

Reproduction and Ontology in Lukács¹

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... an attempt to effectively redirect thinking towards being, in our present-day world, could only take place with the development of a Marxist ontology. (Lukács, 1979b, p.33).

At a time when most thinkers dismiss ontology as an outdated metaphysics, when almost all specialists elevate epistemology and positivism to “quasi official doctrines,” Lukács occupied the last years of his life writing *Towards an Ontology of Social Being* (1976-1981). What are the reasons that led Lukács, at a time when ontology was so neglected, to research into social reproduction as an ontological category?

The answers are not simple, as usually happens with fundamental questions. To Lukács, the complexity of the answer increases even more. Lukácsian thought is so closely articulated with his epoch that a satisfactory answer would involve a whole network of references and connections whose roots are located, with greater or lesser mediations, in the main problems, dilemmas and questions posed by the evolution of humanity over this century. However, in a synthetic and preliminary way, it may be possible to go to the heart of the matter by affirming that, for Lukács, the ontological perspective is the only one capable of recovering the radically historical and human character of social being, so as to, ultimately and essentially, reaffirm the Marxian assertion that history is the exclusive result of human action and that, therefore, it is within the reach of humanity to take history into its own hands. The ethical resonances evident here are not coincidental; in fact, Lukács conceived his *Ontology* as preparation for an *Ethics* which, however, he did not live long enough to write.

This sketch of an answer already indicates two of the basic categories of the Lukácsian ontology of social being. Firstly, as the central category of the world of men.² Secondly, the radically human character of this historicity: the global trajectory of the human race, its history, is the concrete result of social reproduction, a peculiar synthesis which converts into totality and individuality the countless and distinct actions of singular individuals (Lukács, 1976-1981, v. II, p. 253-CLVI).³

For Lukács, thus, nothing resembling a human “nature” is a-historically given, for once and for all, in the moulds of Rousseau or the common sense of contemporary everyday life (Lukács, 1979, p. 14; 1976-81, v. II, p. 269-74/CLXV-CLXXII). Man is not necessarily good or bad, his history is not traced *a priori* by a force or tendency belonging to a deeper essence, which would only be superficially and transitorily touched by history. On the contrary. Throughout his *Ontology*, each paragraph is a reaffirmation of the radical historicity and sociability of the human being.

Inside this basic framework, the Hungarian thinker, with the aim of sustaining his fundamental postulates (the historicity and sociability of the world of men), gave a peculiar treatment to the traditional ontological problem of continuity.⁴

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- 2 With this we do not mean to suggest that historicity is only a social category. For Lukács, historicity is a category of being in general, not implying an abstract homogenization of the distinct features that historicity assumes in nature and in social being. See, for example, Lukács, 1976-1981, v. II, tome 1, p. 167.
 - 3 The Roman numeral in quotations corresponds to the page of the translation into Portuguese of the chapter “*La Riproduzione*” from *Per una ontologia dell'essere sociale* de G. Lukács, UFMG Belo Horizonte, 1990.
 - 4 The problems involving the category of continuity can be put in these terms: to what extent—and in what way—is a transforming entity still the original entity, to what extent—and how—does a being that transforms itself continue to be the same?

The category of continuity has traditionally been approached under the essence-phenomenon duality. The characteristics of continuity would be those given by essence and would correspond to what is true and lasting. In turn, the traces of change and movement would be those originating in the phenomenal sphere, necessarily transient, ephemeral. Essence and phenomenon, therefore, would be distinguished as different levels of being, and this differentiation would be given by a greater or lesser “reality,” by a greater or lesser participation in being. Essence and phenomenon, continuity and historicity, being and becoming are thus opposed as more or less real, more or less “essential” or “apparent.”

Lukács departs from this tradition. He postulates substantiality as a historical category. Briefly, he pursues the central nodules of a continuity whose mode of being is historical, intimately associating historicity and continuity—and he does so by taking social being as his first object. Anchored in Marx, he conceives of a substantiality whose continuity is not opposed to becoming, whose permanence as being is constituted in the permanent evolution of the process of its self-explication; whose essence, basically, is substantiated in the very becoming of which it is the essence (1979b, p. 78).

