, it is again a matter of drawing out the various interpretive procedures and their theoretical presuppositions, and also of relating the observed interaction to the social and material structures that produce its setting and condition its progress: it is a matter of reintroducing the world of objects - and not only those of immediate experience.

This is, of course, a very general outline of what could be the first steps of the critical movement; it is intended to give a very general idea indeed of what is involved in the totalising process. However, it enables two important points to be made. The first is that it is clear that the 'originally given' object (questionnaire results, the observed interaction) remains at the same time as it is transformed, reconstructed. As the mediating structures underlying its production are explored, it takes on a new meaning: it is no longer, for example, the ultimate point of reference against which any theory

must be measured, as it is for most forms of empirical sociology; nor does it vanish completely into the reconceptualisation, as appears to happen with Althusserian criticism. Rather, it comes to exist in the tension of a part-whole relationship, it is no longer an 'individual' to be related to other 'individuals' but it becomes the specific point of a general mediating structure: the specific in which thought seeks the totality of determinations (whilst the totality is that in which thought seeks to discover the specific).<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, there is a noticeable gap in the above formulations: they lack a conceptualisation of the perceptual, imaginative and logical steps by which the 'real' object is appropriated by thought, by which mediations are grasped and transformed, and a structure of concepts produced. The gap is precisely that between the real object and the object of knowledge, or between science and ideology and ideology and the world, and what is required to fill it is a phenomenology of concept formation. That is the gap in Marxist theory to which I referred earlier. I will return to consider it again later in the discussion, but its absence haunts this paper, a second vital factor restricting it to the description rather than the conceptualisation of the processes and results of Marxist criticism.

It is an absence that will be encountered again in discussing the criticism of theoretical sociology, although a rather different set of problems is involved here. Sociology's theoretical insights are attempts to grasp the mediations, the determining structures behind 'facts'. From the argument so far, these can be expected to be incomplete, to tend towards the positing of empty or unintelligible relationships. Criticism in this respect is a matter of displaying the partial nature of theoretical categories, again not a rejection but a deepening and at the same time a limiting of their meaning. The partial nature of a theoretical category or concept lies not in the empirical isolation of some thing immediately given, but in its 'internal' incompleteness (and therefore its abstractness). The 'ideological' function of such a concept lies in its implicit or explicit claim to provide a full grasp of its object.<sup>25</sup> Again, criticism and incorporation into a Marxist framework are the same activity, carried out by Lukacs himself on the theoretical categories of Max Weber. Andrew Arato (1972a) has described what happens to Weber's categories in Lukacs' exposition, and it is worth following his discussion through. As Arato points out, Weber was concerned with demonstrating that historical materialism was only one system of 'ideal types' among many from which he (Weber) had chosen another equally useful system; this makes Lukacs' achievement all the more significant.

The first category adopted and transformed by Lukacs is that of 'formal rationality', for Weber the 'reason' of science and industry, resting on quantifiability and calculability and excluding all 'values'. A rational economy requires the organisation of all areas of life - law, politics etc - according to the principles of formal rationality. According to Arato, Lukacs 'fuses the Marxist category of abstract labour with Weber's category of formal rationality' (p35), enabling him to go

<sup>22</sup> For example, questioning respondents singly rather than in groups is likely to predetermine types of answers; Sartre's concept of serialisation provides a theoretical basis for re-interpretation in this case. Westergaard (1970) demonstrates an implicit fault in the interpretive procedures of the *Affluent Worker* study.

<sup>23</sup> It is quite possible that such a reinterpretation will tell us as much about positivist sociology and its techniques as it does about the object of those techniques. Sartre (1963a) argues that the results of a rigorous analytical study are the most easily integrated into Marxism.

<sup>24</sup> This refers back to Lukacs' concept of totality discussed in n11. The relationship of tension between part and whole (a relationship of dependence/independence) implies in turn that the totality is both 'structured' and 'expressive'; there is no absorption of everything into some 'essence'.

<sup>25</sup> There is of course an interaction between the conceptual criticism and the siting of a work in its social context. In the same way that the latter is necessary for the full intelligibility of a work, it also provides the full intelligibility of its specific forms of one-sidedness.

beyond Marx in arguing that

'... free labour in itself is not enough to allow the complete self-realisation of capitalist production, or even the total rationalisation of a single factory. The culmination of capitalist rationality is only possible when the "fate of the worker becomes the fate of society as a whole", when the "internal organisation of the factory" becomes the microcosm of "the whole structure of capitalist society".' (p35) 26

