

Georg Lukács's theory of revolution

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Until the October Revolution, the Marxist theory of politics stood incomplete. While starting points existed in Marx and Engels' work, the Marxist movement was riven by a contradiction. While it maintained a verbal commitment to proletarian revolution, the movement had long ago adapted itself to operating within the system. In short, abstract revolutionism coexisted uneasily with prosaic opportunism. Lenin's historic achievement – inseparable from his Bolshevik party – was to overcome this antinomy through what Lukács would call “revolutionary realpolitik”.^[1] Combining a sober acknowledgment of reality with revolutionary audacity, his party led the establishment of the first republic of workers' councils in history. This represented a *practical* revolution within Marxist theory, raising its *practical* essence to a hitherto unprecedented level of clarity and concreteness.^[2] In doing this, Lukács contends, Lenin rediscovered the essence of historical materialism, as the theory of proletarian revolution. He established a uniquely concrete revolutionary methodology.^[3] However, precisely because Lenin's revolution in Marxism was practical, it highlighted the need for a commensurate *theoretical* revolution which would overthrow the orthodoxy of the Second International. Lukács intended to complete this theoretical revolution with the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*. This was followed by *Lenin – A Study in the Unity of his Thought* and *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*, as well as a number of articles and essays published until 1929.^[4]

This body of work is basically a philosophical generalisation on the 1917 Russian Revolution and the wave of European revolutions it sparked. It is no overstatement to say that *History and Class Consciousness* is to philosophy and politics as *Capital* is to economics. Yet Lukács was largely unsuccessful in theoretically revolutionising Marxism. Along with Karl Korsch, he was famously denounced by Zinoviev at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern. The apparatchik-philosophers, Rudas and Deborin, followed this up with a doctrinaire critique of Lukács's idealism, revisionism and other heresies.^[5] This, combined with the Stalinisation of the Comintern – and the Hungarian Communist Party – left Lukács sidelined. Not a leader or politician on par with Lenin, Trotsky, or even Gramsci, and in the absence of the revolutionary wave that made his work possible to begin with, Lukács withdrew into literary criticism and philosophy. And so it was that Lukács became a footnote in the history of the Comintern. Today, his name is more associated with the first generation of Western Marxism, and as a key influence on the Frankfurt School, than he is with any far left tradition. Even amongst the organised revolutionary left, a handful of exceptions aside, *History and Class Consciousness* is at best seen as an interesting philosophical tangent to 1917.^[6] This has been a great loss to Marxism – it is impossible to grasp the full significance of the Russian Revolution without Lukács.

This is not just a question of historical bad timing. As Karl Korsch noted in *Marxism and Philosophy*, periods of stability make capitalism appear natural and inescapable.[7] Consequently, the dialectical (and therefore, Hegelian) component in Marxism is diminished. In this situation, Marxism risks degenerating into a mere description, an ideology. This tendency also attacks the Marxist understanding of the proletariat. As time passes between working class upsurges, it becomes difficult to imagine the proletariat living up to the goals Marx and Lukács anticipated. It becomes unfashionable to even talk in these terms. Yet, if we agree with Lukács that historical materialism is the theory of proletarian revolution, without the proletariat, Marxism is incoherent.[8] So, it is clearly preferable to uphold the idea of working class self-emancipation. Yet this is not without a cost. During periods of capitalist stability, proletarian revolution is *genuinely and objectively* utopian; it is an abstract goal.[9] The best model we have for workers' revolution – 1917 – is approaching its centenary. We haven't been able to point to a soviet in decades. A smaller proportion of proletarians identify with socialism – in whatever variant – than at any time since the late nineteenth century. We are effectively defending a political position which attained its high point nearly one hundred years ago. While this is preferable to and more coherent than the fickle winds of intellectual fashion, I put it in stark terms for a reason. Every position carries an overhead. So long as revolutionary Marxism is isolated from the class it claims to be the consciousness of, its position suffers the persistent danger of schematism and dogmatism. This is to say, revolutionary Marxist theory, despite critiquing reification, is nonetheless subject to it. This will only be overcome when history makes proletarian revolution a possibility again. Prior to this point, the most we can do is to recognise the forms that the reification of theory takes, and systematically critique them. This can only be seriously done via Hegel, Marx and Lukács.

However, these comments threaten to go beyond an introduction. So I will outline a few things I want to achieve. Firstly, this article is intended to be a philosophical outline of a Lukácsian theory of politics and of the process of working class praxis. This bears on debates around the meaning of Leninism and revolution. Often this debate is conducted through a very detailed historical discussion, say, via a precise reading of *What Is to be Done?* or analysis of the 1912 Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. It is hoped that a theoretical intervention will clarify these debates. Secondly, I hope to draw out elements of this theory that are specifically relevant for the revolutionary left today. Following Lukács, I will present a view of the world structured around a critique of reification and the “antinomies of bourgeois thought”; or, dialectical opposites. In politics, this dialectical contradiction is rendered as the dialectic of theory and practice. This discussion will clarify a series of terms, including class consciousness, the party and praxis. While I will try not to overburden this piece with Hegelian language, this being a philosophical argument, some technical language is necessary. Indeed, insofar as my reading of Lukács differs from that of others, in addition to being informed by a commitment to revolutionary working class politics, it is also informed by my reading of

Hegel – specifically *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.^[10] Finally, this essay will assume some familiarity with Lukács’s writing. It is not intended as an introduction or summary, but as an argument built upon his work.

Reification

Reification is the form that alienation takes under capitalism. Reification is grounded in the universal production of commodities, or commodity fetishism. Commodities are use values which are produced and distributed entirely according to their exchange value. Once hegemonic, commodity production – and derivative social mechanisms like money, markets, capital and wages – despite being historical, human products – became completely naturalised. They take on a “life” of their own, and constitute an objective reality. So, more than any society in history, capitalism is subsumed under the logic of economics and production for exchange. The essential logic of capitalism is quantitative. Qualities, or, genuinely *human* values, which are the product of real, concrete labour, are subordinated to exchange value, which is produced by abstract labour.^[11] Capitalism, therefore, suppresses the human or qualitative dimension of labour, and only values humans insofar as they are bearers of commodities. The working class is consequently reduced to the status of their only commodity, labour power. Reification therefore fragments our experience of the world. Lukács cites the example of the modern factory.^[12] In it, the production process is compartmentalised, standardised and rationalised. The finished product is isolated from the process of its production, and the workers responsible for making it are reduced to machines. Their labour is degrading, monotonous and soul-crushing. Ultimately, the entire process – which can just as well describe a call centre or a modern office – is designed rationally to maximise profit. Time becomes an essential measure, as labour is streamlined to maximise efficiency and output. Importantly, however, quality (in the sense of human value) cannot be completely expunged (no matter the zeal of middle management). Hence, there always remains a potential for resistance.^[13]

