Marxism and Totality

The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas

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despair did not lead in the same direction as did those of their contemporaries who found holistic answers in the nation-state. Some became imperialists or pan-nationalists. Others, like the anarchist Gustav Landauer,197 sought a solution in left-wing communitarianism, which tried to remedy the failings of orthodox Marxism through a benign rendering of the völksch tradition. Still others were less willing to equate Marxism with its “orthodox” incarnation, and thus abandon it entirely. Accepting that description of the modern predicament most keenly rendered by Simmel, but scornful of his pessimism; impatient with the mechanistic assumptions of Second International Marxism, but still inspired by Marx’s general analysis; aware of the inadequacies of bourgeois holism, but sharing its desire for a new totality—they sought an answer in the radical rethinking of Marxist theory that became known as Western Marxism. The exemplary figures in this new departure were Lukács, Korsch and Gramsci. Of the three, Lukács was most insistent on the importance of totality as the critical category that would restore Marxism’s theoretical vigor, enabling it to match the practical achievements of Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution. And so, it is to Lukács that we must turn first to perceive the intimate relation of the concept of totality with the birth of Western Marxism.


These works supplement and correct parts of Lukács own somewhat tendentious reminiscences in his new prefaces to The Theory of the Novel (1962) and History and Class

CHAPTER TWO

Georg Lukács and the Origins of the Western Marxist Paradigm

Had Georg Lukács ceased writing in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution, he would be remembered solely as a particularly intense contributor to the creative ferment of pre-war bourgeois culture. Among his earliest
works, many written under the aristocratic name von Lukács, were several short essays on drama, a spirited appreciation of the Magyar poet Endre Ady, and an unfinished treatise on aesthetics. All of these, however, were composed in his native Hungarian, and it was only with the collection of essays, Soul and Form, translated into German in 1911, and The Theory of the Novel, published in a German journal in 1916, that he reached a Europe-wide audience. Although a concern for social and political issues appeared in the Hungarian writings, it was almost entirely absent from those that were available to that larger public. As a result, Lukács was known as a thinker for whom cultural, ethical and philosophical problems were far more central than social, political or economic ones. There were few, if any, indications in his published work of anything but scorn for the theory and practice of the Second International.

Methodologically as well, Lukács before the Revolution was firmly, if uneasily, within the confines of bourgeois culture, specifically the neo-Kantianism of the Heidelberg to which he had moved in 1912. His primary theoretical mentors were Dilthey, Simmel, Weber and Lask, his approach to cultural questions largely that of the Geisteswissenschaften, and his general prognosis for the future similar to that of the normally right-wing purveyors of cultural despair. He counted among his friends such conservative figures as the dramatist Paul Ernst, as well as more radical ones such as Ernst Bloch. While interested in political questions, he nonetheless enthusiastically supported the writings of that great "unpolitical" defender of German Kultur, Thomas Mann, who returned his praise in kind.

Unlike many of his contemporaries within the Hungarian Jewish upper-middle class, whose intellectual organs were significantly called Nyugat (The West) and Huzsadik Szagad (The Twentieth Century), Lukács held out little hope for the "westernization" of central and eastern Europe. Although drawn to religious figures like Kierkegaard, he had no use for either traditional or heterodox spiritual consolations. Nor did he find very attractive the chauvinist "Ideas of 1914," which seduced others of similar outlook, including men he admired such as Lask, Mann and Ernst. When the war came, he was later to recall, Marianne Weber challenged his despair with little success:

My only reply was: "The better the worse!" When I tried at this time to put my emotional attitude into conscious terms, I arrived at more or less the following formulation: the Central Powers would probably defeat Russia; this might lead to the downfall of Tsarism; I had no objection to that. There was also some probability that the West would defeat Germany; if this led to the downfall of the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs, I was once again in favor. But then the question arose: who was to save us from Western civilization?

The only herald of a possible new age Lukács could acknowledge was the ambiguous figure of Dostoevsky, whose writings seemed to prefigure a new cultural configuration, although one whose outlines were not yet clearly visible.

Had Lukács' voice then been stilled during the war, he would be known today as one of a large number of radical critics of bourgeois culture, whose radicalism was still incoherent in political terms. But, of course, Lukács lived and wrote well beyond the war, indeed up until his...
death in 1971 at the age of 86. And having found in 1918 an answer to his life, he is best remembered as a Marxist theoretician of uncommon breadth and power. More significant for our purposes, he is of central importance as the founding father of Western Marxism, the theoretician who placed the category of totality at its heart. His work of 1923, *History and Class Consciousness*, has been generally acknowledged as the charter document of Hegelian Marxism, the highly controversial inspiration of a loyal (and sometimes not so loyal) opposition to institutional Marxism in this century.

That *History and Class Consciousness* was a milestone in Marxist theory is undisputed; what is far less certain is its status as a purely Marxist exercise. Schematically put, the main question is whether or not it represents a recapitulation of Lukács' bourgeois preoccupations in Marxist guise or a recapturing of Marx's own most fundamental arguments in an original and explosive form. For those who hold the former position, *History and Class Consciousness* was little more than a kind of irrationalist Marxist version of Lebensphilosophie, "the first major irruption of the romantic anti-scientific tradition of bourgeois thought into Marxist theory."9 For those favoring the latter view, the book was an extraordinarily prescient recovery of those humanist elements in Marx's early work whose existence would be confirmed with the publication of his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* a decade later.10 For those defending the former position, Lukács' subsequent repudiation of *History and Class Consciousness* was a mark of his theoretical maturation, which accompanied his abandonment of the messianic sectarianism of the immediate


Lukács then went on to contrast his own use of totality unfavorably to Lenin's in the latter's *Philosophical Notebooks*, admitting that he had erroneously placed "totality in the center of the system, overriding the priority of economics."14 But he clearly resisted the implication that a stress on totality per se was evidence of non-scientific "romantic anti-capitalism."15 And indeed in all of his later work, totality remained an absolutely central category.

But did the same word mean different things at various stages of his career? Was there a shift from an essentially bourgeois use to a more authentically Marxist one? Or if the phrase "more authentically Marxist" begs too many of the questions this study will try to answer, can one discern a shift from one Marxist use of totality to another? To answer these questions and place *History and Class Consciousness* properly in both Lukács' own intellectual development and the history of Western Marxism, it is necessary to explore the ways in which the concept of totality entered Lukács' work in its pre-Marxist phase, most notably in *Soul and...*
Form and The Theory of the Novel. For only by doing so can one recognize both the continuities and discontinuities in his remarkable career, as well as understand the subtle relationship between Western Marxism and bourgeois culture.

As has often been remarked, Soul and Form is a work permeated by the atmosphere of bourgeois culture in crisis. Its eleven essays, written between 1907 and 1910, were composed in a lyrical and frequently over-wrought mood. Although engendered in part by Lukács' troubled love affair with Irma Seidler, the agony expressed in the work had a far more universal source. The choice of the essay form itself, as Lukács explained in the open letter to his friend Leo Popper that began the collection, was the appropriate means of expressing the problematic nature of contemporary culture. Reflecting the subjective vision of the writer, the essay, Lukács argued, is a precursor form, anticipating an objective truth that has yet to become manifest. In the meantime, its tentative and fragmentary nature captures the painful reality that Simmel characterized as the "tragedy of culture," the inability of subjective and objective meaning to coincide.

In Soul and Form, Lukács explicitly described this dilemma in terms close to Simmel's Lebensphilosophie:

Life is an anarchy of light and dark: nothing is ever completely fulfilled in life, nothing ever quite ends; new, confusing voices always mingle with the chorus of those that have been heard before. Everything flows, everything merges into another thing, and the mixture is uncontrollable and impure; everything is destroyed, everything is smashed, nothing ever flowers into real life. To live is to live something through to its end: but life means that nothing is ever fully and completely lived through to the end. 17

All of the essays express this basic insight: the chaotic richness of life struggles to achieve coherent form, but it can do so only at the cost of what makes it alive. System and life, form and fullness, conventional ethics and authentic existence (or "soul"), all of these are antagonists whose resolution can only be sought, but never achieved. When, for example, Kierkegaard tried to give his life coherent form through the public gesture of spurning his fiancée, he merely created a new series of ambiguities that mocked his attempt at closure. Similarly, when modern writers try to compose true tragedies, they must fail, because tragedy seeks to de-temporalize the rush of life and to give it an essential meaning, whereas neither goal can be accomplished short of death. Normative totalization can, in fact, come only at the cost of life, never in accord with it.

Because of this pessimistic appraisal of the antinomies of culture, Lukács had little patience with those who claim to have found an underlying meaning in life. Echoing Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel's theodicy, he refused to acknowledge a hidden rationality behind the incoherence of experience. Nor did he sympathize with those who attempt to escape from that incoherence into an alternate reality in which normative totality allegedly can be found. In his essay on Novalis, Lukács singled out the Romantics for special criticism in this regard:

They looked for order, but for an order that comprised everything, an order for the sake of which no renunciation was needed; they tried to embrace the whole world in such a way that out of the unison of all dissonances might come a symphony. To combine this unity and this universality is possible only in poetry, and that is why poetry for the Romantics became the center of the world. . . . The actuation of life vanished before their eyes and was replaced by another reality, the reality of poetry, of pure psyche. They created a homogenous, organic world unified within itself and identified it with the real world. . . . The tremendous tension that exists between poetry and life and gives both their real, value-creating powers was lost as a result. 19

Although recognizing that art could create a simulacrum of wholeness through perfect form, Lukács rejected the pan-poetic aestheticization of reality as an illusion.

Nor did he have any tolerance for the claim that totality could be achieved on an individual or personal level. Unlike most mainstream vitalists, he held to the idealist assumption that the objectification of subjectivity, the entrance into Objective Spirit, was necessary to achieve authentic wholeness. In his essay on Richard Beer-Hofmann, he pondered the meaning of a friend's death and concluded that it painfully brought home the interconnectedness of all men: "The sense that I can do nothing without striking a thousand resonances everywhere, most of which I do not and cannot know, so that each action of mine—whether I am aware of it or not—is the consequence of many thousands of waves which have met in

16. Markus points to places in Lukács' unpublished Heidelberg manuscripts on aesthetics where totality also played a critical role (Markus, "The Young Lukács," p. 96).
18. Lukács was, in fact, absorbed in Kierkegaard's writings during this period. In 1913, he began a work on Kierkegaard and Hegel that was never completed.
19. Lukács, Soul and Form, pp. 48-50. In History and Class Consciousness, Lukács returned to the same issue, this time with Schiller as the major exponent of the aesthetic totalization of reality (pp. 137-140).
me and will flow from me to others." In short, as James Schmidt has noted, the traditional German ideal of Bildung, of self-formation through entrance into the world of intersubjectivity, was a guiding ideal of Lukács in Soul and Form and beyond.