Lukács argues that social continuity is distinguished from natural continuity by the fact that the world of men is a synthetic totality of teleologically posited actions. Therefore, social being possesses, in consciousness, the organ and the medium of its continuity. That is, social continuity is constituted in a process of accumulation—which, by its essence, can only unfold through the mediation of an organ such as consciousness—where past experiences are not only accumulated, but also confronted with the demands and challenges posed by the past and the

present, by the new demands and tasks that life, without ceasing, places upon men. Therefore, social continuity exhibits development potentialities absolutely unprecedented in comparison with nature. Above all, social continuity can rise to a being-for-itself impossible to natural continuity: the human being is the only one who can recognize himself in his own history, the only one who has the possibility of consciously changing it (1976-1981, v. II, p. 181-7/LIX-LXI). Therefore, in Lukácsian ontology, essence and phenomenon, becoming and continuity, substantiality and historicity are no longer distinguished by a greater or lesser “reality,” by a distinct participation in being, but by different moments, equally real, of ontological processuality. They would no longer be antithetical terms of a relationship that, eventually, would end up excluding one of the stages, but distinct instances, equally real, articulated by the inextinguishable contradictoriness of the self-explicitness of being.

We have previously referred to the fact that, for the Hungarian philosopher, social being is the result of a peculiar synthesis which converts the intimate acts of singular individuals into a totality (1979b, p. 95). We now affirm that the development of social being—history—is necessarily contradictory. We must, therefore, before turning to the problem of reproduction, clarify the apparent contradiction between the unity that the concept of totality suggests, and our affirmation of the inextinguishable contradictoriness of ontological development.

Unity and contradictoriness are not mutually exclusive categories for Lukács.

The development of social being, the emergence of increasingly complex social forms, results in the extensive and intensive growth of moments of heterogeneity, multiplying the quantity and altering the

quality of contradictions. However, it is no less true that this growth of the internal heterogeneity of the social being is accompanied by the intensification and quantitative increase of the objective, concrete links which articulate the destinies of each individual towards the destinies of humanity, therefore, by the development of the inherent oneness of social being.

For the sake of brevity, let us think about the market. It emerges at a certain stage of human development and, from then on, with each new advance of sociability, it becomes more complex, broadens its horizon of action, drives the division of labour, makes an ever greater quantity of human actions converge towards it, until it converges into a world market which, today, penetrates all the pores of each individual's life. The market is an objective articulation between the everyday life of each individual and humanity, an expression of the growing real unity, socially constructed, of the genus; and, at the same time, it is a unity which can only be constructed through the division of labour, the development of social classes, the growing differentiation of activities, of individuals, etc. The market clearly exemplifies how the growing complexity of social formations during history requires the construction of objective social relations which tend to elevate the biologically given unity of the genus to a qualitatively new, socially posited unity.

In short, again according to Lukács, the growing objective unity of the human world is not opposed to—but rather requires—that this unity take place among increasingly heterogeneous and internally contradictory elements. Hence, social being reveals itself as an authentic complex of

complexes, an increasingly unitary, heterogeneous and contradictory totality.⁵

Therefore, for Lukács, the postulation of the radical historicity and sociability of social being—at the very limit, reaffirming the possibility of men consciously making history—is inextricably linked to the concept of social substance as the bearer of a historical continuity; of a being whose evolutionary process has as its distinctive ontological feature the incessant construction of new levels of sociability. The world of men unfolds in an increasingly heterogeneous and contradictory totality and, at the same time, it becomes more and more strongly unitary. The Hungarian thinker thus rejects any conception of human being which is, in one way or another, rooted in non-historical natures, essences, etc. Likewise, he rejects the irrationalism which takes the objective development of social being as the absolute fruit of chance. Between non-historical nature and absolute chance, not subject to laws, Lukács proposes his *tertium non datur*: the human being as an essentially historical and social substance.

Labour: foundational moment of social reproduction

According to Lukács, following Marx, labour is the founding category of social being. Thus, it is through labour that the biological being man constructs himself as a social being. Labour, in this sense, is rendered as the simplest and most fundamental form of all human activity, in Lukács' words, as the “protoform of all human activity” (1979b, pp. 81-2; 1976-1981, v. II, p. 13511).

5 We do not wish to suggest here that nature does not also constitute a complex of complexes for Lukács. However, this is not the place to deal with this question. Cf. Lukács, 1976-1981, v. II, p. 138IW-V, p. 177/LIX.

Again according to Lukács, the essential structure of labour is a peculiar reflexive relationship between teleology, between goals previously outlined in consciousness and the objectivity of nature and society. In short, social praxis is characterized by the transformation of reality according to objectives previously outlined by consciousness (1976-1981, v. II, p. 264/XLX).