This is very similar to Marx’s account of alienation. Yet one of Lukács’s most significant achievements was to discover the impact of reification on the social totality. Alongside Max Weber (with whom he differed on many other points), he cited the example of the legal system in which a formal and abstract legal code is established in order to provide a calculable and formally rational criminal justice system which can process thousands of concrete cases. In this system, a judge is effectively an “automatic statute-dispensing machine in which you insert the files together with the necessary costs and dues at the top, whereupon he will eject the judgement together with the more or less cogent reasons for it at the bottom”^[14] As another example, following Hegel, Lukács discusses the quantification of time. For Hegel, the uniformity of measurement by quantity or space is alien to time whose essence is difference or negation. In other words, time is the medium

whereby everything constantly becomes other to itself. And yet, as the logic of magnitude and equality (in the sense of uniformity) become hegemonic, even the concept of time is flattened and reduced to space.[15]

Lukács argued that reification has both a subjective and objective side.[16] The objective side refers to social objects, or structures, which operate unconsciously and impersonally. The economy is the most important such reified social object. Millions are impacted, usually for the worse, by market fluctuations that no one can control completely. Similarly, the cycle of competition and economic crisis acts ruthlessly and inexorably. Despite the economy being a human creation, it functions as a secularised deity. Yet, because of its impersonality, it is more terrible and vindictive than any historical god. As has been discussed, its logic infects everything, subordinating politics, the law, culture and so on to economics. So the reified objective world appears like a hostile natural environment with laws that may be studied but never altered. The second side of reification, the subjective side, refers to the way that reification structures our experience of ourselves and our activity. The objective side of reification requires the subjective: without subjects who reproduce it, the objective world wouldn't stand for a day. Yet reification perpetuates by creating private subjects who, through their daily practice, continually reproduce it. Capitalism, which values people only through economic exchange, is thus premised on abstract, negative freedom and individualism. This is not a positive or humanist freedom which allows us to realise ourselves through and with others. Instead, it pits every individual against every other. We are reduced to a means towards an inhuman end: accumulation. Our freedom is freedom *from* humanity, freedom to exchange. This contradiction between the individual subject and the social object means that our essential experience of capitalism is two-sided. As isolated individuals, we are freer than in any other historical system. Yet, because of our fragmentation, this freedom is reduced to a universal scramble for a livelihood. And so, because individuals confront each other as competitors in a society they have no power over, capitalism is also the most overbearing system in history. Objectively, it is inescapable and un-free. Even the bourgeoisie, who derive power and satisfaction from their individual positions within the system, are powerless to alter its fundamental course.

These points make it clear that for Lukács (as for Marx and Hegel) the overcoming of reification is a question of creating a collective and active human consciousness that dialectically overcomes the antinomy between subject and object, or, individual and society. This, philosophically, puts human agency at the heart of Lukácsian Marxism, in sharp contrast to the mechanical materialism of the Second International, or the anti-humanist structuralism of Althusser. This point cannot be stressed enough. There is, of course, an automatic or determined aspect to history. But this determinism is the product of a vast accumulation of estranged, dead human labour. Therefore, notwithstanding the rationalism of capitalism in matters of detail (the law, the production process, etc.), the system as a totality is irrational. It is therefore legitimate to say that there is an *objective*

dialectic which tends towards crisis. The condition for the existence of this objective dialectic is the unconsciousness and fragmentation of humanity. The transition from the “realm of necessity” to the “realm of freedom”, as Marx and Engels put it, and which Lukács liked to quote, is entirely bound up with humanity – via the proletariat – becoming collectively conscious of reification and submitting society to conscious control.[17] Lukács’s entire body of work from the 1920s can be summed up as a quest to understand this process of the emergence of consciousness.

The contemplative stance

The objective social reality is experienced, in its immediacy, as the same for all subjects, be they proletarian or bourgeois.[18] Lukács referred to this subject position, and its corresponding viewpoint, as the “contemplative stance.”[19] As a reflection of the above divide between the objective and subjective side of reification, the contemplative stance is bifurcated between corresponding antinomies. Neither of these poles could exist without each other, and it is their dialectical interaction which ultimately produces progress. Whole philosophies, world views and social types correspond to the antinomies of bourgeois existence, albeit never in pure form. Indeed, this fraught dualism structures our entire existence. This aspect of Lukács is usually under-emphasised. Yet, I believe that it is the foundation to his theory of consciousness and politics.[20] As an aside, it is this aspect of Lukács’s thought where he is most indebted to Hegel – specifically, the Hegel of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

The first side of the contemplative stance is practical, cynical, rational, pragmatic and adaptive. Because we are confronted by a world of hostile social objects that we experience as an unalterable “second nature,” we are reduced to merely contemplating it and adapting ourselves as best we can.[21] We are all Robinson Crusoes stranded on a society-wide Island of Despair. Of course, individuals from a bourgeois background encounter somewhat richer natural resources. Yet the basic problem of daily life is the same – we have to adapt to the world on the basis of an essentially passive understanding. This requires “realism”; that is, we must subordinate our actions to calculable reason. Where individuals encounter success, they may feel a degree of freedom or agency. But this is an illusion. Lukács compares this aspect of the contemplative stance to the position of a worker who must submit to the impersonal and inhuman rational organisation of machinery.[22]

The second side of the contemplative stance is often neglected, but is equally important, and it formed a major theme in Lukács’s chapter, “The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought”.[23] It is the ideal, ethical, romantic, irrational and utopian side. Putting it in these terms makes it sound exotic or esoteric, yet it is far from this. If the world of cynical and pragmatic adaptation is dull and monotonous, and requires that we subordinate ourselves to the logic of quantity, routine, predictability and so on, then the subjective side

of the contemplative stance represents a residual attraction towards *quality*. After all, capitalism merely aspires to reduce us to machines – it hasn't succeeded yet. Furthermore, given that the *totality* of capitalism is irrational, it is impossible to work out a thoroughgoing rationalist world view without rejecting capitalism.[24] So the qualitative, human remainder that can't be contained by the rationalism of capitalism spurs a constant search. Evidence for this is overwhelming – so much modern culture revolves around a quest to re-enchanted the soulless world of reification, and to find our lost humanity. This takes many shapes. At its most extreme, it appears in the form of mystical irrationalism, and a flat rejection (or as Hegel would say, an absolute negation) of the former, objective side of the antinomy. Lukács, to illustrate this point, referred to the way that nature is represented under capitalism. On the one hand, nature is subjected to our rational mastery (think open cut mines and deforestation). Yet this produces an inverse view, the romantic conception of nature, in which nature signifies a holistic, spiritual and pristine realm outside of the prosaic world of reason.[25] This romanticisation of nature is at the core of the fetishisation of pre-modern people's relationship with the land. While less destructive than its rationalist counterpart, this view is just as much a part of the world of reification.