Lukács' rejection of individual solutions to fragmentation extended as well to the assumption that personal wholeness or its absence could be understood in psychological terms. Lukács' life-long antipathy to psychology, particularly to its philosophical misuse, expressed itself in Soul and Form in a distinction between monumental deeds and gestures, which perfectly reveal their essential meaning, and psychological explanations of those deeds and gestures, which are infinitely regressive in their search for hidden motives:

Where psychology begins, monumentality ends: perfect clarity is only a modest expression of a striving for monumentality. Where psychology begins, there are no more deeds but only motives for deeds; and whatever requires explanation, whatever can bear explanation, has already ceased to be solid and clear. . . Life dominated by motives is a continual alternation of the kingdoms of Lilliput and Brobdingnag; and the most inextricable, the most abysmal of all kingdoms is that of the soul's reason, the kingdom of psychology. Once psychology has entered into a life, then it is all up with unambiguous honesty and monumentality.

Tied to his distaste for psychology, which he shared with the later Dilthey, Husserl, and most of the defenders of the Geisteswissenschaften.

20. Ibid., p. 112.
21. Schmidt, "The Concrete Totality."
22. Remarking on Lukács' aesthetic conservatism of the 1930s, Ferenc Feher notes, "In its proclamation of the unquestionable and unproblematic supremacy of reason over our whole personality structure, Lukács' classicism revealed a naive reminiscence of the most over-confident periods of the Enlightenment. In this sense Lukács may be called the Anti-Freud: the theoretician of the 'pure' Ego for whom the whole problematic of the Id ('psychological character' as opposed to moral character) is dismissed with a single gesture. A constant character trait of Lukács since his youth recurs here, namely the hatred of psychology as an empirical branch of learning incapable of adequately explaining the soul (the later 'the substantial personality') ("Lukács in Weimar," Telos 39 [Spring 1979], p. 124). That this trait of his youth was preserved into Lukács' old age is shown in his remarks in his interview in New Left Review 68 (July-August 1971), where he claimed:

I must say that I am perhaps not a very contemporary man. I can say that I have never felt frustration or any kind of conflict in my life. I know what those mean, of course, from having read Freud. But I have not experienced them myself. (p. 58)

The only time Lukács dealt with Freud at some length was a review in 1921 of Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego reprised in György Lukács, Littérature, philosophie, marxisme, 1922-1923, ed. Michael Löwy, (Paris, 1978).

23. Lukács, Soul and Form, p. 39.
24. The early Dilthey, however, had hoped that psychology might be integrated into the historical sciences. Lukács criticized this position in his obituary of Dilthey in 1911 in Szélen, See Markus, "The Young Lukács," p. 102.
25. For a discussion of his general relation to Husserl, see Mihály Vajda, "Lukács' and Husserl's Critique of Science," Telos 38 (Winter 1978-79).

26. Lukács, Soul and Form, pp. 73-74.
27. Ibid., p. 87.
28. Goldmann, "Early Writings of Georg Lukács" and Alberto A. Rossa, "Der junge Lukács: Theoretiker der bürgerlichen Kunst," Alternatize 12 (1969). One expression of his proto-existentialism was his obsession with the importance of death, especially clear in his 1911 essay "On the Poverty of Spirit." The suicide of his former lover, Irma Seidler, was its inspiration. See the discussion in Arato and Breines, The Young Lukács, p. 43f; and Congdon, The Young Lukács, p. 66f.
29. This shift in emphasis has also been detected by Feher and Markes in the unpublished manuscript, "Zur Aesthetik der 'Romance'," written in 1911, which they claim presents a more optimistic counterpoint to the bleakness of "The Metaphysics of Tragedy" essay in Soul and Form.
30. Lukács, Soul and Form, p. 114.
31. Ibid., p. 55.
lidity; like Thomas Mann's character Tonio Kröger, he longed for the seemingly "healthy and unproblematic" life of Storm and his kind.

And if the past contained such totalities, perhaps the future might as well; history may seem chaotic,

yet there is an order concealed in the world of history, a composition in the confusion of its irregular lines. It is the undefinable order of a carpet or a dance; to interpret its meaning seems impossible, but it is still less possible to give up trying to interpret it. It is as though the whole fabric of fanciful lines were waiting for a single word that is always at the tip of our tongues, yet one which has never yet been spoken by anyone.

In Soul and Form, Lukács refused to venture beyond this vague intimation of a possible new totality. He knew himself incapable of uttering that single word which would reveal the figure in the carpet, the design in the dance.

In his next work The Theory of the Novel, Lukács' reluctance grew only marginally less firm, but now he was ready to probe with greater specificity the historical ground of the gap between form and life. The terrain on which he operated was the novel, which he recognized in Soul and Form as providing what the short story or the drama could not: "the totality of life by its very contents, by inserting its hero and his destiny in the full richness of an entire world." Moving beyond his neo-Kantian indifference to history as the mediator of antinomies, he now adopted Hegel's aesthetic outlook in which the truth of art was its expression of objective historical ideas. Kant's formalist aesthetics, which still dominated his unfinished treatise on aesthetics of the war years, was replaced by a new stress on content. Kant's emphasis on subjective judgment, which was preserved without its universal dimension in Lukács' earlier defense of the essay form, was now shunted aside in favor of an essentially mimetic defense of culture. Indeed, as Lukács later recognized, his reliance on mimesis went beyond even that of Hegel, who had contrasted problematic art with non-problematic reality:

The idea put forward in The Theory of the Novel, although formally similar, is in fact the complete opposite of this: the problems of the novel form are here the mirror-image of a world gone out of joint.

Accordingly, he chose a phrase from Fichte's Characteristics of the Present Age, "the epoch of absolute sinfulness," to describe present reality, rather than anything more affirmative from Hegel.

In making his case for the congruence of problematic art and problematic reality, Lukács divided the history of the West into four loosely demarcated eras: the era of the Homeric epic, that of the transition from the epic to the novel identified with Dante, that of the bourgeois novel, and finally, the post-novel era, only dimly anticipated in the works of Dostoevsky. The era of the novel Lukács further subdivided into several subcategories: the novel of abstract idealism, epitomized by Don Quixote; the novel of disillusionment, whose most characteristic exemplar was The Sentimental Education; the Bildungsroman, best seen in Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship; and the novel that "attempts to go beyond the social forms of life," quintessentially those of Tolstoy. In his 1962 preface to the work, Lukács admitted that these categories were generated by the imprecise methods of the Geisteswissenschaften elaborated in such works as Dilthey's Lives Experience and Literary Creation of 1905:

It became the fashion to form general synthetic concepts on the basis of only a few characteristics—in most cases only intuitively grasped—of a school, period, etc., then to proceed by deduction from these generalizations to the analysis of individual phenomena, and in that way to arrive at what we claimed to be a comprehensive overall view.

But unlike the other members of the Geisteswissenschaften school, Lukács had turned from Kant to Hegel and thus closed the gap between allegedly timeless aesthetic values and the flow of history. The often quoted opening sentences of the first chapter of The Theory of the Novel, "Integrated Civilizations," expressed with lyric poignancy Lukács' very anti-Kantian belief that normative totalities in which pure and practical reason had been united were in fact an historical reality:

Happy are those ages when the scarry sky is the map of all possible paths—ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is

If irony is the determining and organizing principle of the novel's form, then Lukács is indeed freeing himself from preconceived notions about the novel as an imitation of reality. Irony steadily undermines this claim at imitation and substitutes for it a conscious, interpreted awareness of the distance that separates an actual experience from the understanding of this experience. The ironic language of the novel mediates between experience and desire, and unites ideal and real within the complex paradox of the form. This form can have nothing in common with the homogeneous, organic form of nature; it is founded on an act of consciousness, not on the imitation of the natural object. (Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism [New York, 1971], p. 56)

What de Man fails to understand is that for Lukács the novel imitates a heterogeneous, inorganic form of society, not a "homogeneous, organic form of nature." Its irony is an appropriate expression of the irreconcilable antinomies of that society.

32. Mann, in fact, was to single this essay out for special praise in Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen (Berlin, 1918), p. 149.
33. Lukács, Soul and Form, p. 59.
34. Ibid., p. 167.
35. Ibid., p. 73.
37. Preface to The Theory of the Novel, p. 17. The mimetic bias of the book has been challenged by Paul de Man, who points to Lukács' emphasis on irony as the dominant principle of the novel.
new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet
like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as
the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they
never become permanent strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light
and all fire clothes itself in light. Thus each action of the soul becomes meaningful
and rounded in this duality: complete in meaning—in sense—and complete for
the senses; rounded because the soul rests within itself even while it acts; rounded
because its action separates itself from it and, having become itself, finds a center
of its own and draws a closed circumference round itself.40

Lukács concluded this paragraph with Novalis’ remark that “Philosophy is really homesickness; it is the urge to be at home everywhere,”41 by which he suggested that truly integrated civilizations knew no philosophy. Like Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy, to which he did not however refer, Lukács saw philosophy as a mark of degradation, a falling off from the wholeness of pre-philosophical times. And like Nietzsche, he found those times in the classical era before Socrates and Plato. Whereas in his earlier work on the theater he had contrasted the Greek tragedy favorably to its modern counterpart,42 now he moved back beyond the age of Aeschylus and Sophocles to that of Homer, contending, this time unlike Nietzsche, that “great epic writing gives form to the extensive totality of life, drama to the intensive totality of essence.”43 Contrasting it to the epic, Lukács claimed the drama reflected a period in which human relations had already grown problematic; indeed the very distinction between essence and appearance suggested a lack in existence as it was experienced:

The concept of essence leads to transcendence simply by being posited, and then
in the transcendent, crystallizes into a new and higher essence expressing through its form an essence that should be—an essence which, because it is born of form, remains independent of the given content of what merely exists. The concept of life, on the other hand, has no need of any such transcendence captured and held immobile as an object.44

The epic provided a narrative complete and meaningful in itself, without the tension between what was and what should be that the drama evinced.

Whereas in Soul and Form, Lukács had pitted the chaos of life against the yearning for coherent form, he now contended that the two had been fused in the lives of the Homeric Greeks, which was in turn reflected in their epics. This conclusion, however, was based far more on the image of the Greeks in German culture, for example in the writings of Hegel and Friedrich Theodor Fischer,45 than on any legitimate historical analysis of the Homeric period. In fact, for all his belief that art expressed the lived experience of an era, Lukács derived that presumed experience solely from the evidence of the art itself. The material basis of the Homeric normative totality was completely ignored; the class analysis he had previously used in certain of his Hungarian writings was nowhere to be seen. The mimesis he invoked—and in this sense he was close to Hegel—was of the idea of an integrated civilization, rather than of its material foundation. The Greeks were thus as romantically depicted as in any of the earlier fantasies of Winckelmann and his followers.