Between the purposes teleologically set and the transformations objectively achieved, there is an inextinguishable tension. First, because absolute knowledge of the sphere of reality upon which one acts is never possible, since reality is in permanent evolution (1976-1981, v. II, p. 190! LXX; 1979b, p. 108). Second, because the new object, the new social relation created by labour, requires a life of its own, independent—to a greater or lesser extent—of its creator. Thus, both the contradiction that occurs between the desired goal and the result effectively achieved, as well as the return effect, on the social being, of the concrete trajectory of the created object, provide elements that will compose the next ideation process and, in this way, will enter the new cycle of previous ideation/transformation of reality. That is the basic way of being in the constant evolution of the reflexive relationship that unfolds between the previously idealized objectives and the results achieved by labour (1979b, p. 52-3).

This teleology/causality dialectic brings Lukács to another key element of the category of labour. Here we refer to the impulse to generalize its results and processes (1976-1981, v. II, p. 231-2/CXX- CXXI). This process of generalization unfolds on two levels which, in the actual process, are inseparable.

The first level concerns the process of generalization which involves the process of ideation; that is, about the tendency, intrinsic to labour, to

generalize, on the level of subjectivity, the partial results of the singular experiences present in every single act of labour as such. The experiences, certainly singular and typical, involved in the construction of an axe, for example, are generalized and converted into generic knowledge that will serve the construction of any other axe. Over time, this generalization which, in its immediacy, takes place in the consciousness of a single individual, ends up generalizing at another level: it becomes collective, it rises to knowledge belonging to the social formation as a whole. This passage from the knowledge of a singular case to a knowledge with universal validity, as well as the passage from knowledge belonging to an individual to a collective, socio-generic knowledge, are passages spontaneously propelled by the dynamics of social praxis.

The second level refers to the process by which labour's results are generalized by the flux of social praxis. Acquisitions such as a more sophisticated axe, a linguistic construction more appropriate to everyday demands, a technique better suited to hunting, etc. are generalized by social praxis itself. And only after this process of generalization do they acquire their real social meaning. Analogously, the growth of human capacities in transforming nature is intimately related to the generalization of social relations which, through time, cover an increasing amount of human beings—until reaching the totality of humanity, as it happens nowadays—in an increasingly developed social mesh, more distant from its primitive starting point. This is the ontological foundation of the genesis and development of social relations that increasingly articulate individuals to the human race, making human substantiality increasingly social-generic.

This drive towards generalisation, at the levels exposed above, is responsible for elevating human beings to higher and greater levels of sociability. This impulse is the root of the development of social relations that make the human being more and more general. In short, it is the essence of social reproduction. After Marx, Lukács calls this process of removal of natural barriers the process of socialization.

However, the process of social reproduction is not limited to the labour process as such. Undoubtedly, without labour we cannot even imagine any process of social reproduction. But it is no less true that the process of social evolution gives rise to needs and social mediations to meet these needs which, although they have their genesis in the process of socialization triggered by labour, are no longer restricted to the labour process itself. In this way, with the complexification of social forms, complex mediators such as law, speech, philosophy, art, politics, etc. emerge, which no longer belong to labour as such, although they have their genesis in the needs posed by the process of social development triggered by labour.

It is well known that vulgar Marxism deals with the emerging problems with extreme disregard, to say the least. Its disregard for the social complex mediators operating in social reproduction is blatant. The specificity of the mediating complexes was deformed to the point of restricting them to mere epiphenomena of social reproduction—while this, in turn, was limited to an immediately material reproduction—in a simplistic manner that profoundly deformed Marxian thought.

Lukács' clear break with vulgar Marxism was the particularizing consideration he dedicated to this complex of social mediations. Between the category of labour as such and the overall social process, composing

the mesh of real mediations that articulate labour and social totality, Lukács points out the presence of a peculiar category that is not to be confused with labour, although it originates from it, which is the category of social reproduction.⁶

This brings us to the theme of our article, the process of social reproduction in Lukács' ontology.

The bipolarity of social reproduction

According to Lukács, the fundamental question when studying the reproduction of the world of men is the unveiling of the peculiar synthesis which, starting from the singular acts of concrete individuals, founds a new substantiality, whose essence is the process of socialization (1976-1981, v. II, p. 287-8/CLXXXVII-VIII). It is therefore a matter of searching for the ontological articulations through which the singular atom becomes the founding element both of individuality and of the social totality.