Wherever the one side of the contemplative stance exists, the opposite will necessarily coexist with it, in some form. So every structure or social object has both a prosaic rational content *and* a subjective, qualitative or human content. The latter is not necessarily a pure illusion, but nevertheless, it functions as a type of utopian aspiration that serves to bind people to the objective structure. This helps us understand, for example, the ideology of the family. The qualitative or utopian side of the family values love and caring. Yet it is precisely this value which compels workers to accept the pragmatic side of the family. That is, people – mostly women – feel pressure to stay in relationships which are no longer loving or which are abusive, often for the sake of the children. The family motivates people to put up with the alienation of work in order to pay the bills. Also, the family is an institution that disciplines and raises the next generation. So, while many people do find love and caring to some extent in the family, this human dimension is never freed to be realised completely. In other words, we can glimpse quality in a number of spheres, but it is always constrained and limited by the hegemony of quantitative reason. Another example of this is recreation. Free time only obtains its importance in contrast to work. In our recreation time, we glimpse the freedom of un-alienated labour. Yet, this enjoyment requires money, is distorted by the fragmentation of capitalism, and at any rate, it serves to refresh our labour power.

Insofar as individuals make choices and define themselves culturally, socially and vocationally, it is possible for individuals to explore either antinomy of the contemplative stance to a greater or lesser extent, to push either side further, in different ways. So, people who live a style of life that revolves around art or music inhabit the subjective side to a greater extent, and typically are less invested in rationalism. Yet these people can just as little do without the rational side of the contemplative stance as they can do without food

and shelter. Of course, the fantasy of pure escape from the rationalism of capitalism exists – be it an escape into aesthetics, mysticism, or merely into the irrationalism of “dropping out”. But reality is always more prosaic. Moreover, lifestyles which aspire to a qualitative utopia are quite easy to package and market. None of this is to say that all lifestyles and philosophical positions born of the contemplative stance are equal. Out and out irrationalism is a worse response to the dilemmas of the contemplative stance than, for example, liberalism, which is nonetheless utopian and pragmatic in its own way. So, while every intellectual position is an expression of the contemplative stance, positions which enthusiastically endorse the contemplative stance (for example, that of Carl Schmitt or neoliberal theory) are far worse than those who express frustration with it, and on some level seek to transcend it (for example, Georg Simmel or Max Weber). Moreover, as will be argued below, while revolutionary Marxism exists within the contemplative stance, it radicalises both sides, obtaining the maximum consciousness within them. Therefore, while not overcoming the contemplative stance *in reality*, Marxism resolves its contradictions in theory, opening the way to further development.[26]

Finally, this is also where class and other sociological factors may enter the equation: the freedom to live a cultivated aesthetic, ethical, intellectual or other qualitatively oriented lifestyle tends to correspond to having access to superior means. Lukács, the son of a banker, was no exception to this. Yet, the dilemma of the contemplative stance plagued Lukács intensely in the years prior to his becoming a Marxist. Indeed, his frustration with every subjective position available was part of what prepared him to throw his lot in with workers’ revolution when it became a reality in 1917.

Overcoming the contemplative stance

The great problems of modern philosophy are an attempt to solve the contradictions associated with the contemplative stance. German Idealism, from Kant, through Fichte and Schiller to Hegel, took this to the furthest point possible from within the position of philosophy.[27] In so doing, they laid the basis for Marxism. Firstly, as Marx wrote in the first of his *Theses on Feuerbach*, where materialism only existed contemplatively, idealism restored the idea of activity and human practice.[28] This culminated in Hegel’s famous and extraordinarily important argument that “everything hangs on apprehending and expressing the truth not merely as substance [object] but equally as subject.”[29] This point – the *principle* that subject and object are *identical* – constitutes one of the most important points in Hegel.[30] Hegel, however, was not one to be satisfied by abstract principles. After all, the reality of reification is precisely contrary to this principle – subject and object are in reality divorced. So Hegel argued that the *unity* of subject and object would be won historically, as the result of a process of mediation, whereby Spirit would return to itself, consciously. This mediation would transform both terms as they existed in isolation.[31]

From this, Lukács learned that there would be no external or miraculous deliverance from the contemplative stance. No apocalyptic event, no messiah, no profound and immediate breakthrough, no mystical, romantic or ideal solution, and no utopian overcoming of reification would take place. Rather, the overcoming of the immediacy of bourgeois society had to be based on the actual and objective tendencies inherent in that immediacy. This is a process of mediation (or negation), whereby the everyday life of capitalism gives rise to experiences and concepts which move beyond capitalism.[32] Lukács wrote:

To go beyond this immediacy can only mean the genesis, the “creation” of the object. But this assumes that the forms of mediation in and through which it becomes possible to go beyond the immediate existence of objects as they are given, can be shown to be *the structural principles and real tendencies of the objects themselves*. [33]

This understanding (combined with reading Marx) allowed Lukács to discover that reification could only be overcome on the basis of a collective subject – the proletariat. In *History and Class Consciousness* he argues that the individualism of the bourgeois style of life and the fact that it so intimately relies on exploitation and the money economy, means that anyone who looks at the world from a bourgeois point of view is prevented from overcoming reification, even in thought. Contrary to this, the class position of the proletariat presents a real-world subject position which is both created by the objective dialectic of capitalism, and which has privileged access to the mediations that can overcome the immediacy of reification and create a genuine subjectivity. The section of Lukács’s essay on reification entitled “The Standpoint of the Proletariat” details roughly five key arguments.[34]

Firstly, the working class uniquely experiences questions of quantity as *qualitative* questions. For management, issues like pay, working hours and intensity of work are quantitative questions. They are purely economic calculations designed to maximise profit. However, these issues are experienced by the working class as questions that matter for quality of life. This is also the case outside the workplace: rising prices, rents or unemployment are regarded very differently by the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Secondly, the contemplative stance is experienced differently by different classes. The bourgeoisie and the middle classes have access to an illusory subjectivity. Within this there is an ability to seek meaning through self-cultivation and personal power. The proletariat has much more limited access to self-cultivation. The illusory subjectivity and agency that the bourgeoisie enjoys is felt to be hollow. As a result of these first two factors, the proletariat is capable of understanding itself as the *object* of society. But, as Lukács points out, following Hegel, for an object to understand itself represents a fundamental transformation in the nature of the object. When the proletariat understands itself as the object of society, it takes its first step into collective subjectivity. This is reinforced by a third point: the functioning of the economy and economic crisis tends to push workers together into a common situation. Fourthly, on the basis of this collectivism, the working

class has real social power. No other class has nearly as much potential power. Even the bourgeoisie is powerless to shut down the objective functioning of capitalism in the same way as the working class may. If we recall that the contemplative stance is essentially passive and fragmented, then we can see that the working class, therefore, has access to a fundamentally different type of understanding, one that is active and collective. The working class may – unlike any other class – consciously alter reified structures. This leads to Lukács’s fifth point. By virtue of the preceding four points, Lukács argues that the proletariat may perceive society as a totality, and therefore, break down reification *in theory* as well as in practice. This means breaking down the fragmentation of the different spheres of society that is the necessary precondition for reification’s reproduction. On the basis of these points, Lukács famously argued that the proletariat may become the subject-object of history.[35]

This argument needs to be continually stressed, especially in contemporary debates over gender, identity and “intersectionality”. Clearly, every category can be related to the totality of capitalism. However, it is *only* possible to elaborate these connections dialectically from the point of view of the proletariat. This is to say, there is nothing inherent in the world-experience or subject position of any other group that allows it to mediate the immediate experience of reification. Theories that elaborate a world view on the basis of a non-proletarian subject will inevitably replicate the immediacy of capitalism, and will necessarily fall back into antinomies of the contemplative stance. This is why, to cite one example, most environmentalism vacillates wildly between an abstract ethical stance that prioritises individual action, and reformism that vainly appeals to the state and the bourgeoisie.