Lukács also neglected to do what other great commentator on the realism of the Homeric epic, Erich Auerbach, was later to do in the brilliant first chapter of his Minness.46 That is, he confined classical civilization to the Greeks and failed to examine another seminal ancient text, the Hebrew Bible. If he had, he might have noted that some of the same characteristics that he had attributed to the modern novel, and which he saw as reflections of the “epoch of absolute sinfulness,” were present in the great document of an age of absolute faith, albeit faith in a transcendent rather than immanent God.

Be that as it may, Lukács’ idealized characterization of the Homeric era nonetheless provided him, as István Mészáros has put it, with “an abstract regulative principle”47 by which to measure later periods. And it provides us with an invaluable series of clues to his image of normative totality during this period of his intellectual development. First of all, for the Lukács of The Theory of the Novel, normative totality lacked any ontological differentiations; the Homeric world was “a homogeneous world, and even the separation between man and world, between ‘I’ and ‘You’ cannot disturb its homogeneity.”48 In this homogeneous world, there are no Kantian distinctions between morality and inclination, duty and desire, form and life:

Totality of being is possible only where everything is already homogenous before it has been contained by forms; where forms are not a constraint but only the becoming conscious, the coming to the surface of everything that had been lying

40. Ibid., p. 29.
41. Ibid. By denigrating philosophy as inherently less capable than epic narrative of expressing a fulfilled totality, Lukács showed how non-Hegelian he still was, even in this, his most Hegelian work.
42. Markus, p. 110.
43. Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, p. 46. In Soul and Form, Lukács argued a similar position: “The inner style of the drama is realistic within the medieval, scholastic meaning of the work (universal essences were most real), but this excludes all modern realism” (p. 159).
44. Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, p. 47.
The Homeric world is so homogeneous that the very distinction between transcendence and immanence is overcome; it is "empirical and metaphysical, combining transcendence and immanence inseparably within itself." 49

Accordingly, the role of subjectivity in the epic was minimized. The subject lived in an immediate and fulfilled manner; he was never equivalent to a principle that transcended and was in tension with his existence.

Moreover, the "I" of the epic was empirical rather than what Lukács called intelligible, as it was in the drama. That is, the epic subject lived in an immediate and fulfilled manner; he was never equivalent to a principle that transcended and was in tension with his existence. Accordingly, the role of subjectivity in the epic was minimized. The subject was receptive and passive, the beneficiary of divine grace.

The Homeric Greeks had only answers, their successors posed troubling questions, which could only be resolved at some future date. The very existence of an ethical imperative, the "ought," "in whose desperate intensity the essence seeks refuge because it has become an outlaw on earth," 50 means that the present needs the future to complete it. In short, time is a form of corruption and normative totality requires its suspension.

Third, the Homeric Greeks knew no real individuality. Epic heroes were eponymous, standing for all men. In the world of the epic, "an individual structure and physiognomy is simply the product of a balance between the part and the whole, mutually determining one another; it is never the product of polemical self-contemplation by the lost and lonely personality." 54 Moreover, the "I" of the epic was empirical rather than what Lukács called intelligible, as it was in the drama. That is, the epic subject lived in an immediate and fulfilled manner; he was never equivalent to a principle that transcended and was in tension with his existence.

In fact, once the subject becomes active and dominant, the subject's form-giving, structuring, delimiting act, his sovereignty over the created object, is the lyricism of those epic forms which are without totality. 56

57. Ibid., p. 67.
58. Ibid., p. 64.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., p. 71. Marx's well-known comparison between the Greeks and the childhood of mankind appeared in the Grundrisse (1857-8).
62. Ibid., p. 88.
63. Ibid., p. 64.
64. Ibid. If any evidence is needed to demonstrate Lukács' indebtedness to the Romantic tradition, these images clearly provide it. Compare, for example, this description of Teufelsdrockh's vision of wholeness in "The Everlasting Yes" chapter of Thomas Carlyle's Sartor Resartus: "The Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres; but godlike and my Father" (Sartor Resartus [London, 1881], p. 130).
yet which still thinks in terms of totality.” Lukács began his highly schematic analysis of the novel with Don Quixote, the novel of abstract idealism. He then proceeded through the other types mentioned above, and concluded with the ambitious, but ultimately unsuccessful, attempts of Goethe and Tolstoy to transcend the limitations of the form. It would take us too far afield to recapitulate his typology and examine its specific implications, but certain aspects of his general discussion of the novel per se merit our attention.

In virtually all of its respects, the novel, as Lukács presented it, is the antithesis of the epic. Its formal properties manifest the fragmentation and dissonance of the world that it reflects. Nostalgia for lost unity or longing for a new one animates the novel; as a result, it lacks the perfect stillness of the epic: “Only the novel, the literary form of the transcendent homelessness of the idea, includes real time—Bergson’s durée—among its constitutive principles.” The subject of the novel, untouched by grace, at odds with his world, driven by an ethical imperative that transcends his existence, is necessarily impelled on a quest for immanent meaning, but one that is doomed to frustration. The novel’s attempt to grasp life whole leads to a limitless aggregation of disparate elements, very much like Hegel’s notion of a “bad infinity,” “whereas the infinity of purely epic matter is an inner, organic one.” Because the novel seeks totality, but cannot achieve it, its characteristic posture is self-referential and reflective, “sentimental” in Schiller’s well-known distinction, rather than “naive.” In fact, “the need for reflection is the deepest melancholy of every great and genuine novel.”

The novelist himself cannot transcend the ironic implications of this situation. “Irony, the self-surfacing of a subjectivity that has gone as far as it was possible to go,” Lukács contended, “is the highest freedom that can be achieved in a world without God.”

In The Theory of the Novel, Lukács held out only a very tentative hope that anything better might be achieved. His final chapter, “Tolstoy and the Attempts to Go Beyond the Social Forms of Life,” examined the great Russian novels of the nineteenth century. His wife at this time, to whom he dedicated the book, was Yelena Andreyevna Grabenko, a Russian “social revolutionary.” He seems to have been captivated by the possibility that Russia might “save us from Western Civilization,” although precisely how he did not know. Because of the “greater closeness of nineteenth century Russian literature to certain organic natural conditions,” he speculated, it expressed the normative totality present in the Homeric epic better than any other novels. Although his work was in one sense the “final expression of European Romanticism,” Tolstoy was able at certain moments to explode the limitations of the novel to show a “clearly differentiated, concrete and existent world, which, if it could be spread out into a totality, would be completely inaccessible to the categories of the novel and would require a new form of artistic creation: the form of the renewed epic.”

The major flaw in Tolstoy’s vision derived from his over-reliance on nature as the arena of totalization, whereas “a totality of men and events is possible only on the basis of culture.”

Intimations of a new normative totality capable of sustaining a renewed epic were more clearly present, Lukács concluded, in the messianic antinomian world of Dostoevsky, for a critique of whom The Theory of the Novel had originally been intended as a preface. In fact, “it is in the words of Dostoevsky that this new world, remote from any struggle against what actually exists, is drawn for the first time simply as a seen reality. That is why he, and the form he created, lie outside the scope of this book.” But whether or not the vision of a new normative totality present in Dostoevsky really foreshadowed a radical change, Lukács chose not to say. The Theory of the Novel ended on a note only marginally more hopeful than that sounded in Soul and Form; Lukács was still mired in the problematic of bourgeois culture in disarray and could see no easy and immediate way out.

He does seem to have felt certain, however, that the answer lay within the realm of culture. His chastisement of Tolstoy for failing to see that totality was an affair of culture rather than nature was characteristic of his intense preoccupation with the idea of culture during the years immediately preceding and following his sudden embrace of Marxism. His concomitant hostility to socio-economic categories was evinced as well in his

66. Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, p. 56. For a recent and arresting analysis of the novel’s inability to achieve totalizing closure that reformulates and particularizes this argument in deconstructionist terms, see D. A. Miller, Narrativity and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel (Princeton, 1981). Miller, to be sure, remains solely within the texts themselves whereas Lukács sought his answers outside them.

67. Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, p. 121. The only way the corrosive power of time is overcome in the novel is through memory, which Lukács sees as injecting an epic quality into certain novels. In his very stimulating chapter on The Theory of the Novel in The Subject in Question: The Languages of Theory and the Strategies of Fiction (Chicago, 1982), David Carroll shows how Flaubert’s Sentimental Education typifies this process. But he then assigns the role of leading Lukács out of his pessimism, an honor that more properly belongs to Dosoevsky’s works.

69. Ibid., p. 85.
70. Ibid., p. 93.
71. Ibid., p. 145.
72. Ibid., p. 151.
73. Ibid., p. 132.
74. Ibid., p. 147.
75. Ibid., p. 132.
depiction of the new world foreshadowed by the Russian novelists: “This world is the sphere of pure soul-reality in which man exists as man, neither as a social being nor as an isolated, unique, pure and therefore abstract interiority.”

For Lukács, social was equivalent to what Tönnies had called gesellschaftlich, connoting a world of alienation and disharmony. Gemeinschaft (community) was a cultural, not social phenomenon. It was the realm of those direct and immediate confrontations between pure souls prefigured in Dostoevsky's fictional world.

In the period after The Theory of the Novel was published, Lukács shed his pessimistic evaluation of the possibilities of change, but his preference for cultural rather than socio-economic solutions continued. An essay he published in December, 1918, the very month of his “conversion” to Marxism, was entitled “Bolshevism as a Moral Problem.” In it, he pondered the dilemma presented by the Leninist adoption of evil means to achieve good ends, “or as Razumikhin says in Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment, that it is possible to lie our way through to the truth.” With a concern for the ethical authenticity that had motivated much of his earlier work, Lukács refused to adopt Razumikhin's logic, and specifically rejected the Bolsheviks' “credo quia absurdum est—that no new class struggle will emerge out of this class struggle.” Although in a second essay published two months later entitled “Tactics and Ethics,” Lukács did justify that leap of faith by accepting the sacrifice of individual ethical purity in the name of “an imperative of the world-historical situation, an historico-philosophical mission,” he nonetheless continued to focus on cultural and moral issues, if now with a revolutionary intent.