Lukács begins this search by pointing out that the teleology/causality dialectic, an essential node of labour, means that the social totality can only be categorically explained with consciousness as its organ and means. And since consciousness is always, in its immediacy, the concrete consciousness of a concrete individual, the growing complexity of social formations requires increasingly richer and more articulated individualities, capable of increasingly socially mediated acts. For this reason, the process of accumulation which characterizes social reproduction necessarily results in the modification and complexification of the individualities which serve as its medium (1976-1981, v. II, p. 226-7/CXV-VII, p. 268-9/CLXV).

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In other words, by having as organ and means of its continuity the consciousness of concrete individuals, the development of the social being also requires and favours the development, the complexification, of individualities. These are increasingly distancing themselves from their origin, whereby each individual was distinguished, in their daily life, very slightly, both from other individuals and from the totality of the social formation to which they belonged. The continuity of this line of development resulted in the raising to consciousness, on a social scale, of the fact that social reproduction involves two distinct, though inseparable, moments: the reproduction of the individual as an individuality; and the reproduction of social formation in its totality. In Lukács' words, it resulted in the consciousness of the bipolar character of social reproduction.

It is worth emphasizing that, always according to Lukács, the bipolar character of social reproduction is a specific ontological feature of the world of men (1976-1981, v. II, p. 182/LV). Such is in Lukácsian ontology the distinctive ontological feature between social and natural reproduction. Contrary to what we find in nature, a constant overcoming of the original starting point in social being, only in itself, makes explicit on an objective level, and raises consciousness on a social scale, the bipolar character of its reproduction; that is, individuation and sociability embody distinct moments of the same overall reproductive process. In this way, throughout the reproductive process, individualities are being composed, at the same time, as personalities which are increasingly particular and increasingly generic.

Once this has been said, we must pass on to the analysis of the reproduction of society as a whole and that of the individual.

Individuation

For Lukács, if social being is the synthesis of singular acts into tendencies, generic forces, then the concrete substance which distinguishes an individuality from the others (as well as from the social totality) is given by the quality, direction, etc. of the chain of alternative decisions which constitute its existence. It is the quality of the relations established with the surrounding world which ontologically characterizes the substantiality of each singular individual (1976-1981, v. II, p. 261-2/CLVI-VIII, 227/CXVI).

For the Hungarian philosopher, the human individual is radically different from the singular biological specimen. The latter possesses a substantiality given once and for all in his genetic heritage (1976-1981, v. II, pp. 177-8/LN-V). The substantiality of the human individual, therefore, is not only radically social, but also historical: not even the characteristics inherited biologically by the individual can *a priori* determine the dynamics of the evolution of their personality.

This also means that the construction of the personality of each individual is only possible through intense integration in the social formation to which the individual belongs. The absolute necessity of this articulation with the social totality for individuality to be categorically expressed manifests itself and is grounded, according to Lukács, in three key moments: the first moment corresponds to the fact that the objective development of social being, as a whole, is the process of moving away from natural barriers which, at the same time, enables and requires the development of increasingly rich, mediated and complex personalities. Through this mediation, the impulse towards generality inherent in labour

itself becomes the ultimate ontological foundation of the individuation process. Briefly, for Lukács, the human individual has real existence only as a social being. Outside society, there is no possible individuation (1976-1981, v. II, p. 261-2/CLVI-II).

Secondly, the individual can only be realized in society because its founding element, the individual's actions, only exists as a synthesis of generic and particular elements. The generic elements are given: 1) by the specific demand, always posed by society, which is at the root of all creation; 2) by the returning action of the product created for its creator; 3) and, finally, by the socio-generational advances which are incorporated into the individual consciousnesses by the spontaneous flow of social praxis. For their part, the particular elements originate: 1) in the singularity of each situation; 2) in the singularity of each individuality; 3) and, finally, in the singularity of the response which corresponds to the alternative chosen (1976-1981, v. II, p 327 ff).

