

On Goldmann, Lukacs, Heidegger, and Adorno

by Ralph Dumain

Lukacs vs Heidegger

On Lucien Goldmann's *Lukacs and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979): I know a bit about Goldmann's literary theory, but I still don't have enough overall context to place his attitude towards this subject matter, which is mostly about basic philosophical issues, except for a brief excursion into Goldmann's literary terrain. The biggest unknown as far as this book is concerned is Goldmann's attitude toward the later Lukacs and by extension towards Lukacs' view of the younger Lukacs. This book concentrates exclusively on the Young Lukacs up to the historical moment of *History and Class Consciousness*. The early Lukacs is the basis of the comparison with Heidegger. Goldmann has obviously infused his views with some brand of Hegelianism. He sees Lukacs and Heidegger both outgrowths of this tradition; it's what they share even in their mutual opposition.

For Heidegger the historical subject is the individual. For Lukacs it is social classes, which Goldmann also suspiciously names the "transindividual subject." [p. 8] Lukacs adopts the Hegelian notion that history of the realization of the idea of freedom. For Heidegger there is only authenticity and inauthenticity and a Romantic view of history. For Lukacs there is no difference between the human sciences and philosophy. Heidegger's strict separation of the two is correlated to his interest in elites alone as positive historical actors. Both are antipositivists, but for Lukacs the dividing line is between the natural and human sciences. [pp. 8-9] I'm skipping over Goldmann's remarks on language and the rest of this introductory chapter. There is another important point made, however. There is an analogous relationship between the two thinkers and the dictatorships to which they rallied, Stalin's and Hitler's, which failed to live up to the principles their would-be philosophers set down for them. [pp. 16-17]

The next chapter is on reification, *zuhandenheit*, and praxis. Goldmann begins with the controversial claim that Heidegger alludes to Lukacs in *Being and Time* and is concerned with refuting him. [p. 27]

The following chapter is on totality, being, and history. Lukacs' notion of collective praxis is not to be found in Heidegger, who is still mired in various dualisms, including science vs. philosophy and the ontological vs. the ontic. Heidegger has no real explanation for the social world of inauthenticity. Goldmann gives priority to Lukacs in formulating the basic ideas of modern existentialism in *The Soul and the Forms*. [p. 45] Already Lukacs breaks with Kierkegaard, and

questions western individualism while criticizing inauthentic life. [pp. 46ff] Both Lukacs and Heidegger see meaning in relation to the collective subject or the individual *dasein*, but Lukacs sees mediation between the immediate given and the totality. Without this, there are only the formalist historical classifications or irrationalist views of history. [p. 50]

The following chapter is about objective possibility and possible consciousness. In striving for its maximum possible consciousness, the petit bourgeoisie, unable to grasp the totality, ends up joining the class with the strongest position. This is revealed in the uneasy relationship of writers to political orders. Ilya Ehrenburg rallies behind or criticizes Stalinism; Kastner has a parallel relationship with Nazism. [p. 57]

This latter point is interesting but I find it very fishy. To me all this idealist talk about collective subjects is suspect. And while it's true that the petit bourgeoisie has trouble grasping the whole, the marginalized position of deracinated intellectuals has its advantages. It's interesting that Richard Wright (in his still unpublished writings of the 1930s), who came from the bottom rung of society, thought that this marginalized intermediate position could give one a privileged vantage point.

For some reason I marked a discussion of Rosa Luxemburg viz. Lenin on class alliances, spontaneity and the party, and the possible consciousness of social classes. [p. 65] Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness* is seen as essentially Luxemburgian. [p. 58]

The theme of the next chapter is subject-object and function. Here we get a precis of Goldmann's famous analysis of Pascal and the Jansenists. It seems to me this analysis stands on its own regardless of what thinks about the basic philosophical postulates of collective subjects and the like. Goldmann ends up addressing the general question of meaning and the dilemmas involved, for example, in Althusser, who poses the alternative of Spinoza vs. Feuerbach, interpreted in dubious ways. This somehow ends up as a choice between mechanism and idealism, a dichotomy which plagues the history of Marxism as well as social science in general. [pp. 76-77] Both Hegel and Marx reject this dichotomy. Then there is a return to the discussion of Jansenism, and eventually of contradiction and coherence in world views. [p. 83]