76. Ibid.
77. Most commentators follow the lead of Lukács' friends from this period, such as Arnold Hauser and Anna Lesznai, who saw his change as sudden and unexpected; in Lesznai's words, "from Saul became Paul" (quoted in Kettler, "Culture and Revolution," p. 69). Goldmann's later stress on the irrational Pascalian imperative of the world-historical situation, an historico-philosophical mission, he nonetheless continued to focus on cultural and moral issues, if now with a revolutionary intent.
78. Appearing first in December, 1918 in the journal of a group of Hungarian radical intellectuals known as the Sprites, "Tactics and Ethics" appeared again in his remarks on party discipline in History and Class Consciousness as well as in his actions after its denunciation, can perhaps be traced back to this earlier identification of the higher morality of justifiable terrorism.
79. Kettler, "Culture and Revolution," p. 36. It derives, he claims, "utopic interest from striving to advance the distinctly humanist values without succumbing to the ethical callousness, if not inhumanity, which normally mars the aristocratic culturalist view." For a recent defense of the cultural emphasis throughout Lukács' work, see Feenberg, Marx, Lukács and the Sources of Critical Theory, Chapters 5 and 6.
80. This extraordinary group of intellectuals met every Sunday from 1915 to 1918 in the home of Béla Baláz. In 1917, they organized a series of lectures given under the auspices of a "Free School for Studies of the Human Spirit." The Hungarian word for spirit (szellem) became an informal way of referring to the circle, which was colloquially called "The Sprites" (Szellenské). The best account of them in English can be found in Congdon, The Young Lukács, Chapter 2.
82. After his embrace of Marxism, Lukács continued to wrestle with the role of intellectual leadership. In a 1919 essay entitled "Intellectual Workers and the Problem of Intellectual Leadership," he argued against the claim that socialism disparaged the intellect. Linking Marx very closely to Hegel, he concluded: "We Marxists not only believe that the development of society is directed by the so-often-disparaged Spirit, but we also know that it was only in Marx's work that this spirit became conscious and assumed the mission of leadership. But then, if anticipating his friend Mannheim's celebration of the free-floating intellectual, he added: "But this mission cannot be the privilege of any 'intellectual class' or the product of 'super-class' thinking. The salvation of society is a mission which only the proletariat, by virtue of its world-historical role, can achieve" (Political Writings, 1919–1929, p. 18).
Lukács' revolutionary culturalism was most clearly expressed in his essay “The Old Culture and the New Culture,” first published in Hungarian in Internationale on June 15, 1919, and then in German in the ultra-left journal Kommunismus on November 7, 1920. Written when Lukács was Minister of Education in Béla Kun's revolutionary government and sponsoring moralistic (and counterproductive) policies such as the prohibition of alcohol, the essay expresses many of the ambiguities of his transitional period. Here, unlike in The Theory of the Novel, a specific link between the crisis of capitalism and crisis of culture was an explicit theme. But the characterization of capitalism was couched in terms closer to the right-wing critique of civilization than to the traditional Marxist language of economic exploitation. “Civilization, and its most developed form, capitalism,” Lukács wrote, “has brought to its peak man's slavery to social production, to the economy. And the sociological precondition of culture is man as an end in himself.”

Like Gramsci, with his contention that the Russian Revolution was a revolt “against Capital,” although without Gramsci's more complicated mediation of politics and culture, Lukács interpreted the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism as a mistaken universalization of the unique, and regrettable, situation of capitalism. In fact, he went so far as to challenge the priority of economics during the pre-revolutionary period as well, arguing that “the culture of the capitalist epoch had collapsed in itself and prior to the occurrence of economic and political breakdown.” And he claimed that with the onset of the revolution, the importance of culture increased even more dramatically: “During capitalism every ideological movement was only the ‘superstructure’ of the revolutionary process which ultimately led to the collapse of capitalism. Now in the proletarian dictatorship, this relationship is reversed.” The new culture that is now being created will end the rule of civilization, the division of labor, and the primacy of the economy over man. It will restore the conditions that had generated “the greatness of old cultures (Greek, Renaissance),” which “consisted in the fact that ideology and production were in harmony; the products of culture could organically develop out of the soil of social being.” When Communism ends anarchic individualism, Lukács concluded, “human society will form an organic whole.”

Understood in terms of the later debate over whether Marx thought freedom lay in the realm of de-alienated labor, a position expressed in the 1844 Manuscripts, or beyond labor altogether, as claimed in the third volume of Capital, Lukács (who, of course, had not yet seen the 1844 Manuscripts) can be placed clearly in the latter camp. He in fact defined culture as “the ensemble of valuable products and abilities which are dispensable in relation to the immediate maintenance of life,” and argued that it was accessible only when strenuous labor ended and “free energies are at the disposal of culture.” Such opportunities may have been open only to an elite in earlier times, but Communism would universalize them. In fact, one of Lukács' primary goals in the Kun government was the democratization of culture, which, to be sure, did not mean toleration for all varieties of cultural expression.

Revolutionary culturalism thus suggested a continuity with Lukács’ “romantic anti-capitalist” phase because of his stress on culture over economics and politics, but it also suggested a movement away from it in his linking of a “new culture” with the triumph of the proletariat. That movement grew more pronounced in the years following the publication of “The Old Culture and the New Culture,” years in which Lukács was able to reflect on the failure of the Kun government and his own messianic ultra-leftism. Although Lukács' concern for culture, Bildung, and ethics was by no means left behind, his new emphasis on proletarian class consciousness and reification signified a firmer grasp of Marx's method and intentions. For the first time in his thinking, political as well as cultural transformation came to play a central theoretical role. The lessons of Lenin, as he understood them, directed his attention to issues of praxis and organization. The result of these changes was a book whose stress on the methodological importance of totality was given credence by its author’s ability to link cultural, political, social, and (albeit to a lesser ex-
tent) economic issues in one powerful argument. History and Class Consciousness put the relationship between theory and practice at the center of the Marxist debate in a way that transcended the limitations of both revolutionary culturalism and the orthodoxy of the Second International. It is to that extraordinary work, the seminal text of Western Marxism, that we may now finally turn.

Because the general tenor of what follows will be critical of Lukács' argument in History and Class Consciousness, it must be stressed at the outset how remarkable an achievement the work really was. At a time when Marxist theory still lagged behind many of its bourgeois counterparts in reflective sophistication, Lukács almost single-handedly succeeded in raising it to a respectable place in European intellectual life. The widespread dismissal of Marxism in the 1890s as another variant of scientism or positivism was no longer tenable, at least in German-speaking countries where Lukács' book could be read at first hand. As one of his staunchest critics, Lucio Colletti, later acknowledged, it was "the first Marxist book after Marx (Labriola was too isolated a phenomenon) which deals with Hegel and German classical philosophy at a European level and with a thorough knowledge of the subject; it is the first book in which philosophical Marxism ceases to be a cosmological romance and thus, a surrogate 'religion' for the 'lower' classes." Indeed, along with Korsch's Marxism and Philosophy, it reestablished the possibility of exploring Marxism's philosophical dimension, rather than seeing it as a science that had overcome the need for philosophical reflection. Although, to be sure, it remained largely just a possibility for many years, the fuse had been lit which ultimately ignited Marxism's critical potential. Moreover, History and Class Consciousness anticipated in several fundamental ways the philosophical implications of Marx's 1844 Manuscripts, whose publication it antedated by almost a decade. It was also the first work by a Marxist of European-wide stature to develop the insight, anticipated in the writings of Mondolfo, Brzozowski, Koigen, Plenge and He­lander, that Marx and Engels should not always be conflated into advo­

cates of an identical position. And finally, it offered a brilliant, if ultimately false, explanation of and justification for the success of the Bolshevik Revolution at a time when Lenin and his followers were too busy or too confused to provide an adequate one themselves. As such, History and Class Consciousness can be seen as the most articulate expression on a theoretical level of the world-historical events of 1917, sharing in fact all of their fateful ambiguities. It thus presented a twentieth-century parallel to Kant's Critiques and their relation to the French Revolution. In fact, as we will see, the high-water mark of Hegelian Marxism came with the cresting of the revolutionary wave; its decline, which can already be discerned in the last sections of Lukács' book, followed swiftly the postwar revolutions' reversal of fortune. Its partial revival had to await an apparently comparable revolutionary wave in the 1960s.

In short, History and Class Consciousness has to be regarded as one of those rare synthetic visions that launch a new paradigm or problematic in thought, in this case Western Marxism. In fact, it was so synthetic in harnessing Hegelian Marxism for Bolshevik purposes that a distinctive Western Marxism did not really emerge until after the book was condemned by the Soviet authorities in 1924 at the fifth World Congress of the Comintern. For Lukács, like Korsch and Gramsci, saw himself as a loyal follower of Lenin, so much so, in fact, that when the condemnation came, Lukács chose the Party over the complete integrity of his own ideas.

But those ideas, of course, came very quickly to have a life of their own, despite their author's second thoughts. In what follows, we will concentrate on only one of them (although, to be sure, a central one). Indeed, for Lukács, it was so central that he insisted:

It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality. The category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts, is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and brilliantly transformed into the foundations of a wholly new science. . . . Proletarian science is revolutionary not just by virtue of its revolutionary ideas which it opposes to bourgeois society, but above all because of its method. The primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science.
As this paragraph reveals, Lukács’ concern for totality was part of his even more fundamental assumption that methodology was the critical determinant of a revolutionary intellectual posture. In fact, the essay which opened with this statement posed the question “What is Orthodox Marxism?” and answered it by claiming that orthodoxy lay not in the acceptance of Marxist doctrine, but rather in the use of the correct method. Lukács carried this argument to the dubious extreme of saying that even if all of the conclusions to which the method led were shown to be false, the method would nonetheless still be valid. This position, it might be noted in passing, was one he never repudiated.102

The main targets of this contention were Eduard Bernstein and the Revisionists, who believed Marx’s alleged predictions had been invalidated by contrary factual evidence. In an earlier version of “What is Orthodox Marxism?” Lukács had ridiculed the fetish of facts in particularly vehement terms, arguing in a way reminiscent of Sorel that “decisions, real decisions, precede the facts. To understand reality in the Marxist sense is to be master and not the slave of the imminent facts.”103 He finished this earlier draft by flinging the provocative challenge of Fichte at the vulgar Marxists: “So much the worse for the facts.”104 In the version of the essay printed in History and Class Consciousness, Fichte’s words were deleted, but the same argument against the passive fetishism of facts remained. Lukács linked action and knowledge, contending that the inert immediacy of facts had to be overcome by mediating them through a dynamic understanding of the whole:

Only in this context, which sees the isolated facts of social life as aspects of the historical process and integrates them in a totality, can knowledge of the facts hope to become knowledge of reality. This knowledge starts from the simple and (to the capitalist world) pure, immediate, natural determinants described above. It progresses from them to the knowledge of the concrete totality, i.e., to the conceptual reproduction of reality.105

What from a positivist point of view would seem oxymoronic, linking concreteness with totality, was accepted by Lukács because of his Hegelian notion of the concrete. Instead of equating it with discrete entities or individual facts, he followed Marx’s Hegelian usage: “The concrete is concrete because it is a synthesis of many particular determinants, i.e.

a unity of diverse elements.”106 The totality could be concrete precisely because it included all of the mediations that linked the seemingly isolated facts.

What is perhaps most striking in these arguments is Lukács’ new confidence in his ability, using the right method, to achieve a “conceptual reproduction of reality.” The change was due to a number of revisions of his attitude towards the historical process, as well as a more complex use of the concept of totality itself. It is these changes that warn us against seeing History and Class Consciousness as merely a transposition of Lukács’ earlier viewpoint into a Marxist key.