It is important to stress that, for Lukács, every social act is a synthetic unity of generic and singular elements (1976-1981, v. II, p. 276-7/CLXXIV-VI). The three moments previously indicated, on the level of objective reality, substantiate a synthetic unity, in such a way that we can only theoretically and abstractly separate them. In everyday life, the generic and particular elements are articulated in such a way that they often require careful analysis to distinguish one from the other. However, this inseparability of the generic and particular elements does not mean that they have disappeared as such. On the contrary, they can only contribute to the process of particularization that makes each human act different from all the others, but always participants in history, to the extent that they

unfold a tension between generality and particularity, a tension that permeates the particular concreteness of the act.

Lukács points out that this tension between generic and particular elements fulfils a specific ontological function: it is the means which allows, at the level of everyday praxis, the perception of the contradiction between human-individuality. It is this tension which, in the choice of the innumerable alternatives offered by reality, makes the individual have to choose between possibilities more or less generic, or more or less particular.

This is the connection which articulates the third moment of individuation. The development of individualities is only possible in the presence of complex mediations, necessarily generic, which permit the individual to refer to themselves the demands posed by the evolution of the human race. This is how customs, law, ethics, etc. arise, to meet the need, permanent in social reproduction, for individuals to refer to themselves, as their own, the needs posed by generic human development. To this extent, such mediations play a fundamental role in the internal development, peculiar to each individuality.

As we shall see soon below, during this third moment, values have an ontological weight which should not be disregarded, especially in the case of more advanced societies. They drive individualities towards more socially mediated, more generic teleological positions, positively valuing the real demands posed by the development of humanity as a whole or, on the contrary, stimulating the adoption of alternatives centred on the particularity of individuality, which is understood as nothing. The immediate, practical consequences for the individual are immediately visible in contemporary society, since the option for general values can

raise the substantiality of each individuality to generality—or, on the contrary, the option for merely particular values can lower the content of its existence to the pettiness of the bourgeois universe which opposes/overlaps humanity.

Therefore, for Lukács, there are three fundamental ontological connections which make possible the synthesis of singular acts in a process of individuation: 1) the process of socialization and its founding impulse and predominant momentum; 2) the contradictory nature between the general-universal elements and the particular ones, in every singular act, a contradictory nature strengthened through the categorical explicitness of the bipolar nature of the reproduction of the world of men, forces individuals to become aware of the contradictory relationship that permeates the individual/society relationship; and, 3) the development of an increasingly generalised network of social relations and the ontological foundation of necessity and, simultaneously, the possibility that, in the process of reproduction, more and more general values and value processes are at work (Lukács considers, above all, ethics). These three connections, per Lukács, are the ultimate ontological foundation so that the reproduction of the individual, whilst it can only unfold within social relations, expresses a growing autonomy before the overall social reproduction, insofar as it embodies its for-itself.

Sociability

As with individuation, the reproduction of social totality exhibits, according to Lukács, three fundamental moments.

In the first moment of synthesis of the social totality is rooted in the most essential nucleus of the world of men, the process of generalization inherent to the category of labour. This process of generalization, by articulating, through the flow of social praxis, each single act with the overall social processuality, constitutes the single act in a primary element of the social totality (1976-1981, v. II, p. 261-CLVI).

The second, which operates in the synthesis of social substantiality as a totality, is intrinsically related to the previous one: the inextinguishable contradictoriness between the general and particular elements. We have already seen that, at its most essential level, labour produces an inextinguishable tension between singularity and universality. We have argued, then, how, through labour, the singularity of the concrete situation becomes generalized both when confronted with the past and the future, and also when objectified in a (always singular) product of labour. At the very core of labour, therefore, the spheres of universality and singularity are articulated in reflexive determinations.

This original, primary situation unfolds, in the course of more developed social praxis, on another level of contradictoriness between singular and universal moments. The overall social process, in its own concrete, everyday movement, places the human race before alternatives which force it to choose between human-generic needs, interests and values and needs, interests and values which are only particular. As a rule, within class societies these oppositions take the form of the predominance of the interests of one class over the interests of social totality.

We have already seen, when dealing with individuation, the central role this tension plays in the process of elevation from singularity to individuality. At the level of social reproduction, this tension is the basis of

the fact that all social conflict, however simple, exhibits in its most essential nucleus this contradictoriness between the generic and the particular. In short, for Lukács, without this contradiction there would be no social conflict.

This is the objective social basis, the ontological foundation, for humanity to raise throughout history to higher levels of consciousness of the contradictory relationship between the socio-generational moments of reproduction and those that are merely particular; and, consequently, to make explicit the possibility of carrying out its reproduction in an increasingly conscious way. (1976-1981, v. II, p. 327 ff.).