The fifth chapter of this section of the book is on the topicality of the question of the subject. This is where the discussion of Adorno, already summarized, takes place. This is preceded by an analysis of the social genesis of Althusserianism and the rebellion against existentialism, which also correlates to the post-war stabilization of capitalism. [p. 89]

The book's final chapter, being and dialectics, sums up everything I find obnoxious in it. The collective subject, totality, and subject-object identity do not in my opinion provide an adequate ontological foundation, though this framework makes sense up to a point. Goldmann concerns

himself with the problem of adequation of scientific knowledge, but his bearing toward the subject-object relation obviates a standard materialist/realist view.

Goldmann is quite willing to criticize Stalinism, admit the difficulties of revolutionary prospects in the current situation (1960s), and so forth. And of course he is not shy about linking Heidegger to Hitler. Goldmann is pretty much silent about the late Lukacs and Lukacs' repudiation of the young Lukacs. And I think this is the major symptom of my puzzlement over this book. Goldmann criticizes both Lukacs and Heidegger, but is also sympathetic to both on some level. But ultimately on what basis? The basis looks suspicious to me. Furthermore, while it is a standard cliché of the artificial construct known as "Western Marxism" to excoriate dialectical materialism and link it to Stalinist orthodoxy, my own opinion is that idealism is just as or more congenial to Stalinism. Early Lukacs with his collective subject and subject-object identity seems to be *more* conducive to Stalinism in some respects than something like *The Destruction of Reason*, which comes into being with Stalin's gun pointed to Lukacs' head. Hence Goldmann's ontological foundation, the basis for his sympathy to these two figures, and his silence about the later Lukacs, all place a question mark over this book.

So this is what what I find troubling about Goldmann's argument. I suppose everyone's viscera reacts differently. My problem here is not with the alleged bloodlessness of epistemological and ontological foundations, but the reverse: how they can tangibly muck up our understanding of the world.

Goldmann, piggybacking on Hegel and early Lukacs, finds his way out of the dichotomy various characterized as mechanist-idealist, Kantian, dualist, via the fundamental notions of totality, subject-object identity, and the collective subject. It's a neat package, I admit, but I think it's inadequate.

Pending a detailed study, I contest the notion that the essence of what the Frankfurters have to offer is the dialectic of enlightenment. I suspect that just the reverse is true, that maybe this work should be put at the bottom and not at the top. The fact that it is most influential arouses my greatest suspicions. But time will tell. If it is Habermas' starting point, so much the better for Habermas to want to contradict it. But what are the implications of being held hostage to the way one was raised even while rebelling against it?

(Written 20 May 2003)

Goldmann vs Adorno

Now I am concerned with a section towards the end where Goldmann criticizes Adorno (pp. 91-97). Goldmann points out that young Lukacs and the Frankfurt School were allied in the latter's

early years. But Adorno has different ideas now:

Adorno revealed his new conceptions at a recent congress on the sociology of literature, as, moreover, had Agnes Heller (one of Lukacs's closest collaborators) on behalf of Lukacs. According to Adorno, the creator situates himself outside reality, not at this necessary distance from the group whose world vision he expresses, but outside of reality, and his attitude toward it is extremely critical: a minimal acceptance and a maximal rejection. That leads Adorno to the idea of a purely negative dialectic, to rejection, and to the requirement of the impoverishment of content, an impoverishment and rejection for which the ideal would be Beckett. In almost Heideggerian tones—whom he criticizes sharply, moreover—Adorno now rejects everything which is popular, and any concession to the popular, and thus arrives, through criticism, at rather conservative positions.