Whereas in The Theory of the Novel Lukács had rejected Hegel’s optimistic vision of the historical process as a whole, agreeing with Fichte instead that the modern age was one of absolute sinfulness, he now saw history as a coherent and meaningful unity, what we have called a progressive longitudinal totality. Instead of viewing time as an agent of corruption and equating normative totality with the stillness of the epic, he now saw dynamism as an integral part of the whole. In the earlier draft of “What is Orthodox Marxism?” he wrote, “Like the classical German philosophers, particularly Hegel, Marx perceived world history as a homogeneous process, as an uninterrupted, revolutionary process of liberation.”107 In the revised version, he asserted in a similar vein that Marx “concretely revealed the real substratum of historical evolution and developed a seminal method in the process.”108 Later, in the central essay of the collection, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” Lukács referred the reader back to this earlier contention:

As we have shown, the question of universal history is a problem of methodology that necessarily emerges in every account of even the smallest segment of history. For history as a totality (universal history) is neither the mechanical aggregate of individual events, nor is it a transcendent heuristic principle opposed to the events of history, a principle that could only become effective with the aid of a special discipline, the philosophy of history. The totality of history is itself a real historical power—even though one that has not hitherto become conscious and has therefore gone unrecognized—a power which is not to be separated from the reality (and hence the knowledge) of the individual facts without at the same time annihilating their reality and their factual existence. It is the real, ultimate ground of their reality and their factual existence and hence also of this knowability even as individual facts.109

102. Ibid., p. xxvi.
104. Ibid., p. 27. Much later, in his 1963 piece “Reflections on the Sino-Soviet Dispute,” reprinted in Marxism and Human Liberation, Lukács singled out this Fichtean phrase (p. 75) as the epitome of the left sectarianism he had abandoned after Lenin’s rebuke.
105. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 8.
108. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 17.
109. Ibid., pp. 151–152.
of the object, and not merely its passive observer: “In the most general terms we see here the origin of the philosophical tendency to press forward to a conception of the subject which can be thought of as a creator of the totality of content.”\footnote{113} Although elsewhere in the text Lukács lapsed into the more orthodox notion that “history” controlled men, his quasi-Fichtean emphasis on subjectivity lent itself to a humanist interpretation of the historical process.

In fact, he criticized Fichte and Idealism in general for their transcendental and ahistorical notion of the subject. And like Marx, he chastised Feuerbach for correcting this fallacy only to the point of substituting an equally abstract anthropological notion of man for the Idealists’ Spirit. To grasp the subject of history, he insisted, was to recognize which social groups, which classes, were practically active and which were not.

Throughout all previous history, Lukács contended, no social group could legitimately lay claim to the role of universal subject, although some had attempted to do so. Only now, Lukács thought, with the rise of the proletariat to power an imminent prospect, could such a claim be justly entertained. The implications of this new universal subject for Lukács were profound. Whereas in the past, Simmel’s “tragedy of culture” accurately described the gap between a particular subject and the residues of other subjects’ objectifications, now the situation had changed drastically. The assumptions underlying Lukács’ belief in that change were ultimately traceable to a strictly humanist reading of Vico’s \textit{verum-factum} principle. Although Fredric Jameson has discerned traces of it in the last chapter of \textit{The Theory of the Novel},\footnote{115} it was not really until \textit{History and Class Consciousness} that Lukács’ new view of the subject allowed him to

106

Lukács and the Western Marxist Paradigm

In short, for Lukács, the past, present and future were all to be understood as moments in a coherent and meaningful process of emancipation, an argument which, as we will see, later Western Marxists were to question as a theodicy.

In \textit{The Theory of the Novel}, to point to another contrast, Lukács had argued that certain novels were able to approach the epic’s cessation of temporal corruption through memory: “The genuinely epic quality of such memory is the affirmative experience of the life process. The duality of interiority and the outside world can be abolished for the subject if he argued that certain novels were able”\footnote{110} This vision of a retrospective totalization, with its echo of Hegel’s Owl of Minerva flying only at dusk and Dilthey’s idea of death as the sole moment of personal totalization, was absent from \textit{History and Class Consciousness}. Lukács’ stress on deeds, action and praxis meant that those who make history were no longer separated from those who came later to understand it. Although, as we will see when looking at Marcuse’s notion of totality, the redemptive power of memory was not entirely abandoned by all Western Marxists, it was clearly subordinate in \textit{History and Class Consciousness} to a stress on the convergence between acting and knowing.

This revision necessarily entailed a radical rethinking of the subject for Lukács. No longer did he talk of a passive, receptive subject who achieves totality through some kind of grace. From what in Dilthey’s well-known lexicon might be called the “objective idealism” of \textit{The Theory of the Novel}, Lukács now turned to Dilthey’s “idealism of freedom,” an attitude bringing him in some ways closer to Fichte than to Hegel. Fichte, in fact, had held a fascination for Lukács for some time, possibly because of Lask’s extensive exploration of his ideas.\footnote{111} In one of his pre-Marxist works, “Towards a Sociology of Drama,” Lukács had claimed that “in its basic essentials . . . Marx’s whole philosophy sprang from one source—Fichte.”\footnote{112} Although he no longer held this drastic estimation of Fichte’s sole influence, the notion of the subject in \textit{History and Class Consciousness} bore unmistakable traces of Fichte’s subjective activism. In fact, Lukács specifically praised Fichte’s impatient dismissal of the impenetrability of the Kantian noumenon and his belief that the subject was the creator.

107

Lukács and the Western Marxist Paradigm

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\item \footnote{110} Lukács, \textit{The Theory of the Novel}, p. 127.
\item \footnote{111} Lask’s doctoral dissertation was entitled “Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte” (1902); reprinted in \textit{Gesammelte Schriften}, 3 vols. (Tübingen, 1923, 1923 and 1924).
\item \footnote{112} Quoted in Brinton, “Lukács, Revolution and Marxism: 1885–1918,” p. 414. See also the discussion in Aceto and Brinton, p. 260.
\end{itemize}
see Vico's argument as central. Quoting Marx's own citation of Vico in *Capital*, Lukács built his refutation of Simmel's acceptance of the tragedy of culture, which Lukács now called "the anathem of bourgeois thought," on the belief that man knows history better than nature because he can know what he has made better than what is made outside of him.

Vico, as we have seen, did not worry about distinguishing man in general from specific historical subjects. Nor did he confine the process of making to intentional, conscious and rational action. Lukács, like Hegel before him, contended that the *tertum-factum* principle applied only when a universal totalizer made history in a deliberate and rational manner. To know the whole was thus dependent on the existence of a collective historical subject who could recognize itself in its objectifications:

Only when a historical situation has arisen in which a class must understand society if it is to assert itself; only when the fact that a class understands itself means that it understands society as a whole and when, in consequence, the class becomes both the subject and the object of knowledge, in short, only when these conditions are all satisfied will the unity of theory and practice, the precondition of the revolutionary function of the theory, become possible.

Such a situation has in fact arisen with the entry of the proletariat into history.

Capitalism, to be sure, had laid the groundwork for the proletariat's entrance by its relentless socialization of the world, its incorporation of intellectual expression of the revolutionary process in the Early Marxist Work of Lukács.

There were a few bourgeois thinkers who tried to think holistically—Lukács mentioned the psychologist Wundt in this regard—mainstream bourgeois thought could not transcend its individualist, analytic and formalist biases. An adequate theory had to be understood as "essentially the intellectual expression of the revolutionary process itself," and clearly bourgeois theory could only be in opposition to that process.

Because of Lukács' reliance on the *tertum-factum* principle and his contention that theory expressed the revolutionary process, the view of totality he was advocating has justly been called "expressive" by his more recent structuralist critics. According to this notion, the whole expresses the intentionality and praxis of a creator—subject, who recognizes himself in the objective world around it. Other ways of making the same point are to call it a "genetic" or "reflective" or "self-activating" view of totality, because the whole is understood as a reflection of its own genesis, the product of its own praxis. For Lukács, at least in certain moments in *History and Class Consciousness*, the subject of history and the object of history are ultimately one. The Western Marxist use of totality can be said to have begun with this expressive view of totality although, as we will soon see, it certainly did not end with it.

In adopting an expressive notion of the whole, Lukács was able to achieve seemingly valid resolutions of the antinomies of bourgeois thought and culture that had been plaguing him since he began to write. The source of these intellectual and spiritual contradictions, he claimed, lay in the contradictory nature of bourgeois existence. Extrapolating from Marx's discussion of the "fetichism of commodities" in *Capital*, and applying insights from Bergson, Simmel and Weber, he introduced the notion of reification to characterize the fundamental experience of bourgeois life. This term, one not in fact found in Marx himself, meant the petrification of living processes into dead things, which appeared as an alien "second nature." Weber's "iron cage" of bureaucratic rationalization, Simmel's "tragedy of culture" and Bergson's spatialization of *durée* were thus all part of a more general process. Lukács was able to move beyond the stoic pessimism of situated in a *decentered* totality of which it is not so much the source as the decentered mediation! (p. 28). Rather than holding on to a constitutive concept of subjectivity, Lukács, according to Feenberg, agreed with Hegel's doctrine of essence in the *Logik*, which posited a relational immanence that did not annihilate the specificity of the entities bound together in the relation. As a consequence, Lukács argued that the proletariat could never create the social world out of itself and recognize itself in its objectifications. Instead, Feenberg contends, he argued only that the proletariat "alters the social signification and function of its objects" (p. 34). Accordingly, "Lukács argues that under socialism society could become increasingly subject to conscious control, but not that the tension between man and society would disappear" (p. 37).

This reading of Lukács seems to me truer to Lucien Goldmann's revision of his work than to Lukács himself. Feenberg, who was a student of Goldmann, is more generous than the texts allow. Indeed, as he himself concedes, "The critique of Lukács is by no means entirely misplaced. Unfortunately, Lukács' constant use of the language of productive subjectivity suggests that even though he defines this concept in a Hegelian manner, he wants it to bear the burden of solving the sort of problems Kant first posed, and Fichte later resolved with the undialectical concept of expressive totality" (p. 38). Perhaps the most telling piece of evidence against Feenberg's reading is that a subjective mediation of objective reality that merely "altered" its social signification and function would not really overcome the Kantian thing-in-itself problem, which Lukács clearly set out to resolve. It seems therefore correct to conclude with Arato and Brenner that "Lukács' consideration of Hegel's discovery of the historical dialectic does not amount to an abrogation of the Fichtean roots of his concept of 'subject'" (p. 128). For yet another discussion of those roots, see Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London, 1981), p. 31. In his book, Feenberg comes close to recognizing this point when he acknowledges that there are two competing models of practice in Lukács' work, practice as production (basically Fichtean) and practice as mediation (essentially Hegelian). He prefers, of course, to emphasize the latter. See the discussion on p. 126.
Weber and Simmel by linking their intellectual dilemmas to the refined nature of bourgeois life, an explanation that grounded them historically. And he was able to offer a similar explanation for the infection of Second International socialism thought by the same antinomies; the Revisionists with their neo-Kantian split between facts and values and the orthodoxy with their economic fatalism and failure to consider subjective praxis were both ideological expressions of a still non-revolutionary age, an age before the collective totalizer achieved self-consciousness.

