Lukács' Ontology: a return to medieval ontology?

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The title of this article[1] may appear, at first sight, somewhat absurd. Since its first publication in Italy, between 1976 and 1981, Lukács' *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*[2] has provoked quite divergent interpretations; not one, however, questioned that it represented a major rupture with traditional ontology. Independent of the evaluation that one has of Lukács' last theoretical endeavour – and these evaluations vary substantially one from another – no one had yet appraised that there was no great rupture between Lukács' Ontology and medieval metaphysics.

However, during the eighties, foundations of such an interpretation were gradually building up (specially in English spoken countries, including Australia). There are three main formal characteristics in this trend of interpretation. Firstly, it has long favoured relatively small texts, without judicious citations, such as articles, essays, collectanea, instead of a deep and systematic investigation of Lukács' last work. Secondly, most of these essays rest on what they consider to be the "religious character" of Lukács' "conversion" to Marxism. And lastly, this interpretation is backed by a strong authoritative argument: Agnes Heller, Ferenc Feher and other members of the "Budapest School", are among its most illustrious and best known supporters. As it would be impossible, in an article, to exhaustively exploit the complete gradient of the articles and essays which, as we see it, comprise this interpretation of Lukács' Ontology, we will restrict our analysis to three essays which supply decisive theoretical elements for its constitution.

The first is Marshall Berman's "Georg Lukács' Cosmic Chutzpah", published in 1989 in *Georg Lukács, Theory, Culture and Politics* (Transaction Publishers, USA), collectanea organized by Judith Markus and Zoltán Tarr. This text begins with Berman's remembrance of his first contact with Lukács. A few days after the invasion of Hungary by the Soviet army in 1956, while walking in Central Park, he met an old acquaintance who still preached his faith in communism. When Berman asked him how it was still possible for him to believe in communism after the events in Hungary, he replied with Lukács' "What is Orthodox Marxism?". Lukács' argument that even though Marxism was completely wrong regarding History and the world of men, Marx's method would still remain true and intact, led Berman to a curious reasoning: "When I thought about it later, it struck me that Marxism of 'What is Orthodox Marxism?' had more in common with existential flights of the religious writers whose books I was carrying that day – Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Buber – than with Stalinist dogmatics on which my friend had grown up. As I thought of Lukács in their company, it flashed me that what I just read was a Marxist credo quia absurdum. Could it be that communism had found its St. Augustine at last?" (p. 138-9)

The real question is whether Lukács' mind was a religious mind that finally returned to his birthplace, and his ontology a religious form of thought; or, was he, when young, a Hegelian-Marxist who later abandoned the idealism of History and Class Consciousness*?*

Berman argues that: "Recent scholarship researches unearthed the way in which Lukács became a Communist. In fact, it was a religious conversion, an upheaval of the mind and heart, a second birth. According to one of his intimate friends, it happened between one Sunday and the next, like Saul turning into Paul." (p. 148) This "religious" character of Lukács' "conversion" to Marxism, according to Berman, would later manifest in the religious mortification form of his many abjurations, of his successive heretical falls, much like the remorseful heretics of the Middle Ages. As a result, "At the age of 70, this lifelong seeker after orthodoxy found himself an authentic heretical hero." (p. 140)

The first element of the trend of interpretation of Lukácsian Ontology as a return to medieval metaphysics outlines itself as follows: idealism and religiosity are fundamental elements of Lukács' Marxism from its very beginning. This view is reinforced by enumerous researches on the young Lukács that call attention to his messianism and his teleological conception of History, most especially in *History and Class Consciousness*. Not only the writings of Michael Löwy, but also those of Mary Gluck (*Georg Lukács and his generations* - 1985), of Lee Congdon (*The young Lukács* - 1983), and of the members of the late "School of Budapest", are very frequently quoted in this context.

It is necessary to recall, however, that Lukács himself recognized that *History and Class Consciousness* has in fact many idealistic, messianic and teleological elements. But, to select this typically Hegelian elements, and transform them into a religious conception of the world, which would be the foundation of Lukács' Marxism – with the goal of disqualifying it –, is quite another question. The real question is whether Lukács' mind was a religious mind that finally returned to his birthplace, and his ontology a religious form of thought; or, was he, when young, a Hegelian-Marxist who later abandoned the idealism of *History and Class Consciousness*? The answer to this question can only be found in

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the evaluation of Lukács' posterior work, from the twenties until his *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*. The debate, then, takes a different turn: from a discussion of the idealistic-teleological character of *History and Class Consciousness*, it now focuses on the inquiry into whether does exist a rupture from his youth teleological conception of History.

The second essay we take into consideration is A. Heller's "Lukács's late Philosophy". It was published in a collectanea, *Lukács Reappraised* (Columbia University Press, 1983), organized by Heller herself, with the intention to intervene in this specific debate.