The above argument establishes the *principle* of the proletariat as the subject-object of history. It is a theoretical generalisation. But theory is the abstract and the non-actual. At its best, theory is a critical hypothesis about an immanent direction in reality. Similarly, principles are nothing but necessarily distant demands for how the world ought to be. So, while philosophy at its best can outline principles, to discover their realisation in reality, it is necessary to turn to history and politics. Without transcending itself, philosophy risks turning inwards, giving rise to a perpetual quest for a perfect (and therefore non-existent) description of the world.

This oriented Lukács towards the *real-world* development of the proletariat as subject-object of history. His starting point for this is the objective world and he held that a major objective breakdown of capitalism would be the precondition. This is because crisis visibly exposes that society functions as a totality; ideology is stripped back, revealing the economic logic underpinning the whole. Moreover, the deeper the crisis, the more the state is required to use force to restore order and production. This exposes the class domination

of the bourgeoisie. So, broadly speaking, Lukács expected the objective dialectic of capitalism – the specific analysis of which is the task of Marxist economics and history – to give rise to a historical situation in which a *subjective* dialectic might take precedence.

Or, to use his favoured term, Lukács believed that the *actuality of revolution* was a precondition for class consciousness. In the book *Lenin – a Study in the Unity of His Thought*, he argued that this was one of Lenin’s most significant contributions. With the onset of World War I, Lenin understood that capitalism had entered a new and potentially terminal stage, where the entire concrete totality, and indeed, every question, was to be understood in light of imperialism.[36] Lukács argued that the actuality of revolution made it possible to concretely identify the key tasks and questions of the revolution, and to elaborate a genuinely revolutionary program. This made the overcoming of the antinomy between reform and revolution a possibility, because it made genuinely revolutionary mass action a real possibility. In the period of the actuality of revolution, therefore, political differences become sharper and more consequential.[37] None of this should be taken to imply that Lukács expected a sharp or cataclysmic breakdown. Also, the term “actuality of revolution” should not be understood as a sharply delimited periodisation. Rather, it refers to a historical process which although punctuated, can be expected to emerge over years and potentially decades. The actuality of revolution culminates in a political struggle between classes – a period of dual power. Failure to understand this periodisation of revolution can and has led revolutionaries to an impatient or opportunist attempt to substitute either a program or some tactic for history. Rather, we must be clear: the emergence of a class-conscious proletariat is only possible at the end of a long chain of historical developments and crises, in which conscious intervention becomes progressively more important.

From the contemplative stance to theory and practice

If we take the actuality of revolution seriously, we have to understand that the proletariat is trapped for the time being in the contemplative stance. So our theoretical critique of capitalism, which understands the working class to be *potentially* the subject-object of history, must turn its attention to the reality of the development of workers’ struggle. This means we encounter the dialectic of theory and practice. While this is a subset of the contemplative stance, it is special in that it can give rise to praxis, or the overcoming of reification. As with all antinomies, understanding the dialectic of theory and practice requires us to hold either term in their mutual interrelation and overcoming.

To begin with practice, it remains the case that actions are inescapably determined by society. A simple example is property. Although this is a complex historical and social construct, we all immediately act in accordance with it. Even when we choose to violate property rights – say, by shoplifting – it is impossible to ignore the immediate validity of property. To cite another example, even though we know they are socially constructed, we

experience and act out our gender, sexual and ethnic identities in ways that are determined by the social totality. This remains the case even when we are uncomfortable in our assigned identities, or when we actively question and reject them. Even when we *consciously* engage in practice, say via political activism, the starting point is always determined by the structure of bourgeois society. We protest along quite established lines. Trade unions largely operate within the established legal framework. Even practices that appear on the surface to be radical are informed by the immediacy of bourgeois society: proponents of consumer politics or lifestyle politics are some of the most militant defenders of the market and the power of individual choice. Or, in anarchist forms of direct action, we find a negative affirmation of the power of the state and the police. By fetishising confrontation with these state forces, anarchists implicitly accept, albeit with a radical cover, the ideological power accorded to them by capitalism.

So everything we do, both unconsciously and consciously, is necessarily informed by the vast array of reified structures we confront. In this sense, the starting point for all practice is the fragmented and reified social immediacy of reification. Yet this does not make all practice equal. The vast majority of forms of practice leave the structure of reification untouched. Some, however, begin to overcome it. For instance, a strike *objectively* challenges the fundamental structure of commodification and bourgeois hegemony, even if the workers involved don't realise this. A mass movement can work, to an extent, to overcome fragmentation. And a mass strike goes even further by leaving an objective mark on the structure of reification – again, regardless of whether this is intended by the organisers or strikers. This is why Gramsci famously argued that practice often runs ahead of the worker's theoretical consciousness.

This brings us to the other side of the antinomy, the side of theory. Everyone has a philosophical world view. However, these are deeply contradictory, usually comprised of clichés, common sense banalities and a few genuine insights. This stands to reason – the condition for the existence of reification is the unconsciousness of the majority. Indeed, the “common sense” viewpoints that most commonly exist under capitalism are simply reflections upon the immediate practices discussed above. However, this critique of theory also extends to theories that are considered much more sophisticated. The vast majority of academia naturalises reification. Regardless of the views or prejudices prevalent in academia, which are usually liberal and progressive, there is absolutely nothing in the life practice or experience of the vast majority of academic theorists that could give them access to the theoretical mediations necessary to generate a genuinely critical theoretical insight into capitalism. Indeed, the practice of academia cuts sharply against this. The struggle to be published, itself the result of competition over scarce job positions, as well as the expansion of higher education over the last 70 years, has created unfathomable specialisation in academic theory. The cult of sophistication and “academic integrity” means that academic theory is crippled by jargon and a massive excess of detail.