He conceives of the work as a sort of objective reality, a nearly Platonic reality or form which the creator should attain. To defend the idea of this constraint by form, Adorno recalls that, however great a genius he may be, the creator could only produce everything he wants to at the risk of succumbing to mediocrity. This is incontestable at the psychological level of the individual, but in no way does it explain to us the existence of its objective realities, nor their origin. As we have seen, this objective reality—in other words coherence, significant structure, aesthetic form, which goes beyond the subjective consciousness of the individual creator—is not in the least a Platonic reality, but rather the possible consciousness of a plural object, its world vision. This objectivity, this form, exists for the individual who must attain it not as an evident reality, but as a non-conscious norm; it is here that the individual is differentiated from the collective subject, because, in the historical praxis of a plural subject, the forms are neither given nor are they preexistent. It is by starting from this collective praxis that the forms become intelligible and that their genesis can be grasped.

Moreover, Adorno is little interested in these significant structures. What makes a work important for him, what interests him, is what he calls its 'truth content'. This truth content, according to his pronouncements on it at the congress, is difficult to define and always goes beyond the purely intellectual. Consequently, the work must not be approached in its totality and by following its genesis, but in relation to criticism, to the philosopher, who knows this truth content today. Literature no longer appears interesting or valid except to the extent that the critical philosopher speaks about it in order to extract certain elements from it which he judges in relation to something which is not the work itself. Thus, the truth content is beyond the work, in the consciousness of the critical philosopher who chooses this content

in accordance with the critical consciousness, and the work is no longer considered except outside itself. This truth content, then, is situated outside history or in the history of philosophy. As a result, aesthetics is subordinated to philosophy, to truth, to the theoretically valid content. And, since this truth content is not a significant structure inherent to the work, it becomes a sort of evidence, of which the cultured man, the thinker, the philosopher may have a sort of intuitive knowledge. Their knowledge is shared by other cultured men, without the existence of any foundation other than culture for this community. With much finesse and subtlety Adorno comes back to this Neo-Kantian thought and to the dualism of the subject and the object which Lukacs and Heidegger had transcended, thus taking up the position of Bruno Bauer's and Max Stirner's Critical Consciousness.

I don't know what to make of this, but as we shall see, the argument hangs on Goldmann's conception of subject-object identity with a collective subject. There is something fishy about this. Goldmann continues:

This Critical Consciousness found an explanation in the young Marx and the young Lukacs on the basis of its historical genesis, and this can also clarify Adorno's new position. Following Marx's directions, Lukacs was the first to overturn the old customary scheme of the development of Neo-Hegelian philosophy. He discusses the Neo-Hegelians in *History and Class Consciousness* and in articles on Lassalle and Moses Hess of the same period. These ideas of Lukacs continued by A. Cornu in his books on M. Hess and Marx, are now very widespread and—as in the case of other Lukacsian ideas—their origin has been forgotten. The earlier history of Neo-Hegelianism was different. It constituted a chain which went from Hegel to the Neo-Hegelians, to those of the right, the centre, and the left, to reach Marx, as the most radical among the Hegelians of the left, who developed dialectical materialism. But Lukacs has shown that those who are called 'Hegelians of the Left' are in fact closer to Fichte—as the Neo-Kantians were later on—than to Hegel. They had moved away from the Hegelian position, according to Lukacs because they had abandoned the fundamental categories of totality and the identity of the subject and the object, in order to return to the subject-object opposition in the form of the opposition between 'critical consciousness' and the world.

In *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology* Marx had already accused the Hegelians of the left—Feuerbach, Bauer, Stirner, etc.,—of having retained Hegel's language and his categories, but also for having returned to this side of Hegel, who tried to imagine himself in the world. In fact, the Hegelians of the left thought they were situated above the world and spoke from outside it, whereas according to Marx and he ardently insists upon it in *The German Ideology* when someone speaks, he

should ask who is speaking and from where. The Hegelians of the left are in opposition to the reality of ideas which have no real basis: Bauer with his critical self-consciousness and Stirner with his egoistic individual which, Marx has shown, is not real and, in short, comes from a philosophical construction, just like Bauer's 'critical consciousness'. To know what one is speaking about, Marx very justifiably requires that one know who is speaking and from where: it is necessary to know that one always speaks from within a world from which comes the structure of consciousness of the one who is speaking and who, in order to know what he is saying, must know this world and this structuration at the risk of otherwise remaining within an ideology.