The central antinomies Lukács identified as characteristic of the bourgeois era were the separation of facts and values; the distinction between phenomena, or appearances, and noumena, or essential things-in-themselves; and the oppositions between free will and necessity, form and content, and subject and object. For Lukács, as we have seen in examining his pre-Marxist writings, the gap between “is” and “ought” was a source of particular distress. The epic was distinguished from the drama and novel by its incorporation of morality into immediate life. To regain this unity was possible only if a transcendental and ahistorical morality in the Kantian sense was replaced by the more Hegelian notion of ethical life (Sittlichkeit) as the concrete customs (Sitte) of a specific historical totality. The answer to the moral relativism haunting bourgeois thought was thus not a flight into an imagined world of transcendental values, as attempted by Rickert and other neo-Kantians. It was instead an acceptance of the partial relativism of the historical process in which collective values were posited by specific historical subjects. To Lukács the “is” and the “ought” would merge once the subject of history, the proletariat, objectified its ethical principles in the concrete mores of Communist society. Recognizing itself in the world it had created, it would no longer be subjected to the moral alienation plaguing bourgeois culture. As part of a collective subject, the individual would no longer be troubled by the types of doubts Lukács himself had voiced in “Bolshevism as a Moral Problem.”

121. In his seminal study of Lukács in the “Western Marxism” chapter of Adventures of the Dialectic, trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston, 1973), Merleau-Ponty recognized the importance of this answer, which he says was directed at Lukács’ “teacher,” Weber:

He does not reproach him for having been too relativistic but rather for not having been relativistic enough and for not having gone so far as to “relativize the notions of subject and object.” For, by so doing, one negates a sort of totality. Certainly nothing can change the fact that our knowledge is partial in both senses of the word, it will never be confined with the historical in itself (i.e., as this word has a meaning). We are never able to refer to completed totality, to universal history, as if we were not within it, as if we were spread out in front of us. The totality of which Lukács speaks, in his own terms, “the totality of observed facts,” not of all possible and actual beings but of our coherent arrangement of all the known facts. When the subject recognizes himself in history and history in himself, he does not dominate the whole, as the Hegelian philosopher does, but at least he is engaged in a work of totalization.

Although Merleau-Ponty reads Lukács through the lens of an existentialist Marxist for whom open-ended totalization has priority over finished totality, he nonetheless perceives with considerable acuity the answer Lukács tried to give to neo-Kantian transcendentalism.

A comparable resolution of the antinomy between phenomena and noumena would follow from the same coming-to-consciousness of the universal totalizer, the proletariat; for from the point of view of totality:

The two main strands of the irrationality of the thing-in-itself and the concreteness of the individual content and of totality are given a positive turn and appear as a unity. This signals a change in the relation between theory and practice and between freedom and necessity. The idea that we have made reality loses its more or less fictitious character: we have—in the prophetic words of Vico already cited—made our own history and if we are able to regard the whole of reality as history (i.e., as our history, for there is no other), we shall have raised ourselves in fact to the position from which reality can be understood as our action. 122

In other words, the mysterious impenetrability of the thing-in-itself will be revealed as no more than the illusion of a refined consciousness incapable of recognizing itself in its products.

In addition, the felt distance between will and fate, freedom and necessity, would also narrow once the external world were no longer perceived as ruled by alien forces experienced as if they were a “second nature.” The very opposition, popular among vulgar materialists and neo-Kantians alike, between a world of objective matter and subjective consciousness would end as men adopted a practical attitude towards the objective world. Being would then be understood as Becoming, things would dissolve into processes, and most important of all, the subjective origin of those processes would become apparent to the identical subject-object of history.

Freedom was reconcilable with necessity because it was equivalent to collective action, action which constituted the world out of itself. For bourgeois notions of “negative freedom,” the freedom from interference in individual affairs, Lukács had nothing but contempt: “Above all one thing must be made clear: freedom here does not mean the freedom of the individual.” 123 The very notion of the individual isolated from the social context was a mark of reification. The antinomy between form and content, which had bothered Lukács so much in his earlier writings, was itself a reflection of the reified individual's sense of his own unique life in opposition to the alien forms of social interaction. Once he recognized himself as part of the collective source of those very forms, their foreignness would dissolve. As in the Homeric world, men would live lives of immediate formal and substantive wholeness. The normative totality to which men had so long aspired would be finally achieved.

122. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 145.
123. Ibid., p. 315.
Hearn, The Dialectical

The intermediary was the organizational embodiment of the theoretical self-consciousness of the proletariat's objective possibility. In the early stages of the combined power of party and soviets conformed to Bolshevik practice. Crucial for Lukács, because he still believed that Lenin's professed faith in the proletariat was a corrosive tendency in the service of bourgeois culture, were enormously powerful taken on their own terms. But it soon became apparent that their elegant simplicity could not bear close scrutiny. There are, in fact, indications in History and Class Consciousness itself that Lukács had sensed the difficulties even before his critics began to detail them. Perhaps the most obvious instance was Lukács' highly controversial notion of "ascribed" or "imputed" class consciousness, which was the philosophical correlate of Lenin's insistence in What is to Be Done? that, left to itself, the proletariat could only develop reformist "trade-union consciousness." By introducing this notion, Lukács admitted the gap between his ideal construction of the proletariat as the subject-object of history and the reality of its current status. In rejecting the Revisionists' fetishism of facts, Lukács invoked, as we have seen, the Hegelian distinction between essence and appearance, both of which had to be understood as mediated elements in a concrete totality. In discussing the level of awareness of the proletariat in the contemporary world of revolutionary transition, a world still ruled by capitalist reification, it was necessary to distinguish between empirical and essential class consciousness. To make his point, Lukács borrowed Weber's notion of "objective possibility,"124 but gave it an ontological dimension absent from Weber's more neo-Kantian usage. Instead of a fictional construct produced by the observer's educated imagination, objective possibility for Lukács was rooted in the actual conditions of society. It was logically appropriate to the reality it described because reality was ultimately the practical objectification of the collective subject of which the individual observer was a part. But because this equation was only true in an ultimate sense, it was still necessary to theorize ahead of the empirical consciousness of the proletariat. Presumably, of course, once the process of "dereification" proceeded, the gap between empirical and imputed class consciousness would narrow and finally vanish; objective possibility would become subjective actuality.

But in the transitional period, which Lukács thought would not last indefinitely, an intermediary was necessary. Here Lenin's example was crucial for Lukács, because he still believed that Lenin's professed faith in the combined power of party and soviets conformed to Bolshevism of facts. The intermediary was the organizational embodiment of the theoretical self-consciousness of the proletariat's objective possibility. In the early es-

With this attitude towards the widening chasm between workers and party, Lukács inevitably had to modify the expressive use of totality that was at the heart of his "solution" to the antinomies of bourgeois thought, as we will see momentarily.

But the solution itself contained a number of fundamental theoretical difficulties. As Lukács himself came to understand after reading Marx's 1844 Manuscripts a decade later,128 he had erroneously conflated the processes of objectification and reification in an essentially idealist way. By equating praxis with the objectification of subjectivity, instead of seeing it as an interaction of a subject with a pre-given object, Lukács had missed the importance of the dialectic of labor in constituting the social world. Thus, although stressing activity as opposed to contemplation and arguing that the abolition of contradictions "cannot simply be the result of thought alone, it must also amount to their practical abolition as the actual forms of social life,"129 he nonetheless underestimated the material resistance of those forms. In the essay of 1919, "Tactics and Ethics," he had spoken of blind forces being awakened to consciousness, and added in a footnote:

"Consciousness" refers to that particular stage of knowledge where the subject and object of knowledge are substantively homogeneous, i.e. where knowledge takes place from within and not from without. ... The chief significance of this type of knowledge is that the mere fact of knowledge produces an essential modification in the object known: thanks to the act of consciousness, of knowledge, the tendency inherent in it hitherto now becomes more assured and vigorous than it was or could have been before.130

In History and Class Consciousness, the same basic argument remained:

The coercive measures taken by society in individual cases are often hard and brutally materialistic, but the strength of every society is in the last resort a spiritual strength. And from this we can only be liberated by knowledge. This knowledge cannot be of the abstract kind that remains in one's head—many "socialists" have possessed that sort of knowledge. It must be knowledge that has become flesh of one's flesh and blood; to use Marx's phrase, it must be "practical critical activity."131

128. Ibid., p. xxxvi, where Lukács writes:

I can still remember even today the overwhelming effect produced in me by Marx's statement that objectivity was the primary material attribute of all things and relations. This lines up with the idea already mentioned that objectification is a natural means by which man masters the world and as such it can be either a positive or negative fact. But contrast, alienation is a special variant of that activity that becomes operative in definite social conditions. This completely shattered the theoretical foundations of what had been the particular achievement of History and Class Consciousness.

129. Ibid., p. 177.
130. Lukács, Political Writings, 1919–1929, p. 15.
131. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 262.

It is somewhat exaggerated to contend, as one of Lukács' structuralist critics has, that

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—strikes, demonstrations, lock-outs, riots, insurrections or civil wars—that is the stuff of terrestrial revolutions.132

But it is true that, as Lukács himself later admitted, "The proletariat seen as the identical subject-object of the real history of mankind is no materialist consummation that overcomes the constructions of idealism. It is rather an attempt to out-Hegel Hegel."133 Nor, as Andrew Arato has argued,134 was there an acknowledgement of the dialectic of concrete human needs in History and Class Consciousness that might have tempered the reduction of subjectivity to consciousness implicit in Lukács' position. Equally lacking, as a disillusioned former student of Lukács, Mihály Vajda, has pointed out,135 was an awareness that the collective interest of the proletariat was based on an abstract notion of a fully unifiable class. Here Lukács' hostility to sociology, which he considered an inappropriate misuse of natural scientific methods, like psychology, had its costs. The result was a normative totality, a goal of complete constitutive subjectivity, that was little more than an "abstract negation of a totally reified world."136

Lukács' inability to move beyond idealism was even more blatantly obvious in his treatment of nature. Here his indebtedness to Fichte, Dilthey and the Geisteswissenschaften tradition was particularly strong.137 Ironically, it was because of his zeal in trying to free Marxism from another variant of idealism, one in which nature was seen as the objectification of a meta-subject, that he fell prey to an idealism of a less global kind. In his opening essay, Lukács remarked in an important footnote:

It is of the first importance to recognize that the method [of Marxism] is limited here to the realm of history and society. The misunderstandings that arise from Engels' account of dialectics can in the main be put down to the fact that Engels—following Hegel's mistaken lead—extended the method to apply also to nature. However, the crucial determinants of dialectics—the interaction of subject and

133. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. xxiii.
object, the unity of theory and practice, the historical changes in thought, etc.—are absent from our knowledge of nature.38

Lukács was, to be sure, correct in protesting Engels' naive assimilation of history to nature, but he himself erred in the opposite direction by separating them too categorically.