So theory and practice are both trapped within reification. The actuality of revolution is the precondition for their objective overcoming. Prior to this, these antinomies inevitably condition the existence of revolutionary Marxism. Conceptually, Marxism is distinguished by a theoretical critique of capitalism elaborated from the standpoint of the proletariat. It was for this reason that Lukács called historical materialism the self-consciousness of capitalism.[38] Given that this theoretical viewpoint is explicitly revolutionary, it is only very rarely shared by academics or intellectuals. Yet this is not enough to escape the antinomy of theory and practice. The condition for the existence of theory *as such* is that the theory and practice of the vast majority is unconscious. To put it simply, if theory and practice always coincided, we wouldn't be living under reification.

The fact that Marxism represents the position of self-reflexive theory within capitalism is its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. After all, as Marx argued, philosophy, at best, is its own era comprehended in thought. This is why works like Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Marx's *Capital* and Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, despite their abstraction, remain vital. They discovered conceptual truths about capitalism that remain valid. Yet, if philosophy is a reflection of a reified world, the more accurate it is, the more it, too, will be reified. As Marx argued in his early texts, and especially in *The Holy Family*, theory divorced from practice is dead, and is indeed the highest and most complete form of alienation. Hegel and Lukács were also aware of this. In Hegel, this is a large part of why he believed he had to write *The Phenomenology*; to provide a ladder for the ordinary or everyday consciousness to rise to the level of "Science" which he believed was accessible through serious dialectical reflection.[39] Similarly, in Lukács's "Critique of Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought", philosophy that remains on the level of philosophy (this includes Hegel, in Lukács's view) is in the final analysis doomed to relapse back into the contradictions of the contemplative stance. In other words, theory unmediated by practice contains within it a strong tendency towards schematisation and ultimately reconciliation with the world. Therefore, in Marx's words, the working class submits capitalism – and all world views generated under it – to a *practical critique*. This point is driven home repeatedly by Marx in his *Theses on Feuerbach*. [40]

This is not an argument against theory *per se*. The theoretical reflection on the world provided by Marxism remains the truest perspective possible under reification. But the point of this is to say that merely possessing theory does not make for an insight into de-reified truth. Even the best theoretical or historical reflection is radically limited.[41] So, the *real-world* emergence of truth is equally the process whereby reification is broken down, making it materially possible to generate a truthful consciousness of the world. This is equally the overcoming of the antinomy between theory and practice, giving rise to praxis. This definition of praxis cuts against many "common sense" uses of the term, but is important for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it precludes the possibility of praxis occurring meaningfully on a purely individual level. The only possible way to overcome the fragmentation imposed on theory and practice is for a collective theoretical-practical movement to emerge. This is to say individual practice can never touch the totality of the system. Similarly, individual theoretical insight can never hope to understand even a fragment of the vast world of meaning that is continually being generated by collective humanity. *Only* a collective subject has a hope of generating a practice and an accompanying theory that genuinely grasps the social totality. Praxis is therefore a historical process and an open-ended project which emphasises communication and contingent truth over any fixed absolutes. For it to emerge, a historical situation must emerge in which working class practice can rise to the point of changing the social totality, *and* this practice must be informed by a correct insight into the social totality. The closer praxis comes to completely overcoming reification, and uniting theory and practice, the more it transcends itself, and gives way to a free, self-reflexive humanity.

Lukács, (quoting some of Marx's earliest writings), makes this point quite clearly:

Marx clearly defined the conditions in which a relationship between theory and practice becomes possible. "It is not enough that thought should seek to realise itself; reality must also strive towards thought." ... "It will then be realised that the world has long since possessed something in the form of a dream which it need only take possession of consciously, in order to possess it in reality" ... The historical function of theory is to make this step a practical possibility. 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.[42]

So long as this is not on the agenda, the theoretical position of Marxism, the philosophy of praxis, therefore has to work to avoid becoming a lifeless schema. There are a number of measures we can take to avoid this. Firstly, revolutionary Marxism has to accept that there is an abstract and utopian dimension to its thought. This is certainly not to argue that we should move away from Marxism. Indeed, if we take the above argument seriously, we have to accept that qualitative conceptual and theoretical advances in Marxism are *impossible* until working class practice rises once more to a level capable of generating new historical truths. This is not to say that we cannot deepen aspects of Marxism, or continue the work of understanding the world as it changes. Rather, the point is that we need to accept that our theory is historically limited. New questions will emerge for which we won't have easy answers. Indeed, the fact that we can't perceive these questions yet is enough confirmation of the limitation of the position of theory.

So we have to defend the theoretical generalisations of past praxis. This means defending the classical Marxist tradition. But also, this means, specifically, defending dialectics and

the standpoint of the proletariat. This means that we have to continually rework Hegel, Marx and Lukács, as well as associated thinkers. This body of thought is the most coherent critique of reification yet elaborated. As Korsch put it, overcoming philosophy doesn't mean indifference towards it, but actively mastering it.[43] Secondly, and equally importantly, this is why it is critical to maintain an engagement in political practice. Of course, this practice is limited. Yet, if we accept that theory in itself must be subjected to the "critique of practice", then to maintain an orientation towards real-world practice, no matter how limited it might be, is a vital corrective. While this might not produce praxis today, it gives us the best possible chance of engaging with the real-world development of history and praxis as it occurs in the future. Indeed, this is the key difference between academic or sectarian theory and revolutionary Marxist theory. The former is content in its isolation, substituting either the eternal quest for sophistication or doctrinaire purity for engagement in the real world. But genuine revolutionary Marxism – from Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and *The Holy Family* to Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* – retains a vital democratic impulse that understands the sovereignty of the real world, which is created by the labour of the proletariat. The historical practice of the vast majority of people always trumps the most elaborate and sophisticated theoretical schema.

The situation today and the real-world development of praxis

The real-world development of praxis occurs as theory and practice both rise to a level of concrete radicalism, and converge. This raises new antinomies which are more determinate and more concrete expressions of the more overarching and abstract antinomies of bourgeois society. Specifically, as a result of the Russian Revolution, his experience in the failed Hungarian Revolution, and his reading of Lenin, Lukács believed that this would occur in the sphere of politics, the sphere in which class consciousness can emerge and become actual.[44] However, this presupposes the actuality of revolution. So, before we are free to discuss this process, we must make one final comment about the political categories that shape our present situation.