According to Heller's article, Lukács evolution after *History and Class Consciousness* expresses itself as a "paradox": his "absolute", "existential" option for the CPs, the URSS and the Third International, led to anxieties and frustrations, which grew stronger with the reading of Manuscripts of 1844 where Marx argues that "class cannot take place of 'species'". (p. 177-8)

This paradox, according to Heller, is the main stream of Lukács's evolution from the twenties to his last writings. "Lukács believes in his on God, yet as the same time he recognizes all the dirt and horror of 'Gods created world' and contrasts this extant world with an ideal world that would be commensurate with his God. This is why all those who see in him the representative of Stalinism (such as Issac Deustcher, among many others) are right, while those who see him as Stalin's greatest philosophical adversary are also right. For until his very last years, when his belief in the absolute became shaky, he was both." (p. 178)

As a result of this paradox, in the decades that followed *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács had to hide himself under the cover of literary critics, and history of philosophy, not being permitted to write straight philosophy. In spite of the excellent essay *The Young Hegel*, the intonation of this period, according to her, is marked by *The Destruction of Reason*, which is a "demonology" and not a serious philosophical research. The opposition rationalism/irrationalism, which is the dominant characteristic of this book, is reduced by Heller to a moral question on the historical responsibility of ideas – not on men's responsibility for the use of ideas. Heller does not ignore that the issue is far from being merely a moral one: the real question is regarding the truthfulness of Marx's thesis that men make history, though in circumstances not of their own choosing.

According to Heller, the great change in Lukács' intellectual development was made possible by the XXth Congress. To her, the crisis of Stalinism liberated him from the absolute, and he could finally return to the "great" philosophy: his Esthetics (p. 181-2). However, this liberation from the absolute, as she denominates it, was not complete. So much so that, according to Heller, in this writing when Lukács asks for the social function, and not for the possibility, of works of art, he subordinates the essence of art to its existence (the function), turning his esthetics into a philosophy of history. Heller completely distorts one of the fundamentals of method in Lukács, that of the procedure he denominates "genetic approach": as being is historical, the disclosing of the process that produced the object under study is centrical to its revelation. The issue, put forward by Lukács, of the genesis of the generic essence of human being is, though, a central historical matter, and a decisive one in relation to work of art. However, this major historical issue, in spite of its importance to esthetics and to the genesis of esthetic values, does not turn itself into question of values, as assumed by Heller.

After turning the historical question of the genesis of the generic essence of man into one of valorization, Heller presents the next step in her argumentation: the central category of Lukács's philosophy of history is evolution. To Heller, Lukács's belief in the absolute (which, after the XXth Congress, was no longer soviet socialism, but Marx) continued to be the support of his conception of the world: "The absolute is simply the proclamation of Karl Marx – since that proclamation the world of freedom is open to us." (p. 188)

From this viewpoint, Heller considers the self-evident fact that *Zur Ontologie* ... fully realizes this substitution of absolutes, changing from soviet socialism to Marx. (p. 189) And this self-evidence is so overwhelming to her, that she does not even bother to search the Lukácsian text for proof of it. In a single, poor paragraph she buries Lukács' Ontology as his last and futile effort to hold on to the absolute which, from his very youth, was part of his "existential choice".

With Berman's article and this text of Heller, we have two decisive elements to pave the way towards conceiving Lukács' Ontology as a return to medieval philosophy: on one hand, the religiosity of Lukács' initial Marxism and, on the other, his attachment to the absolute (the USSR, later Marx) as the core of the internal logic of his intellectual life. What is now missing is an article to reveal that the nucleus of his Ontology, his category of substance, contains a religious character. This task is assumed by Gaspar Tamás in the letter published in Heller's *Lukács Reappraised*.

The kernel of Tamás's argument is: "The dimensions of the failure are gigantic. The only representative modern philosopher of form and culture, Georg Lukács, like his protagonist, the young Hegel, embarked on the enterprise of rationalizing the unrationalizable. As a consequence, he had to attempt that which is beyond the limits of endurance of both form and logic, the transformation of his choice into law." (p. 155)

Lukács main mistake, according to Tamás, is in forgetting that "on this side of the Rhine all modern philosophies are philosophies of practice, whose formative

principle is the categorical imperative (...)" (p. 155). From Tamás's viewpoint, the fundamental task of philosophy is to search for a "general legislation" and not, as he claims Lukács does, "to describe" the generalization whilst an objectivity and, from there, "to infer the rules of 'right' choice from it." (p. 155) To Tamás, "this is precisely the structure that remains hidden in the Stalinist diamat and is revealed by Lukács' Ontology." (p. 155)

In other words, "In order to rescue the possibility of description of objectivity, Lukács transforms his choice into law (practical schema) by recognizing the former as a law (practical schema). The substractum of this recognition, of transforming practice into theory, choice into knowledge, is Being." (p. 155)