Restricting dialectics to history and society was, however, essential for his argument: only by doing so could Vico's verum-factum principle be invoked as the answer to the antinomies of bourgeois thought. Otherwise, Lukács would have been forced to confront the fact that Kant's distinction between noumena and phenomena had referred to objects in the natural world, which could not be construed as objectifications of a creator-subject. Hegel had been able to assume that they were such objectifications because of his pantheistic objective idealism. Lukács, contrary to some interpretations,139 could not, with the result that nature outside of man was reduced to a kind of residual status in his system and one that was abandoned to a positivist methodology. When nature did affect man, Lukács could only see it filtered through the same methodology that applied to the study of society and history. In his 1925 review of Wittfogel's The Science of Bourgeois Society, Lukács sternly repeated this point:

For the Marxist as an historical dialectician both nature and all the forms in which it is mastered in theory and practice are social categories; and to believe that one can detect anything supra-historical or supra-social in this context is to disqualify oneself as a Marxist.140

That man might be construed as being rooted in a natural reality, as well as capable of transcending it through history, Lukács chose to ignore. Focusing solely on the "second nature" that was refined history, he neglected to probe the role of the "first nature" in human life, a mistake for which Western Marxists of very different persuasions were to take him to task.141 With the exception of Ernst Bloch, who adopted the neo-Hegelian belief that nature could itself ultimately be seen as a subject, they generally chose to emphasize the non-identical dialectic of subject and object that encompassed both history and nature. The consequences of this shift for their concepts of totality will be discussed later in our narrative.

Lukács' hostility to the dialectics of nature and his inability to mediate nature and history in a non-idealistic way reflected in part that critical attitude towards science evident in his pre-Marxist works. As we have seen, in Soul and Form he had denigrated works of science in comparison with works of art for being infinite, open, instrumental and formless. In criticizing scientific psychology, he had attacked its positing of an infinitely regressive series of motivations rather than understanding the imminent meaningfulness of a monumental gesture. He was no less hostile to bourgeois sociology for the same reasons. Science, in short, was incapable of grasping reality as a totality. In History and Class Consciousness, Lukács added the further reproach that science was an inherently contemplative enterprise, the witnessing by a detached observer of a process outside of his control. Once again Engels was singled out for special criticism in this regard:

Engels' deepest misunderstanding consists in his belief that the behavior of industry and scientific experiment constitutes praxis in the dialectical, philosophical sense. In fact, scientific experiment is contemplation at its purest. The experimenter creates an artificial, abstract milieu in order to be able to observe undisturbed the untrammelled workings of the laws under examination, eliminating all irrational factors both of the subject and the object.142

For Lukács, to view society through the eyes of the scientist was thus to be complicitous in its reification; for such an allegedly neutral point of view was incompatible with the engaged practice that would overthrow the dualism of subject and object and create a normative totality.

In his 1967 preface, Lukács specifically retracted the equation of science with contemplation,143 but he still insisted that Marxism was irreducible to the methodology of the natural sciences. In his posthumously published The Ontology of Social Being, Lukács conceded that


142. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 132.
143. Ibid., p. xx.
Above, all, social being presupposes in general and in all specific processes the existence of inorganic and organic nature. Social being cannot be conceived as independent from natural being and as its exclusive opposite, as a great number of bourgeois philosophers do with respect to the so-called “spiritual sphere.”

But he then added immediately thereafter that Marx’s ontology of social being just as sharply rules out a simple, vulgar materialist transfer of natural laws to society, as was fashionable for example in the era of “social Darwinism.” The objective forms of social being grow out of natural being in the course of the rise and development of social practice, and become ever more expressly social. This growth is certainly a dialectical process, which begins with a leap, with the teleological project in labor, for which there is no analogy in nature.

Marx’s ontology of social being just as sharply rules out a simple, vulgar materialist transfer of natural laws to society, as was fashionable for example in the era of “social Darwinism.”

This leap out of nature into social being, the “retreat of the natural boundary,” as Marx put it, remained for Lukács the crucial step for mankind. It justified his continued stress on the applicability of the dialectical method, with its mediation of subject and object, primarily to history alone.

Lukács’ privileging of history over nature, his emphasis on subjective consciousness over objective matter, his premature confidence that the proletariat would emulate its most radical wing, and his reliance on an inevitable transfer of natural laws to society, as was fashionable for example in the era of “social Darwinism,” were all obvious indications of the euphoric mood engendered by the events of 1917 and their immediate aftermath. To some, and Lukács seems to have been among them, the end of the realm of necessity was close at hand and the beginning of the realm of freedom not far behind. When the euphoria ended, by 1923 or 1924, theoretical revisions were inevitable. The later essays in History and Class Consciousness, with their shift to a more “realistic” appraisal of the role of the vanguard party and their critique of “organic” theories of revolution, already registered a subtle transformation of Lukács’ position. By 1926, he had left behind virtually all residues of his “infantile leftism.”

In the intervening three years, Lenin had died, the German revolution had failed, and the Social Democrats were branded “social fascists.” Although Lukács had no use for this new maximalist turn, he accepted the rebuke of the Executive Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party and gave up active politics for what proved to be almost three decades. He would later cite the example of Korsch’s ostracism from the KPD and his own (very dubious) belief that staying within the Communist movement was the only way to fight Fascism to explain his self-criticism. But unlike his earlier turn away from Left sectarianism, this new shift, he contended, had been for tactical reasons alone. The basic impulses of the Blum Theses were continued in the literary criticism that occupied him during the remainder of the Stalinist period.

148. Lukács’ movement away from Kun’s position began as early as 1919 with his implicit criticism of bureaucratization in his essay “Party and Class,” reprinted in Political Writings, 1919–1929. Here his criticism may be seen as still leftist in origin. By 1922, in the essay “The Politics of Illusion—Yet Again” reprinted in Political Writings, 1919–1929, Lukács had added the rightist epithet “adventurist” to his denunciation of Kun’s policies. Lukács was not alone in shifting from an extreme left position to a more moderate one. According to Tokés, other “survivors of the Szamuely-led left opposition” (p. 215) were among the members of the Landler faction.


150. Lukács, Political Writings, 1919–1929, p. 227f.

151. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. xxx. What makes this argument less than compelling is the fact that the left turn of the Comintern during these years meant that Communists were more hostile to the Social Democrats than to the Fascists. The disastrous policy of “after Hitler, us” meant that they were far more interested in undermining the Weimar Republic than in preventing a Nazi takeover.

152. Löwy, Georg Lukács, p. 201. For a modification of this argument, see Russell Berman, “Lukács’ Critique of Bredel and Ortmann: A Political Account of an Aesthetic Debate of 1931–1932,” New German Critique 10 (Winter 1977). Berman argues that Lukács’ up-
what extent he compromised with Stalin solely out of tactical considerations has been debated ever since, although as Löwy has argued, he felt most comfortable when Stalin followed a popular front strategy close to his own inclinations.

Theoretically, Lukács' movement away from *History and Class Consciousness* can be traced in four short works written in the aftermath of its controversial reception: *Lenin, A Study in the Unity of His Thought*, a review of Bukharin's *Historical Materialism*, a longer review of a new edition of Lassalle's letters, and an extended essay entitled "Moses Hess and the Problems of Idealist Dialectics." In these works, the expressive use of totality so central to the argument of *History and Class Consciousness* and, accordingly, to the origins of Western Marxism, was quietly set aside in favor of a more complicated, ultimately less coherent, alternative. Although it is arguable that Lukács returned to certain of the attitudes expressed in *History and Class Consciousness* shortly before his death, the revised position he had formulated by 1926 remained more or less a permanent part of his mature work.

*Lenin* was hastily written in February, 1924, to commemorate the loss of "the greatest thinker to have been produced by the working-class movement since Marx." It was also probably designed to head off the accusations of heresy stimulated by *History and Class Consciousness* that Lukács saw coming. Virtually all residues of his ultra-leftist sectarianism were purged from the argument; instead, Lenin's "Realpolitik" (a term, to be sure, Lukács had approvingly used as early as 1920) was invoked as an antidote to the utopian musings of the Left sectarians. Instead of "revolutionary culturalism," which reduces politics to a means, Lukács firmly asserted the primacy of the political. The role of the state, he argued, was far more important than any ideological agitation in the class struggle. He praised Lenin's theory of the vanguard party with few of those Luxemburgist qualifications evident in at least the early essays of *History and Class Consciousness*. Although the soviets were still lauded as the locus of dual power under a bourgeois regime and the means by which the split between economics and politics was overcome, they were severed entirely from any notion of majoritarian democracy, for "it must always be remembered that the great majority of the population belongs to neither of the two classes which play a decisive part in the class struggle, to neither the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie." This generalization, clearly based on the Russian experience but not entirely wrong for Germany either, may have been a subtle acknowledgement of the fact that the soviets were themselves only an expression of an "aristocracy of labor," the skilled workers who were to be swamped by the mass of unskilled labor brought into the factories by the changes in capitalist production introduced in the 1920s. But it was clearly at odds with the theoretical basis of *History and Class Consciousness* with its premise of the proletariat as an imminently universal class. In the long run, so Lukács expected, it would achieve that status, but for the present, its class consciousness was still too inchoate to allow it to realize the role of subject and object of history.

*Lenin*, however, was by no means a clean break with *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács, for example, chose to ignore entirely Lenin's crude reflection theory of consciousness in his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and interpreted Leninism instead as a "hitherto unprecedented degree of concrete, unschematic, unmechanistic purely-praxis-oriented thought." He further argued, as he had in "What is Orthodox Marxism?," that "Historical materialism is the theory of the proletarian revolution. It is so because its essence is an intellectual synthesis of the social existence which produces and fundamentally determines the proletariat; and because the proletariat struggling for liberation finds its clear self-consciousness in it." And most importantly for our purposes, he praised Lenin for grasping the concrete totality of social relations; without having known of Lenin's wartime reading of Hegel, Lukács sensed a strong Hegelian element in his political practice.