Today, the working class has no independent organisation and is trapped in reformist theory and practice. This, as Lukács argued, represents bourgeois hegemony over the workers' movement. Class consciousness does not yet exist; all that does is a memory of historic class consciousness. In this situation, the working class has not achieved an independent political existence. Rather, working class politics remains the abstract possession of small groups of Marxist activists. These groups exist in various countries and vary in size, from tens to thousands. These groups are, objectively speaking, sects. This is not necessarily the result of a failure of their theory or practice. A sect *may* be schematic, undemocratic and ungrounded in the real world. But this represents a *capitulation* to their existence as a sect. On the contrary, there have been many Marxist sects that have enjoyed a dynamic and creative internal culture, which have maintained their commitment to

working class politics, and which have engaged in real world struggle. Yet the fact remains that, for those who uphold an active commitment to revolutionary Marxist politics today, the *only possible* political form is that of a sect. This usage of the term sect is controversial, and is at odds with the way it is mostly used on the far left. For example, Duncan Hallas of the Socialist Workers Party defines a sect as an organisation which pursues an incorrect policy towards the class struggle.[45] This said, I note that the use of the term “sect” put forward here is entirely consonant with the usage of the same term by Marx, Lenin and Lukács. Lukács argues that a sect’s main possession is an *ethical* commitment to the realisation of praxis which is as yet abstract.[46]

In making this point, it is very important to be clear that this is *not* an argument against revolutionary organising in the period prior to the actuality of revolution.[47] Even though revolutionary Marxists are obliged to organise in the political form of a sect, they have been shown to be capable of organising reasonably significant groups which can make a tangible and positive contribution to class struggle. Insofar as a sect begins to organise a fraction of the working class, and insofar as it proves itself theoretically and practically to be oriented towards the real world, it can create the preconditions for overcoming its existence as a sect. While this is not possible prior to the actuality of revolution, the prior existence of a sect is a necessary condition for the creation of a proletarian party.

The advantage of this understanding is twofold. Firstly, we can recognise that in certain historic periods such as our own, the existence of revolutionary Marxist sects is both progressive and necessary. There is no other road. Secondly, by posing the definition of small groups starkly, it forces us to confront the reality and limitations of our era. There is a powerful and dangerous pressure on sects to seek to overcome their marginal status through a pragmatic adaptation to reality or through a voluntaristic act of willpower. These two attempts to step over history effectively amount to the same thing – a resignation to the contemplative stance and an unconscious relapse into the antinomies of bourgeois life. So, being self-conscious about the historically imposed limits of revolutionary organising prior to the actuality of revolution and being conscious of the overheads involved in this position is vital to avoiding capitulation to reality. In other words, modesty, realism and patience are crucial to the success of small groups. Moreover, these attitudes cannot remain abstract dispositions. Rather, small groups must be cognisant of themselves and their real limitations. This also makes the task of orienting towards the real world more difficult than in a mass party, with real, organic connections to the class struggle. As such, small groups need to rigorously cultivate reality-checking mechanisms and open discussion that allows for the examination of mistakes. If small Marxist groups achieve these difficult tasks, it has been proven that they can grow, and ultimately, they can position themselves to overcome their existence as a sect.[48]

This point aside, we may return to praxis. The actuality of revolution gives rise to new terms – imputed class consciousness and empirical class consciousness. The first of these is often misunderstood. Imputed class consciousness is the antinomy of empirical consciousness. This is to say, it is not this or that set of beliefs or views held by a section or all of the class. Nor is imputed class consciousness necessarily the possession of a vanguard. Rather, imputed class consciousness is an ideal which Marxists derive from a theoretical consideration of the standpoint of the proletariat and its interests within capitalist society. This has unsurprisingly given rise to the charge of elitism. However, as Lukács points out in *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*, imputation is a basic intellectual operation. For example, any historian – non-Marxist included – makes a selection of facts when discussing a previous historical epoch. No matter how accurate the historian is, their activity imputes a meaning to history that is different from the meaning that was experienced by people in the epoch in question.[49] Or, to give another example, more or less all sensible political conversation relies on imputation. For instance, we can safely enough impute to refugees incarcerated in Australia’s immigration detention system an interest in being released and processed on the mainland. This said, however, imputing a class consciousness to the proletariat *does* posit an ideal reality at odds with the present one. So what matters is the process whereby empirical consciousness is reconciled with imputed class consciousness. This is praxis.

This necessarily begins with a working class still mostly under the sway of reformism, or other ideologies that accept reification. This is confronted by a revolutionary party which, by virtue of the fact that it leads a significant minority of the class, can claim class consciousness. In this configuration, the antinomies of the contemplative stance re-emerge, as a contradiction between pragmatism and utopianism.[50] This antinomy structured the European socialist movement, both in the social-democratic and syndicalist traditions, in the decades leading up to World War I.

This antinomy has many more determinate or concrete forms of appearance. It raised its head in the debate over parliamentary action. Similarly, Lukács dedicated a chapter of *History and Class Consciousness* to the question of legality and illegality. This chapter is not just interesting for how it deals with this question, but for the methodology Lukács employs. To begin with, he attacks each term in its one-sidedness. The fetishism of legality – “legal cretinism” – unthinkingly eternalises bourgeois legality, and is therefore ideological. Yet underneath the objectivity of bourgeois law, civil society and economics, Lukács argues, there is violence. The bourgeoisie imposed itself historically through violence, and consequently, the state is a hypostatisation of the class struggle. And beyond this, the moment stability is challenged, violence is exposed again. This critique historicises the bourgeois state, and enables us to imagine a future without it. This ability to see past the ideological appearance of the state allows us to hypothesise a future without a state. Yet this is an abstract ideal. To stop the investigation here is to merely invert the reality. The political position that corresponds to this is the romanticism of illegality. Lukács contends

that this equally fetishises the law in that it allows all activity to be law-bound, only in the negative.[51] Lukács argues that a revolutionary party must instead cultivate a sort of indifference towards the law; a freedom from the ideological power of law. Breaking the law or not is merely a question of means, not ends. Ultimately, the question is concrete, and can only be answered on the basis of the analysis of the present day situation.

This reveals a methodological solution to all the antinomies that exist in the sphere of politics. The real-world overcoming of dialectical opposites – between utopianism and pragmatism, or between ultra-leftism and opportunism, or between legality and illegality – is never settled in the abstract. Although a theoretical critique of any one-sidedness is necessary, the result of this theoretical critique is that it potentially *frees* the workers' movement to decide, based on an analysis of the present and in light of the whole society, what has to be done next. Lukács argued that this was Lenin's political genius – he always oriented towards the next “link in the chain.”[52] This is also the key to overcoming the opposition between imputed class consciousness and empirical class consciousness. The truth of the imputed class consciousness that a party holds is only as worthwhile as its answers to the questions of the day. Or, to put the same thing from the other side, workers can only be expected to freely choose to support a party whose politics are capable of satisfactorily answering the key questions that arise in their struggle. This means that Lukács's theory of class consciousness is radically democratic. Far from privileging the party as a bearer of “truth”, he explicitly and consistently argues that a party is only as radical as its ability to convince and inspire masses of workers who freely choose it. Merleau-Ponty sums up this position quite well:

The proletariat's acknowledgement of the Party is not an oath of allegiance to persons. Its counterpart is the acknowledgement of the proletariat by the Party. This is certainly not to say that there is a submission of the Party to the proletarians' opinions just as they are; rather there is the statutory aim of making them attain political life. This [is an] exchange, in which no one commands and no one obeys... In the communist sense, the Party is this communication; and such a conception of the Party is not a corollary of Marxism – it is its very centre... In other words, the masses are never the simple means of a great politics which is worked out behind their backs. Led, but not manoeuvred, the masses bring the seal of truth to the politics of the Party.[53]

The truth is concrete

This Hegelian aphorism is essential to Leninism, as Sandra Bloodworth has pointed out.[54] Lukács's theorisation of praxis is built entirely on this argument. From the estrangement and reification of the contemplative stance, to the dialectic of theory and praxis, and finally to the antinomies of workers' struggle, the solution to every contradiction is simultaneously more concrete. Moreover, the concrete overcoming of these antinomies is where human freedom displays itself.