With these words, Tamás delimits the ground on which he intends to prove Lukács's failure: to discuss the category of being not as an objectivity, as Lukács does, but as a category founded on a "choice", a "recognition". So, the researches carried towards the criterium and mechanism of this "choice". It leaves the ontological ground and gets into the epistemological sphere: "For Lukács, continues Tamás, Being is simply a metaphor of everything in which his choice can be recognized as a law, as real, as realized, in which free choice appears as truth deducible from objectivity corroborated through (self)affirmation. (...) Being proper is that which supports the conclusions that can be drawn from the domain of 'species values' (gattungsmässig Werte) – in other words, from Lukács' own value choice, his voluntary option." (p. 155)

Tamás's first movement: to conceive Lukács's ontology as simple choice of a point of view that, once accepted, autovalidates itself. Being (with capital letter) is assumed to be all that which confirms Lukács's choice, everything else is treated as second rate being. (p. 155) According to Tamás, Lukács inappropriately presupposes a category of Being and, based on it, develops an ontology which does nothing more than prove the truth of his starting-point, of his pre-supposition about Being. The presupposed legitimatizes the demonstration, and the demonstration proves the full veracity of the presupposed whilst it is such: Lukács' ontology is nothing more than circular proof of an arbitrary starting-point freely chosen by Lukács.

We must remember, however, that for Tamás (a neo-Kantian), Lukács's mistake is not this circular proof of the presupposed, for to him all philosophy is nothing other than the attempt of transforming choice into law" (p. 155). Lukács's mistake is in the fact that the presupposed, which Lukács generalizes into law, is not generalizable. On the contrary, according to Tamás, Lukács's presupposed represents a return to the old conception against which Kant turned against. "According to Lukács, what is Being and what is object(ivity) cannot be defined by epistemology that has been enlarged into a mythical adversary, since in it Being and the existing entity are separated from the assertions that assert Being-about-something and describe the existing." (p. 155)

What Tamás is saying is that, to Lukács, what is being and what is object or objectivity cannot be defined by epistemology. Contrary to Kant, who epistemologically distinguishes being-in-itself from phenomenon, Lukács affirms the distinction between objectivity and conscience to be an ontological one, and that, in ultimate analysis, the whole gnosiological problematic arises from this ontological distinction. The rejection of the incognizability of the thing-in-itself does not mean that Lukács has abandoned the distinction between knowledge (in Tamás's language, "assertions" about something) and the real; does not mean that the Hungarian philosopher has, in some way, reverted to the subject-object identity.

As a Kantian, however, Tamás cannot conceive a tertium datur between the incognizance of thing-in-itself and the subject-object identity. This is the reason why he ends up affirming that, since Lukács rejects epistemology as the resolutive field of these questions, "The arbiter is perforce ontology, whose only subject-matter proper is objectivity on the progressive level of 'species-Being' (Gattungsmässigkeit). It is easy to discover what the former means: the revolutionary institution or organization resulting from the objectification of revolutionary faith." (p. 155)

In short, as Lukács considers ontology as the resolutive field of gnosiological problems, Tamás deduces that, to Lukács, all objectivity is Being, and can be so only when it is an expression of generic values. Since generic values, continues Tamás, are nothing but the institutionalization of "revolutionary faith", if the entity is not the incarnation of the revolution, it belongs to a "lower category" of the existent, the counter-revolution.

According to Tamás, generic values, in Lukács, are substantiations of a higher kind of Being than particular values and entities. The ontological hierarchy is founded on a valorative hierarchy: a thesis exactly opposite to that which Lukács proposes in *Zur Ontologie ...*[3]

The reduction of Being to the social form institutionalized by Stalinism: this is, where, for Tamás, the deepest meaning of Lukács's Ontology lies. In his favor, Tamás quotes the following passage from the text of Lukács: "Objectivity is not a determinant ... attached to Being which it shapes (?) in a certain way, either in its capacity of existing or through the cognitive consciousness. It has to be strictly discerned: every Being, in so far as it is Being, is also objective" (p. 155). Although we couldn't locate this passage in the Lukácsian text[4], it is exact that, to Lukács, in a briefer formula: "(...) the objectivity (at last analysis, the real concretude) is synonymous of being tout court."[5] (*Prolegomenos*, p. 292)

As Tamás sees it, the Marxian-Lukácsian conception that a non-objective being is a non-being (Ein ungegenständliches Wesen ist ein Unwesen[6]), is the biggest of all heresies. From his Kantian perspective – we repeat –, to conceive the phenomenic-objective sphere represents an involution to the precritical philosophies, with all backwardness that it represents. To him, the phenomenic-objective sphere is subjectively founded on choice-desire (collective or individual). As Lukács does not recognize this fact, he reproduces the circularity of the scholastic ontological argument, according to which objectivity, with its order and hierarchy, is the proof of God's existence; and the perfection of God is the basis of objective order. In Lukács, however, ever according to Tamás, this circularity of the argumentation seeks "to deduce the