I understand the argument against the Left Hegelians, but there is something not quite kosher here. The problem begins with subject-object identity. I don't think this is a quite accurate characterization of the deficiencies of the Left Hegelians.

I'll skip the next paragraph for the time being and move on:

According to Lukacs the Hegelians of the left are the expression of a small, radical group oriented since the beginning of the 1840s toward the revolution of 1848, without being sufficiently strong to succeed in the revolution, or capable of thinking about itself and the situation clearly. Moreover, after the failure of the revolution of 1848, the group altered and its thinkers (who had been very well-known) lost all importance. Beforehand, in the struggle against the Prussian State, which created all sorts of difficulties for them, the Hegelians of the left could not continue Hegel's compromise, nor find in Germany a real force which they could have relied on. And so they criticized the world as bad and negative without knowing where, in what place, and in what perspective or praxis, to situate their criticism. They placed it in an imaginary entity, a 'critical consciousness', or in the egoistic individual, Stirner's 'Unique Man' who is another version of this who opposes the world and judges it.

True, but the problem is that their criticism lacks concreteness in its treatment of the objective world and their relation to it. Hence their judgment becomes abstract. There is something Stalinist about the "collective subject", and Goldmann's sympathy here for the notions of the *young* Lukacs as well as a limited sympathy for Heidegger, and this obsession with situatedness that doesn't smell right. Who farted?

In *History and Class Consciousness*, where Lukacs offers this explanation concerning the Hegelianism of the left, there is another important observation—likewise derived from Marx—on Hegel's philosophical limits and his proximity to Kant and Fichte. It is these limits of Hegel which have permitted the

Hegelians of the left, and the Neo-Hegelians in general, to use him as their authority and to continue to use his language in order to uphold a Fichtean outlook. Lukacs recalls that Hegel rejects any possibility of judgment coming from the outside because he develops a philosophy of immanence and totality. Yet, according to the Hegelian conception, history is the work of the Absolute Spirit which, although intervening through its agents, remains outside reality and has a dualist relationship with it. Thus, despite the monism of a system which denies dualism, a dualism of the subject and the object virtually exists in Hegel between the Absolute Spirit and concrete history, according to Lukacs. This opposition of the subject and the object was able to be accentuated and placed at the centre of their preoccupations by the Hegelians of the left, for whom the Absolute Spirit simply became the subjective consciousness of the critique, the 'subject' of history.

According to Lukacs it is not because the young Marx had been the most radical of the Hegelians of the left, i.e. in reality a Fichtean, that he developed dialectical materialism. Quite the contrary, it was because he was the only consistent Hegelian among them that he eliminated all of the Fichtean and Kantian residues from the thought of Hegel and that he turned toward rigorously monist thought. And he only attained this thought, and was only able to elaborate it completely, after his exile in France and his discovery of the proletariat as the new social force and as the basis of identical theory and praxis.

I understand the logic of the argument, but I don't believe it.

Since Marx's time, and even since *History and Class Consciousness*, the development of the forces of production and economic relations has again rendered problematic the relation between thought and reality. Even Lukacs abandoned the identity of the subject of praxis and the subject of the work, and no longer relates the work to the group, but to the relation of its creator to global history. Thus, the old theory of the revolutionary proletariat as the historical basis, by its action, of dialectical thought must be modified and can no longer be maintained or asserted as before. The Frankfurt School, which no longer admits this old conception, has the impression that the ground has been pulled away from under its feet. But this disappearance of the collective subject has not led it to join the structuralists who, on the basis of the technocratic structures of organizational capitalism, deny the existence of the subject. The Frankfurt School has kept its critical positions; nevertheless, it finds itself in the situation of the Hegelians of the left in the Germany of the 1840s. It has come back to the dualism between the subject and the object, and criticizes the world on the basis of ideas which it is far from being able to justify. Bauer came from Hegel. Today, Adorno comes from an earlier Adorno,

close to the positions of *History and Class Consciousness*, who would not easily have accepted this radical rejection and this 'critical consciousness' which he upholds today, while continuing, on other points, his refined and intelligent dialectical analyses. The need to know worldly reality, the collective subject on the basis of which one thinks, obviously only exists for the dialectical thinker. Descartes—to take the famous example of a non-dialectical thinker—does not have such a problem and almost ignores its possibilities. The relation between the dialectical thinker and the worldly reality from which he begins, is a dialectical, circular, relation. The collective subject produces the mental structures which the thinker expresses and elaborates, and he must be able to account for their real origin in his thought.