If Weber's category enables an extension, or at least a clarification, of Marx, then what has happened to the category itself? At one level it remains the same: it 'refers' to an analytic logic necessary to capitalist production and reproduced in every area of social life; at the same time it is modified, it becomes a concept 'required' in the totalising framework of Marxism, and the conceptual structure of which it becomes a part limits its meaning and fills it out. Limits, in the sense that it ceases to be the (eventually unintelligible) dominant feature of industrial society as such, but becomes a feature of capitalist society, a 'dependent' rather than a central, organising concept - dependent upon the analysis of the development of capitalist relations of production, the analysis of which it follows in Lukacs' exposition. It is 'filled out' in the sense that it takes its place in a structure of concepts appropriate to capitalist society which specify in more detail its significance; whereas previously in Weber's work it was specified principally in relation to the principles of organisation of non-capitalist society - as for instance in Weber's analytic classification of types of authority. Thus what I referred to earlier as its 'unconscious relativism' is revealed - it loses its 'absolute' implications and becomes the grasp of an historically limited phenomenon.

There is a neat irony in the fact that Lukacs appropriates another Weberian category - that of 'objective possibility' - precisely to point to the transcendence of the type of industrial society in which 'formal rationality' is dominant. Arato shows how Lukacs transforms 'objective possibility' from a category referring to the past structured by the more or less arbitrary interests of the individual historian to a category referring to a present structured by the interests of a social class.

'Weber examines the possibilities of the past for the sake of the cognitive interests of the present, while Lukacs seeks to interact with the possibilities of the present for the sake of future praxis.' (p63)

Again, the category always remains the same, a grasp of the possible outcomes which lay within a particular historical situation, in turn enabling a grasp of the 'subjective' contribution to the eventual outcome. It is here that what can best be called the 'fluidity' of concepts becomes apparent: it is the case that the meaning of a concept depends upon its relations to other concepts within the same conceptual system, yet it is also true that the same concept is not unrecognisable when it is situated within another system. Like the 'given', it is transformed and remains the same at the same time. Again for the conceptualisation of this process, we are referred to the absent phenomenology of concept

26 I have reservations about Arato's formulations in this passage. It leaves the impression of an 'expressive' economic determinism: the economic base expressing itself identically at different levels of the social formation. The notion of 'expression' might offer an approximation to the nature of change of forms of thought (with which Lukacs is primarily concerned)

formation, but it is possible to make one more point about the fluidity of concepts, which in turn leads to a further point about the process of Marxist criticism. This involves returning to the 'transcendence of dualisms': a theoretical understanding of the dualisms of bourgeois thought is essential for the coherent comprehension and rigorous criticism of non-Marxist thought.

Any theory, whether articulated or 'practiced' in empirical research, presupposes a conception of the subject/object relationship; organisation by means of the possible variations of this relationship represents the most general level at which it is possible to distinguish between different theories or 'approaches'. As long as the variation remains dualistic, 'static' or 'dynamic' contradictions appear within the thought that presupposes it. Lukacs traces the most general dynamic form of contradiction set in motion by the most highly articulated presence of the dualism in pre-Marxist philosophy - ie the working out of the contradiction in rationalist philosophy. The basis of the fluidity of concepts lies precisely in this: that one dualistic variation of the subject/object relationship, pushed to its limit, will transform itself into its opposite and this in turn will involve the transformation, not the destruction, of the conceptual articulation of the dualism. In the working out of the transformation of Kantian philosophy, there is no point at which a previous set of categories is abandoned for a new and opposite one, yet the transformation is radical. A dialectical conception should be able to reveal and theorise the transformation as part of its own conceptual structure, become self-conscious of its own necessary internal fluidity.

In its 'static' form the contradiction appears as a number of implicit or explicit contradictions in the same work. In *Ideology and Utopia* the contradiction is glaring; in less directly epistemological writings it has more manifold results and is less obvious. In any case, however, it involves the coexistence in the same work of two (or possibly more) opposing variations of the same dualism 'behind' the explicit argument of the work. Here, an understanding of the dualisms enables the identification of contradictions within the work being studied, and provides the unifying principle of those contradictions. Crudely, the consequent process of 'incorporation' is a matter of elaborating the contradictory positions into a coherent whole, in the way that Lukacs constructs a dialectical position out of the poles of traditional rationalism.

Before going on to look briefly at the problem of a phenomenology of concept formation, some further concluding observations are possible. To begin with, the transcendence of relativism can be underlined. Relativism implicitly or explicitly conceptualises different systems of thought as self-contained unities, between which there can be no mediation; otherwise there would be a transcontextual unity which would enable judgments between different systems. The above discussion has shown, I hope, that such mediation is possible and that it does not re-introduce either a notion of a 'neutral' or 'objective' reality independent of conceptualisation against which 'theory' can be tested, or reference to some eventually empty transcontextual notion of 'comprehensiveness'.<sup>27</sup> Rather, the

but the material articulation of a form will differ at different levels of the social formation. This does not affect the main drift of the argument: that the development of abstract labour involves other changes before the domination of the capitalist mode of production is achieved.