We have seen so far two of the nexuses operating in the synthesis of social substantiality as totality: 1) the generalization inherent to the labour category that makes social (i.e., socially generic) the whole up to the singular; and 2) the inextinguishable tension between the general and particular elements, which constitutes the basis for the raising to consciousness, on a social scale, of the generic character of the human being. Now we must proceed with the analysis of the last connection of this synthesis, which will lead us, as it happened in the study of the individual, to the problem of values and valorative processes.⁷

With the development of sociability and the consequent intensification and extension, both objective and subjective, of the conflicts between the general and particular elements, the need arises for social mediations which make explicit, as clearly as possible, the general demands which are gradually developing.⁸ It is necessary to identify the general needs, to mould them into social forms which are visible in the most diverse

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situations, so that they become operative in everyday life. Values like justice, equality, liberty, etc. emerge in each historical period as concrete expressions, historically determined, of the general collective needs posed by the development of sociability. Certainly, for being concrete, historical expressions of human-generic needs, the content of these values alters with the passage of time. These changes introduce new problems in this complex, but do not change that such values are central in the raising to consciousness, on a social scale, of the singular/universal, generic/individual contradiction; and that, yet, the raising of the level of consciousness of the individual/general contradiction decisively influences the more precise identification of the generic needs that have historically arisen.

According to Lukács, the social need for such mediations is the ontological foundation of the genesis and development of complexes such as tradition, morality, customs, law and ethics. Each of them, despite the enormous differences they exhibit, if compared among themselves, have the social function of operating within the space opened by the contradictory nature between the general and the particular, so as to make recognizable by men (always on a social scale) the form and content that this contradictory nature assumes at each moment. And, in so doing, they allow men to choose, in a more and more conscious way, between values which express the general human needs and values which express the interests of individuals or social groups.

Particularly in bourgeois society, by contrasting the individual-network/society-composed-by-conflicts-between-individuals, it opposes everyday the particular elements (which often take on the appearance of “real” interests of the individual) to the general interests (which as a rule

take on the appearance of “obstacles” to the development of the individual). And, in this way, in everyday life, the individual is forced, with intensity unheard of in the face of previous social formations, to become aware of this contradiction and to make choices for one or the other side. On these choices, more and more in advance, the generic connections act which articulate, in a more and more intense way, the lives of individuals to the destiny of humanity. It is this foundation so that the development of increasingly general values have a growing weight in the reproduction of society as a whole.

Lukács argues that in this process of humanity's elevation to generality, the role of ethics is of primary importance. And here, as in other moments, when dealing with this social complex, the Hungarian philosopher limits himself to pointing out its fundamental ontological constitution, referring its exhaustive treatment to the work he would write later. In short, for Lukács, what distinguishes ethics from custom, law, etc. is that, while these move within the contradiction between the particularity of individual existence and its generality, within ethics this contradictoriness is overcome by a new synthesis: the being-for-itself of social being, which now takes place both in the individual and in the general. Therefore, ethics would be the expression and the instrument of overcoming the new level of the individual/society contradiction, made possible by the capitalist social form; it would be the specific social mediation which would allow the bourgeois form of bourgeois individuality, which understands itself as merely particular, to overcome itself, elevating itself to generality, building itself as an individuality consciously participating in a genre which recognizes itself as such (1976-1981, v. II, p. 328/CCXXXV).

In short, the key connections of the synthesizing process constituting social reproduction have their ontological genesis in labour, the process of socialization that it unleashes. The essence of this process, as we have seen, is the raising of the genus to generality, to its being-for-itself, which is the foundation of the reproductive polarity of the individual/reproductive polarity of the overall social formation.

The *process of individuation* has its ultimate foundation in the development of increasingly complex social forms which, while simultaneously facilitating, imperatively requires the development of individualities endowed with increasingly complex personalities, more richly mediated from the social point of view. The objective social means which, from a given historical moment, in everyday praxis, allows individuals to raise their consciousness of the bipolar character of social reproduction, has its roots in the complex character of all human action. Each act is a synthesis of generic and particular elements, a synthesis which, far from eliminating the spheres of generality and particularity, objectively articulates them in a concrete totality through which the tension between generality and particularity is objectively expressed. This contradictory nature of generality/particularity, we repeat, is the objective means by which individuals become conscious not only of the bipolar character of social reproduction, but also of the ontological inseparability of the individual/social being. Against this background, values and value processes are developed in order to meet the needs arising from the explicitness of this contradictoriness. Tradition, law, customs and ethics are some of the social mediations which emerge to meet the serious problems and the equally generous possibilities which emerge from them throughout human history.