I get it, but I don't believe in any collective subject even as a concept. Smacks of objective idealism.

Finally:

If one does not accept Adorno's 'critical consciousness', which judges and scans reality from on high, or the individual relation to global history as Lukacs currently conceives it, if one wishes to maintain, no longer the idea of the revolutionary proletariat, but the requirements of Marx's dialectical thought (which always demands that one know who is speaking and from where), of the subject-object totality, then the basic question arises of knowing who is, now, the subject of speech and action. It is necessary to know in the name of what and from where we are speaking today, if we believe that there are only valid works and actions to the extent that they are placed within a universe created by men and are attached to specific groups.

There are situations in which one cannot give an answer because the group, from which speech and action comes, is not yet manifest. In these situations, on the basis of a modified tradition, individuals speak by formulating perspectives and positions for which the group, the true subject, if it is not yet there, is in gestation or waiting to be elaborated. And very probably, these positions will be modified when the group becomes manifest.

I find this inadequate. This cannot be as banal as it looks, can it?

(Written 19 May 2003)

Lukacs, Hegel, Marx, Engels & Intellectual Genealogy

Goldmann may be on to something in criticizing Adorno, but I have doubts about Goldmann's premises.

The young Lukacs (who later repudiated his early work) opposed dualism and subjectivism not through positive ontological materialism but through Hegel's notion of totality, altering Hegel's idealism to create the construct of the identical subject-object. Goldmann picks up on this without criticizing it and without accounting for the later Lukacs, and even uses the concept of identical subject-object to criticize empiricism, dualism, etc.

I hope my basic point at least is clear: Hegel is appropriated in certain ways, altered with respect to methodological and ontological requirements, and deployed to pursue novel ends, in an overall context in which there is a gap or silence or inadequacy in the universe of ideas currently available, whether they be traditional metaphysics, Kantianism, empiricism, positivism, etc.

Marx and Engels came earlier and hence had, by definition, fewer sources to draw upon. Both, however (here I am referring to their individual not joint efforts), had to come up with their own methodologies and philosophies of science, Marx in the *Grundrisse* and elsewhere, Engels in *Anti-Duhring*, *Dialectics of Nature*, elsewhere. Each found himself having to create where a gap in the current state of philosophy (not to mention the social sciences) existed: they both had to develop approaches that were neither empiricist nor idealist. They both selectively drew upon Hegel. However, genealogy is an inadequate means of explaining innovation, or even motivation. And in the case of Marx, even the genealogy is extremely complicated. Since there are dozens of approaches to Marx, theoretical "Marxism" is as artificially fragmented as everything else. But Marx needs to be compared not only to Hegel, but also Galileo, as the [Poznan School](#) (concerned with scientific idealization) does.

Going back to Hegel now, we might pick up Hegel's "third way", which tried to appropriate the gains of empiricism rather than turn the clock back. In sum, if we can look at the internal tensions governing the world of philosophy and theoretical construction generally, we can formulate new questions by which to delve into the material. One area that interests me involves questions of intellectual genealogy. Some areas: the appropriation of Hegel by Marxists as an alternative to empiricism, beginning with Marx and Engels (separately, not together!), Lukacs, the Frankfurt School, etc. Perhaps a consideration of Hegel's own attempt to find a third way between empiricism and the conservative tendencies of traditional idealism is germane. All of these people mentioned (besides Hegel) opposed both positivism and idealism. They all had peculiar intellectual trajectories that speak to the lacunae in the intellectual world of their times. There are interesting dynamics to be explored here.

(Written 21 May 2003)

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