But Lukács' view of Hegel and the notion of totality had undergone a subtle revision. In *Lenin*, he did, to be sure, retain his earlier belief in a longitudinal totality:

155. Löwy, p. 205f.
157. See the essay "Opportunism and Putschism" reprinted in *Political Writings*, 1919–1929, p. 76.
For every genuine Marxist there is always a reality more real and therefore more important than isolated facts and tendencies—namely, the reality of the total process, the totality of social development.  

But no longer did he try to equate that totality with the objectifications of a creator—subject. Perhaps anticipating Josef Reva’s pointed observation in his 1924 review of History and Class Consciousness that if only the proletariat was the subject and object of history, there could not have been an original creator—subject of the historical process, Lukács disentangled his longitudinal view of totality from his earlier expressive one. In accepting Lenin’s realistic assessment of the need to forge alliances between oppressed groups, an assessment that led to the success of the Russian Revolution in contrast to its Hungarian counterpart, Lukács moved to what might be best called a modified “decentered” or non-genetic view of totality. No longer was the proletariat the meta-subjective totalizer of history.

Not surprisingly, his recent structuralist critics would find in Lenin a significant advance over History and Class Consciousness. That this new concept of totality with its implicit jettisoning of Vico’s verum—factum principle cast into doubt Lukács’ resolution of the antinomies of bourgeois culture, neither he nor his later structuralist opponents remarked. Nor did Lukács himself immediately recognize the tension between his assertion that “historical materialism is the theory of the proletarian revolution” and his admission that the revolution was not a purely proletarian one. In his later work, as his 1967 postscript to Lenin made clear, Lukács did recognize that a choice had to be made, and he made it in a way very different from those who, like Korsch or the Council Communists, remained wedded to the belief that theory reflected practice:

Without orientation towards totality there can be no historically true practice. But knowledge of the totality is never spontaneous; it must always be brought into activity ‘from the outside,’ that is theoretically.

162. Ibid., p. 22.

163. Reva’s important review has been translated with an introduction by Ben Brewster in Theoretical Practice 1 (January, 1971). Mereau-Pony recognized the significance of Reva’s objection in Adventures of the Dialectic:

The proletarian “projects” a subject into the past which totalizes the experience of the past and unobscuredly projects into the empty future a subject which concentrates the meaning of the future. This is a well-founded “conceptual mythology,” but a mythology, since the proletarian is not truly able to enter into a precipitate past or a postcapitalist future. The proletariat does not realize the identification of subject or history. It is nothing but the “carrier” of a myth which presents this identification as desirable. This extension offered by Reva reduces Lukács’ philosophical effort so nothing because, if the proletariat is only the carrier of a myth, the philosopher, even if he judges this myth to be well-founded, decides this in his profound wisdom or unlimited audacity, which becomes a court of last appeal. (p. 54)


166. Reprinted in Political Writings, 1919–1929.


168. Lukács, Political Writings, 1919–1929, p. 142.

ership, advocating a coalition with the peasants in a manner very similar to Lukács’ own argument in his later “Blum Theses.”

What makes Lukács’ review of Bukharin particularly important for our purposes is its critique of Bukharin’s attempt to interpret Marxism as a general sociology:

As a necessary consequence of his natural-scientific approach, sociology cannot be restricted to a pure method, but develops into an independent science with its own substantive goals. The dialectic can do without such independent substantive achievements; its realm is that of the historical process as a whole, whose individual, concrete, unrepeatable moments reveal its dialectical essence precisely in the qualitative differences between them and in the continuous transformation of their objective structure. The totality is the territory of the dialectic. 170

What Lukács was asserting here was the distinction between historical and philosophical versions of Marxism, which were based on the idea of totality, and sociological ones, which substituted the notion of system, often understood as an analogue of a biological organism. Bukharin’s book had, in fact, developed an equilibrium theory of society that saw social systems tending towards stability in a manner similar to biological adaptation. 171 Outside of the Bolshevik movement, other Marxists, most notably the neo-Kantian Austro-Marxists around Max Adler, 172 had contended that Marxism was a sociology. In this review, Lukács began a long tradition of Western Marxist attacks on the sociologization of Marxism, a tradition to which Korsch, Gramsci, the Frankfurter School, and Lefebvre made perhaps the most notable contributions. 173 All later attempts to find parallels between Marxist notions of totality and such sociological positions as the functionalism of Talcott Parsons were ignorant of the critique Lukács and other Western Marxists had made of Bukharin and his successors. 174

In 1925 Lukács also reviewed for the Grünberg Archiv Gustav Mayer’s new edition of Ferdinand Lassalle’s letters. The concept of totality played only a very marginal role in Lukács’ argument, which was aimed primarily at discrediting Lassalle as “the theoretician of the bourgeois revolution.” 175 The reason for this judgment, Lukács contended, was the extent of Fichte’s influence on Lassalle’s philosophical development. Rather than emphasizing the progressive moments in Fichte’s activist philosophy, as he had done in History and Class Consciousness, Lukács now attacked him for being naively utopian and believing that the idea was active in history. In contrast, Hegel was praised for being far more aware of the concrete relations of his own epoch:

The Hegelian notion of “reconciliation,” the culmination of the philosophy of history in the present, implies—for all that it is politically reactionary and ends up philosophically and methodically in pure contemplation—a more profound connection between the logical categories and the structural forms of bourgeois life. 176

Here for the first time Lukács emphasized the idea of “reconciliation” with reality, which was to be a frequent theme in much of his later work. Although he always maintained that this idea should be understood as contradictory, he nonetheless insisted, as he put it in The Young Hegel, that “the dialectical core of this view is always the recognition of social reality as it actually is.” 177 No longer stressing the subjective dimension of totalization in Fichte’s sense, he now emphasized Hegel’s objective totality of existing reality. Accordingly, when he invoked the category of totality in the essay on Lassalle, he did so only to debunk the primacy of subjective consciousness:

The collective fate of a class is only the expression in terms of consciousness of its socio-economic situation and is conditioned simultaneously by its correct totality-relationship to the whole society and to the historical process both really and cognitively. 178

Lukács’ move away from Fichtean activism towards the Hegelian notion of “reconciliation” was given its classic formulation in his major essay of 1926, “Moses Hess and the Problem of Idealist Dialectics.” Here the Young Hegelians, most notably Hess, Cieszkowski, and Bauer, are described as regressing to Fichtean idealism and Feuerbachian moralism, while Marx is credited with grasping the concrete, mediated totality of existing relations through his own reading of Hegel. Lukács’ attribution of a direct relationship between Marx and Hegel was helped by his insistence that Hegel’s thought was already deeply imbued with the economic

170. Lukács Political Writings, 1919–1929, pp. 139–140.
174. For a discussion of this issue, see Alan Swingewood, Marx and Modern Social Theory (New York, 1975), chapter 8. Swingewood rejects the identification of Marxism with functionalism, but tries to salvage its non-philosophical, scientific status. For an attempt to rescue sociology from the contention that it is inherently anti-dialectical, see Alvin W. Gouldner, For Sociology.
175. Lukács, Political Writings, 1919–1929, p. 177.
176. Ibid., p. 153.
178. Lukács, Political Writings, 1919–1929, p. 163.
categories of the classical economists, an argument he was to make even more extensively in *The Young Hegel*. Thus, whereas the Young Hegelians were mesmerized by the idealist elements in Hegel's philosophy, Marx was able to recover its materialist dimensions.

Curiously, Lukács blamed Hess’s deficiencies in this regard on his non-proletarian background:

Hess philosophizes from the standpoint of the revolutionary *intelligentsia* sympathetic to the coming social revolution. The sufferings of the proletariat form the starting-point of his philosophizing, the proletariat is the *object* of his concern and his struggle.179

Anticipating the later Marxist critique of his friend Karl Mannheim’s notion of a “free-floating intelligentsia,” Lukács added the explanation:

The fond belief that he inhabits a sphere above all class antagonisms and all egoistical interests of his fellow-men is typical of the intellectual who does not participate—directly—in the process of production and whose existential basis, both material and intellectual, seems to be the “whole” of society, regardless of class differences.180

How Marx, or Lukács himself for that matter, had avoided this situation and come to “participate—directly—in the process of production,” Lukács did not choose to explain. Insofar as virtually all of the Western Marxists were like Hess in this regard, this omission was an important one. What it indicated was a certain willingness on Lukács’ part to subordinate the autonomy of the intellect to the allegedly superior wisdom of those who participated in the production process. This “workerist” attitude, as it became known, was, however, counterbalanced by his belief that in non-revolutionary times theory had to be in advance of practice. The compromise he reached to reconcile these extremes was to subordinate his personal intellectual autonomy to the wisdom of the party, which supposedly was rooted in the working class, if in advance of it theoretically. Few other Western Marxists would find this a very satisfactory solution.

In any event, what was clear in “Moses Hess and the Problems of Idealist Dialectics” was the distance Lukács had travelled since the days when he wrote *History and Class Consciousness*. The only real residue from that period in the essay was the argument that for Hegel, alienation and reification “cannot be overcome either epistemologically or in ethical-utopian fashion; only by self-sublation in the identical subject-object of history can they attain their resolution.”181 But Lukács significantly did not use this formula to describe Marx’s method as well, which he claimed was a “theory of a completely different kind (albeit profoundly connected with the Hegelian dialectic): the critique of political economy.”182 And although Lukács then went on to refer the reader in a footnote to the essay, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” he carefully avoided any reference to the subjectivist emphasis of that work.

In short, by 1926 Lukács’ use of the concept of totality had altered in essential ways, most importantly through the weakening of its expressive and Fichtean dimensions. Although Lukács still continued to stress praxis, subjectivity and consciousness, these emphases were countered by a new appreciation of the inertial force of the objective elements in the totality. It is inaccurate to argue that, as one commentator has, that “the Lassalle and Hess essays, like the criticism of Bukharin, indicate that on the theoretical plane he did not retreat a step from his earlier anathematized position.”183 Michael Löwy’s conclusion that the essay on Hess “provided the methodological basis for his support for the Soviet ‘Thermidor’” is closer to the truth.184 And, as we will see in the chapter on Goldmann and Marxist aesthetics, it also provided the philosophical foundation for Lukács’ highly influential writings of the 1930s on culture and literature, writings in which the concept of totality continued to play a critical—but changed—role.

Lukács’ tortured later history is as much a part of “Eastern” as Western Marxism, if not more so. To detail it at any length would thus be beyond the scope of this study. What will interest us instead is the subterranean influence of *History and Class Consciousness*, which, despite all of its author’s second thoughts, launched the problematic we are examining in this study. Lukács had not, to be sure, been alone in challenging the philosophical and political assumptions of the orthodox dialectical materialists. Accordingly, his concept of totality was not the only one the Western Marxists were able to adopt. Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci, and to a lesser extent Ernst Bloch were the other members of the first generation of Western Marxists who contributed to the debate about holism. It is to their work that we now must turn.

180. Ibid., p. 197.
181. Ibid., p. 214.
182. Ibid., p. 218.