The reproduction process of the social complex, however, has the same foundation as the individuation, that is, the process of socialization brought about by labour. As with the reproduction of the individual, the genesis of capitalism as the first pure social formation is a fundamental moment: it allows the individual/society polarity to be made explicit on a new level, one which Lukács describes as the generality/particularity duality. The essence of this new duality is the citizen/bourgeois dichotomy established by the consciousness of the common man subjected to the everyday life of capital. Moreover, the overcoming of this estranged duality is possible, first, because the everyday social conflicts enforce the choice between the sphere of particularity and that of generality, obliging men to become aware of this contradiction; secondly, because the objective development of the productive forces leads to ever more intense generic social bonds between individuals; and, finally, because the advance of socialization gives rise to values and value complexes which drive towards generality.

Conclusion

This introductory outline highlights the central elements operating in social reproduction, as understood by Lukács. It is only necessary to emphasize the obvious: reproduction of the individual and the reproduction of society as a whole are, for Lukács, stages of the same overall reproductive process, stages which develop among themselves a relationship of reflexive determination. Accordingly, Lukács rejects as false both the theories which take the individual as an entity ontologically dissociated from the social complex, and the theories which understand

the total social complex as the only moment of determination of its reproductive process.

At its most general, this situation corresponds, at the level of social reproduction, to what Hegel called the identity of identity and non-identity. We have here an originally unitary necessity, the social reproduction which, during its development, while giving rise to ever more developed and heterogeneous social complexes and mediations, also develops bonds and connections between them which unify their always specific processualities into an ever more univocal totality. The growing heterogeneity between the individualities (both internally and between themselves) and the social totality—that each of them develops a specific legality which is increasingly active in its own evolution—is nothing else but the highest form of manifestation of the original necessity of reproduction of the world of men. In short, the specifically social form of embodiment of the ontological unity of the world of men is historically unfolded in the development of the elements of heterogeneity comprising the social totality. Or, expressed in other words, the intensification of the presence of the general links in social reproduction requires the development of increasingly heterogeneous and specific individualities: precisely the identity of identity and non-identity referred to above.

This brief sketch of the central nodes of social reproduction, according to Lukács, highlights the set of ontological markers with which we began this article. We refer to the postulation—central to Lukácsian ontology—of the radical historicity and sociability of the world of men. We have seen how, from social praxis, the individual, when acting, when responding to the needs posed to their development by the reality that surrounds them, concomitantly contributes to the construction of the social being as a

genus and to the construction of their specific individuality. The contradictions between generality and particularity, as essential components both of the individual in its singularity and of the overall social process, make up the real social mediations of the raising to consciousness, on a social scale, of the bipolarity of individual/society. We have seen how—from a certain stage of social development—given by capitalism, this ontological situation takes on a new quality, enabling, in daily practice and in a very concrete way, the choice, by individualities and by the whole genre, of a new level of existence—that is, of a social existence which takes as central the real demands posed by the development of the human genre, overcoming the centrality of capital.

What we want to emphasize in these concluding paragraphs is the frontal opposition of Lukácsian ontology to any interpretation of the world of men that has as its support the concept of a human nature that is not a historic-social construct. Briefly, for Lukács, men build themselves as men, humanity builds itself as a social being and, therefore, the possibility remains open for humanity, from a given level of development, to objectify this construction in a conscious way, teleologically determined. That is, the possibility is open—on the most general ontological-historical level, which certainly does not mean today or tomorrow—of an “assault on Heaven.”

Therefore, the answer to the question at the beginning of this essay about why Lukács turned to ontology can be better understood: To make explicit the ontological character of Marx's work, in which it opposes traditional ontology (including in this comprehensive term Hegel's ontological logics) and in which it is a debtor of this very ontology, constitutes, for the Hungarian philosopher, the most suitable ground for a full confrontation with all currents of thought that, in essence, deny the

possibility of the ontological character of Marx's work, the possibility of men to consciously construct their own history, freeing themselves from the strangeness responsible for the genesis and development of a social form whose essence is the negation of the human. This, we believe, is the deepest meaning of Georg Lukács' ontology.

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