27 A full criticism of Mannheim would have to show how, on occasions, he seems to be struggling towards a dialectical conception without ever making it.

mediation is built into the nature of conceptual thought itself; dialectical reasoning is a matter of pushing each system to the point at which a transformation takes place, yet maintaining both systems as essential moments of a wider totality. Of course, this is not always as simple a task as it might appear from the above formulations: the discussion has been primarily concerned with highly articulated systems and many of the complexities involved in dealing with less systematic theories, and with theories of the natural sciences (where the problems are likely to be very different) have been lost.

Secondly, the criticisms of Althusserian Marxism that have been running through the argument have been based on its failure to achieve a self-conscious transcendence of the dualisms of bourgeois thought, positing instead a break which amounts to a false suppression of the problem. This results in the presentation of Marxist science as an eventually unintelligible phenomenon governed by formal laws - a return to a form of classical rationalism. Glucksmann (1972) sees Kant's rationalism in the a priori identity of structures that Althusser posits between the different levels of production, and the latter's discussion of the production of knowledge modelled on economic production is perhaps the core of the resulting reification of thought processes.<sup>28</sup> A more systematic critique than that offered here would search out the contradictions and gaps consequent upon the suppression of the dualisms and point towards their resolution.

Another result of the suppression is a misreading of non-Marxist and much Marxist work, Lukacs being an ideal example, and this has certain more immediate implications when it is seen in connection with the sort of criticism operated by Althusserian Marxism. Despite the generality of the discussion, it should be apparent that the process of Marxist criticism involves the demonstration that it can understand non-Marxist thought more completely than that thought can understand itself. It can grasp the complex of relationships that relate that thought to its social context, draw out its conceptual presuppositions and push them to the point at which they become self-destructive and reveal hidden contradictions and limitations that remain 'unconscious' from within the criticised system. However, the earlier discussion of praxis revealed that conceptual criticism of this type cannot be isolated and the continued ability of Marxism to appropriate and unify the scattered and partial insights of non-Marxist thought depends in the last analysis on its ability to articulate itself as a coherent, concrete social and political practice. It is only through its practical relationship to a developing totality of social relationships that Marxist theory can recognise the partial truths presented by non-Marxist thought.

Now, the gap between epistemology and political organisation is not inconsiderable: it would be a nonsense to ascribe the absence of an effective political practice to a rigid epistemology, and as big a nonsense to ascribe a rigid epistemology to the absence of an effective political practice. But without implying that one is a principle cause of the other, it is possible to see how a mutual reinforcement can take place. A Marxism that presents itself in terms of a radical choice between an unfounded science and an ideology to be rejected will have an inbuilt tendency to different organisational forms, and a different political effectivity, to a Marxism that attempts to transform an ideology by working

within it. And a politically isolated and ineffective Marxism or a Marxism rigidified in fixed institutional forms will tend towards a different conception of its own knowledge producing activities than a Marxism engaged in a living interaction with the class whose experience it is theorising.

## **Towards a Marxist Phenomenology of Concept Formation**

The need for a Marxist phenomenology can be indicated in a number of ways.<sup>29</sup> That for which I am arguing here is based eventually on the theoretical description of perceptual processes. Its foundations have, I believe, already been laid, although in a fragmented way, in the work of Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty,<sup>30</sup> but a coherent structuring and elaboration of the insights of these very different writers is still needed. Beyond pointing to this task, it is only possible in the present context to outline its scope and significance.

To begin with, it would itself be an epistemology, a guide to and delineation of the scientificity of an analysis of the structures of society, the foundation and 'guarantor' of Marxist science. It is the specific tool by means of which a philosophy of history (or praxis or consciousness) founds, points to the necessity of, and defines the means of producing, the precise and careful analysis of social formations.

In the second place, it is an essential base for the reflexivity of Marxist thought, and this is of prime importance for political practice. The rooting of our concepts, at all levels, in the immediate experience of the class is necessary to comprehend and clarify the way in which agitational and propaganda work is to be carried out; such work is precisely the attempt to root a Marxist analysis of society in the class itself, and involves rendering that analysis comprehensible in terms of class experience. Yet its epistemological role also enables a critique of class experience, to distinguish between that experience which is an inessential surface effect of the development of the mode of production and that which indicates an important change in that development and comprises a fundamental part of it. The material structures of society do not change in the same way as the experience of those structures, and in this sense the analysis of each must necessarily be rooted in that of the other.