Two further dimensions of Lukács's political theory will put this in sharp relief. The first is the relationship between party and soviets. The soviets are the real-world bodies that overcome reification. They overcome the separation between economics and politics, and between theory and practice. As institutions of the whole working class, based in the productive sphere and in working class communities, the decisions made within soviets are carried out by the same soviets. This leads to a second element: the soviets overcome the fragmentation and stasis of bourgeois politics. They combine the executive, legislative and judicial aspects of the state, and rely on participation and direct democracy. Therefore, they are fluid bodies, preferring the active involvement of people to constitutionalism. This power also gives soviets the ability to mediate between the proletariat and other sections of the oppressed population who don't enter into politics on a clear class basis; for example, oppressed national groups. Soviets are, therefore, the key institutions of working class hegemony, and they simultaneously destabilise bourgeois hegemony. Their seizure of power is the realisation of the potential of the working class, and the key moment in the victory of the conscious element of human social existence over the unconscious and reified element.

The party is less than this, but simultaneously, indispensable. As a self-selecting fraction of the class, the party cannot be the institution that de-reifies society. As I outlined earlier, the condition for the existence of class consciousness in a party is the *unconsciousness* of the mass, which it seeks to overcome. Hence, a revolutionary party ultimately exists in order to render itself useless. Precisely because practice requires clear theory to become praxis, Lukács is clear: without a party the proletariat will never actualise its historic potential. He does not invest in the party an elite or mythical status as Stalinism and some varieties of Trotskyism do. Nor does Lukács identify the power of a party with its possession of a perfect program, or the "science" of dialectical materialism. Rather, he argues that the party represents the externalisation or alienation of the consciousness of the working class, and that to be effective, the class must consciously and freely choose its own consciousness.^[55] This is done in the soviets, where different political perspectives contend to solve the questions of the day.

This brings us to the most concrete dialectic that Lukács discusses. This is the dialectic of moments and process. Interestingly, it is a strong precursor to the Gramscian concepts "war of position" and "war of manoeuvre". His argument is waged primarily against representatives of mechanical materialism who hold that history is a process without subjectivity.^[56] Lukács contends, following the theory of reification, that processes in history can only be understood as the accumulation of subjective actions. Yet, these actions, undertaken in circumstances beyond the actors' choosing and comprehension, almost always have a meaning, importance and impact beyond the understanding of those who undertake them. This is why history takes on an objective appearance of being a subject-less process. Lukács also points out that the automatic process of history is punctuated by moments where decision is critical. He writes:

What is a “moment”? A situation whose duration may be longer or shorter, but which is distinguished from the process that leads up to it in that it forces together the essential tendencies of that process, and demands that a *decision* be taken over the *future direction of the process*... Development does not occur, then, as a continuous intensification, in which development is favourable to the proletariat, and the day after tomorrow the situation *must* be even more favourable than it is tomorrow, and so on. It means rather that at a *particular* point, the situation demands that a decision be taken and the day after tomorrow might be too late to make that decision. ... [I]n such moments everything depends on class consciousness, on the conscious will of the proletariat. This is where the moment of decision lies. The dialectical interaction of subject and object in the historical process consists in the fact that the subjective moment is, self-evidently as I stress again and again, a product, a moment of the objective process. It works back on the process, in certain historical situations, whose emergence is called forth by the objective process...and gives it direction. This working back is only possible in praxis, only in the *present*.^[57]

This quote makes clear the meaning that Lukács assigns to praxis and it makes an extremely clear argument for revolutionary intervention in history. Additionally, it clarifies the role of the party, which is seen as a crucial and indispensable mediation between theory and practice, allowing working class praxis to be realised. This is an unmistakably revolutionary-democratic position.

Conclusion

I aimed to establish a number of points in this article. Firstly, Lukács should be regarded as equally indispensable as Marx and Lenin. *History and Class Consciousness*, as well as *Lenin* and *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*, represent a body of work as important and ground-breaking as *Capital* or any other canonical revolutionary Marxist text. A return to a Lukácsian understanding of revolution, consciousness, organisation and dialectics can, I believe, provide the basis for immense clarity and development in Marxism. This also requires that we go back to Hegel. If we understand reification as a totalising and inescapable social system that shapes every aspect of our perception and knowledge, then the dialectical critique of reification is a continual labour. Too often, lip service is paid to Hegel. Yet precious few revolutionary Marxists ever read him, preferring inherited clichés about turning Hegel on his head to an engagement with the real thing.

Beyond this, understanding the contemplative stance, and its impact on the immediate forms of consciousness, including our theory and practice, is critical to our self-knowledge and informing our intervention in the world. Of course, these antinomies run through socialist practice and thinking, yet it is extremely rare for socialist writers to be theoretically conscious of their origin and material foundation in reification, or in how the antinomies of bourgeois thought and politics can be overcome. Often, Marxists use their theoretical tools without understanding them. This neglect of method risks one-sidedness.

Finally, I believe that Lukács's theorisation of the Russian Revolution, and particularly, his analysis of the antinomies that face the workers' movement – utopianism and reformism, and his analysis of the dialectic between party and class, and between moment and process – still retain a conceptual validity in the twenty-first century. This framework will, of course, have to be filled with new concrete content as history produces new revolutionary opportunities. Yet, I would argue, recovering the philosophy of praxis is an indispensable part of preparing ourselves to be equal to the real-world elaboration of praxis when history makes this possible once more.

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[1] Lukács, 1967b, Chapter 6.

[2] Lukács, 1967a, pxlii.

[3] Lukács, 1967b, pp9-10.

[4] This is the year in which Lukács's *Blum Theses* were debated and rejected by the Hungarian Communist Party. This work, as has been argued by Paul Le Blanc, marks the end of Lukács's revolutionary Marxist period. Following this period, by his own admission,

he retreated into literary and philosophical work. To some extent – although the extent is debated – he accommodated to the Stalinist regime. This way, he retained his life during the purges, and retained his membership of the Communist Party until after 1956, when he was ostracised as a result of his involvement in the 1956 government of Imre Nagy. This is not to say that Lukács’s writings prior to the 1920s or from 1930 through until his death in 1971 are uninteresting. Rather, they are less clearly informed by a commitment to proletarian revolution and its attendant philosophical and political problems. Le Blanc, 2013, pp47-75.

[5] Lukács, 2002.

[6] One such exception is the International Socialist tendency (IST). Possibly uniquely amongst the broad “Trotskyist” movement, writers from the IST – notably, Chris Harman, John Molyneux, and John Rees – seriously read Lukács and drew from his work. This shines through quite clearly in the works *What is the Real Marxist Tradition*, *Marxism and the Party* and *Party and Class*. Although not formally a part of the IST, Socialist Alternative has continued this theoretical perspective. See for example Sandra Bloodworth’s article in this issue and Bloodworth, 2013.

[7] Korsch, 2008.

[8] This helps us understand the persistent desire to find some other revolutionary subject, to “sophisticate” Marxism, or to move beyond it. Lukács, 1967b, p9.

[9] My use of the term utopian is at odds with more common uses of the term. Mostly this term is understood to denote an inherently unrealisable future society. Yet, following Lukács, I use the term to denote an end goal which is still abstract and distant. There are, of course, utopias which by their nature are unrealisable, and are doomed to remain abstract and mythological. Yet all utopias reflect something about the world in which they are developed. As such, communism is a *rational* utopia which reflects an immanent direction within capitalism. The real-world struggle of the working class may actualise this utopia, sublating its utopian content.

[10] For more on this reading of Lukács, I am happy to make available copies of my Honours thesis on the same. Additionally, my forthcoming piece in *Historical Materialism*, “Recovering Georg Lukács” illustrates the difference between my reading of Lukács and the more common academic Marxist readings.

[11] This is a rather sharp compression of a more detailed argument. See Chapter 1 of *Capital* or I. I. Rubin’s book *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value*. The latter is an excellent introduction to Marxist economic theory which emphasises its dialectical dimension.

[12] Lukács, 1967a, p88.

[13] As an important aside, this aspect of Lukács compellingly demonstrates his humanism, and puts him on par with Marx of the *1844 Manuscripts*. Both hold labour to be the essence of humanity, and both have a fundamentally qualitative and creative understanding of labour as a process whereby we create our world and ourselves.

[14] Lukács, 1967a, p96.

[15] Hegel, 2008, §46. Lukács, 1967a, p90. Once we begin to understand this logic, other examples are easy to come by. For example, the same dynamic is at work in modern politics, where citizenship reduces concretely different humans to the same abstractly equal status, and in so doing, covers for a system that privileges wealth and power. Marx's earliest works – *The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and *On The Jewish Question* – were dedicated to exploring exactly this dimension of alienation. Marx found commodity production to be at the core of alienation, a point made by Lukács even though these texts would have been unknown to him in 1920.

[16] Lukács, 1967a, p87.

[17] Lukács, 1967a, p69.

[18] Lukács, 1967a, p150.

[19] Lukács, 1967a, p89.

[20] In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács conducts this argument through a critique of German Idealism, but it could just as well be conducted through the critique of any other systematic body of thought which arises on the basis of the contemplative stance. Lukács, 1967a, pp110-149.

[21] Lukács, 1967a, p130.

[22] Lukács, 1967a, pp.89-90.

[23] Lukács, 1967a, pp110-149.

[24] Lukács cited the self-acknowledged limitations of Max Weber's rationalism, and the paradoxes of Kantian formalism as evidence for this. Lukács, 1967a.

[25] Lukács, 1967a, p136.

[26] This is reflected in the lifestyle of revolutionary Marxist cadre. A good revolutionary activist is extraordinarily rational and prosaic, and is possessed of a well cultivated sense of realism. Yet this is combined with an extraordinarily utopian aspiration that maintains faith in the possibility that humanity will liberate itself. So the cadre of a revolutionary party combines utopianism with reason and intellectual consideration. This doesn't escape

the contemplative stance, but it produces extremely self-sacrificing individuals who radicalise the contemplative stance as much as is possible in their given historical context. In many historic periods, this combination has seen revolutionaries risk jail, exile or death.

[27] Lukács, 1967a, pp110-149.

[28] Marx, 1969.

[29] Hegel, 2008, §17.

[30] Here the term “identity” is used in a technical sense, to argue that *in principle* subject and object are unified, but that this unity is as yet still abstract and not yet actual. As such, it is still a flat and undifferentiated unity. The unity of subject and object, and the creation of a differentiated and self-conscious totality (or Concept) is a historical process. Finally, as Lukács notes, this discovery was also made by Fichte. Lukács, 1967a, p.119.

[31] Hegel, 2008, §37.

[32] Lukács, 1967a, pp160-162.

[33] Lukács, 1967a, p155.

[34] Lukács, 1967a, pp149-223.

[35] Lukács, 1967a, pp148-149.

[36] Lukács, 1967b, pp12-13.

[37] It is common – and incorrect – to understand the term “actuality of revolution” as an overarching commitment to revolution. Of course, Lukács did hold such an overarching commitment. However, in *Lenin*, Lukács uses the term to mean the dialectical opposite of this abstract overarching principle. He believed that the concrete questions of revolution would become more visible and tangible the closer history moved to a revolutionary situation, and that only this level of concreteness would make it possible for the working class to actualise its potential.

[38] Lukács, 1967a, pp223-253.

[39] Hegel, 2008, §26.

[40] Marx, 1969.

[41] This is, incidentally, why Marxism has never been able to say anything about the positive content of communist society, except in negative terms which counterpose it to the present reality.

[42] Lukács, 1967a, pp2-3.

[43] Korsch, 2008.

[44] This idea is also present in Marx, and it underpins his arguments in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

[45] As far as I know, no small group defines itself as a sect. Mostly, small groups argue that they are parties. A smaller number prefer to call themselves a propaganda group. This latter term has advantages in respect to the former, and to some extent, to quibble over this terminology is hair-splitting. Hallas, 1985.

[46] Lukács, 1967a, p321.

[47] Of course, this conclusion has been drawn by other Marxists, notably Hal Draper. This is not the place to discuss their arguments in full. Suffice to say, however, that every “alternative” model of Marxist organising designed to overcome “sectarianism” has turned out to be a capitulation to movementism, reformism or a retreat into individual theoretical work.

[48] One modern example of this is the creation of the British Socialist Workers Party, which was able, in the early 1970s, to radically alter the makeup of its membership from predominantly students and white collar workers, to approximately 40 percent blue collar workers. This was made possible by an historic situation that approached, in some respects, the actuality of revolution. As such, they began to think of themselves as a party. This was not entirely unrealistic, but held dangers of overstating what they could achieve.

[49] Lukács, 2002, pp63-64.

[50] Lukács made this the starting point for his essay “Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organisation”. Lukács, 1967a, p296.

[51] Lukács, 1967a, p263.

[52] Lukács, 1967b, p84.

[53] Merleau-Ponty, 1973, pp50-52.

[54] Bloodworth, 2013.

[55] Lukács, 1967a, pp326-328.

[56] Lukács, 2002.

[57] Lukács, 2002, p.55.