Finally, and most importantly, a phenomenology of concept formation is only part of a phenomenology of consciousness as such, and thus a phenomenology of class consciousness. Within orthodox phenomenology and in its already existing variants (and especially in Sartre) there exist in embryonic form the necessary tools to grasp consciousness in its widest sense: to bring within the scope of Marxist comprehension imaginative, emotional as well as 'ideological' and conceptual processes; and eventually to develop a coherent politics of interpersonal relationships. The significance of this last possibility cannot be overstated: it involves the development of a 'science of lived experience', a science different to that of social formations, with a different internal logic and with its own (self-founded) criteria of scientificity, but one complementary to and articulated with structural analysis. The importance of a phenomenology along these lines must be self-evident; as must the difficulties of developing it in a coherent and systematic way.

<sup>29</sup> Piccone (op. cit.), for example, uses Lukacs to point to the need for phenomenology of needs (which by itself, it seems to me, is likely to remain an idealist project). See also Paci (1972).

<sup>30</sup> See in particular Husserl (1970); Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1974a, b); Sartre (1949, 1957, 1960, 1963a, b).

<sup>28</sup> Paradoxically, it is also the closest he comes to the type of phenomenology I am advocating here.

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# reviews

## THE NEEDS OF MARXISM

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Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx*, translated from the German, Introduction by Ken Coates and Stephen Bodington, Alison & Busby, London, 1976, 135pp, hardback £5.25, pb £2.95

As Hemingway, I seem to remember, somewhere said of Pernod, so it is with this book: it takes you up as much as it brings you down. The analogy, however, is perhaps too frivolous for a work whose scholarly sobriety borders on dryness; moreover, it suggests an ease of absorption that might mislead readers who are unaccustomed to that strange brew of half-developed concepts, potent good sense and flights of fancy that can be concocted from Marx's works and labelled (somewhat euphemistically) 'a theory of needs'. For it does not seem to me that Heller has managed to offer us anything much more readily digestible than Marx himself on this subject, even though her project is largely one of exegesis and synthesis - and I speak as one who has spent some time in the attempt to ascertain the meaning and coherence of Marx's various remarks on the subject of needs. On the other hand, it may be true that I have approached Heller's book with too many preconceptions and expectations about what a work on the theory of needs should achieve, and that others less steeped in this aspect of Marxism will find a good deal to interest and inspire them in this book, if only because it sketches out an area for consideration that is scarcely ever discussed in any detailed way, and because it is the product of a good deal of reflection on that area. All the same, I suspect that many readers will wish that Heller had provided more opportunity to share in this process of reflection. As it is, she tends merely to chart its results, and these are often presented in an over-condensed and disjointed form.

In all fairness, it should also be said that she has not been well served either by her translator or by her editor in this English edition. There is a nervous recourse to literal rendering in the translation which betrays a failure to have construed Heller's precise meaning (and in several instances I have still not managed to decipher this). Even where the meaning is clear, it is frequently couched in rather bizarre expressions, and the reader is confronted with an array of undefined concepts (eg 'community structure', 'society of associated producers', the 'antinomies' of capitalism, its 'formation', and so on). In the case of these and other terms, some

explanation for their choice either within the text or in a glossary would have been welcome. So too would have been more indications (if only in the form of section headings and bridge passages) of the overall direction and design of the work. As it is, we are offered the pieces of a jigsaw - which is tantalizing because we are not sure if we have all the pieces, and wearisome because so much of the work of assembly is left to a reader who has little idea of the final picture to be constructed.

There are two further general features of this book which some may find disappointing. In the first place, there is scarcely a reference to other work bearing on the question of needs, by which I mean either to work outside historical materialism in anthropology or psychology or biology, all of which are pertinent studies, or to attempts by other Marxists to confront the vexed question of needs. Admittedly in the latter case there are a few directly relevant works, and it may be that Heller has not had much opportunity to assess them<sup>1</sup> - here I have in mind such writers as Sève and Timpanaro, and the debate on Marx and Freud. Yet she also never mentions either Sartre or Marcuse nor any of the economic studies that bear on the issues she raises (Mandel, Bettelheim, Rubin) and there is scarcely a reference to any work by Lenin or Trotsky or Stalin. In other words, there is no attempt to place her contribution in the context of developments in Marxist study either in the East or the West, though her debt to Lukacs is obvious. There is an advantage to this in the sense that her book is refreshingly unparasitical; it also means that it avoids any facile classification in terms of allegiances within current Marxology (it does not, for example, adopt either a straightforward humanist or anti-humanist stance and cannot be located easily in terms of such disjunctures.) Its disadvantage is that it is restricted to Marx's work alone, and thus to a large extent remains a piece of academic Marxology - an exegesis of texts which themselves are regarded as self-sufficient ends: getting at Marx's meaning, rather than assessing its worth or relevance to contemporary events, still seems the dominating concern. Since it scarcely ever ventures beyond Marx's own dicta either for its substance or its exemplification, the book re-

<sup>1</sup> Though her book was originally published in German, Heller is herself Hungarian and associated with a group of Hungarian philosophers of Lukacian inspiration who have recently been subject to a certain amount of persecution in Hungary.