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communist creed" (p. 157) in such a way that "what has been projected by medieval philosophy as objectivity on God and eternal truth is incorporated by Lukács as an idol, as an untranscendable immanence into the 'this-worldiness' ..." (p. 158)

With the incorporation of the divine objectivity into a new idol, according to Tamás, without the systematic Kantian criticism, Lukács could not possibly avoid the teleological conception of existence. For this reason, to Tamás, Lukács's conception of History shows an absolute necessity which articulates the first moment of the genre, still mute, "towards 'species-Being-for-itself' (für-sich-seiende Gattungsmässigkeit), towards the promised land: both waste products and the real successes of objectivity will be equally justified in it." (p. 152)

If history is nothing more than the journey of Being towards itself, if all objectivity is Being and every reality essentially generical (individuals only existing as particular expressions of the genre) – then the knowledge necessary to the for-itself of the genre had already been inscribed at the very start of the process. So, according to Tamás, we find in Lukács a knowledge in itself independent of consciousness. Such knowledge would have been present since the beginning – independent of the consciousness men had about it. Tamás protests that because, with this, all post-Kantian philosophical development would be disdained. "Despite all provisos and quibbling, this is the most extremely kind of conceptual realism, which is only aggrieved by the denial of transcendence: the latter eliminates the last systematic criterion." (p. 158-9)

Having converted the Lukács of *Zur Ontologie ...* to the most modern form of teleological conception of history, with the discovery of his precritical character, and the laical religiosity of his category of substance, Tamás constructed the basis he needed to expose his boldest argument: there was a proximity between the foundations of Lukács' and that of St. Anselm's ontology. In both thinkers we have, Tamás goes on, an insuperable "circularity": Being is the founder of the existent, while at the same time, a necessary theoretical consequence of objectivity. In other words, the ontological justification of existence is Being, and human consciousness recognizes the unavoidable existence of Being in the existent. In Lukács, as in St. Anselm, "Faith itself is part of recoursive thinking here; the creed is not an original fact, but a proposition inferred. The circular character of this idea has become intensified in modern (Lukácsian) ontology, which was intended to deduce the communist creed." (p. 157)

From the perspective of individual/social totality relationship, the identification between being and objectivity, which characterizes Lukács's ontology, is taken by Tamás as the decisive moment of the deduction of the "communist creed". If Being is the generical-being, Tamás deduces that the individual is necessarily a "second rate" Being, a sphere with less being than the generality. "Once again, objectification has devoured the individual, this time under the aegis of philosophy of history. Nothing but hypostatized institutions attains to a specific existence." (p. 158)

If the "Ens per accidens exists in the same way as the substantially existing, but it exists to a lesser degree. Instead of aporias, we attain to hierarchy. The ontological proof of God's existence also rests on this consideration. For mysterious reasons, Being is in a way more valuable than non-Being (...)". (p. 161)

It does not interest us, at this moment, to discuss the "propositive" part of Tamás's letter. Although it is relevant, the discussion of his proposal of a return to nominalism would take precious space which we do not have in this article. What is relevant for the present is that, to Tamás, Lukács's, like all ontologies, is fundamentally mistaken in not recognizing that "(...) Being, 'species-Being', as the substratum of singular entities and independent universals, do not exist. They are hypostases of the regularities of existing beings (...)». (p. 163)

With this argument, Tamás tries to ascribe to Lukács the conception of universality characteristic of the medieval realists. This is, fundamentally, Tamás' main argument against Lukács. And, as he exposes it, he contributes with yet a final argument to give body to the interpretation that Lukács's Ontology is of no interest to the contemporary debate, as it is nothing more than an unsuccessful return to traditional ontology, more specifically to medieval realism. The religiosity of the young Marxist Lukács, according to this interpretation, touched his whole existence through the mediation of his attachment to the absolute. *Zur Ontologie ...* is the crowning of this trajectory, its most perfected form: Lukács is the St. Anselm of XX century!

The indispensable opposition at this attempt of reducing Lukács' ontology to the Medieval thought could be made through various perspectives. However, due to the limited space of an article, we shall go directly to the main aspect of this debate: the category of substance. As it is known, the radicalism of the comprehension of the real disclosed by every ontology has its decisive problem in the category of substance. Because of this, if there is a radical rupture between Lukács and traditional ontology, it must necessarily show itself entirely in his conception of the category of substance.

In Lukács' ontology, the decisive characteristic of substance is its historicity. "(...) every being, nature as well as society, is understood as a historical process, (...) historicity thus instituted represents the essence of every being."[7] By historical substance Lukács designates a substance whose essence is neither given a priori, nor dilutes itself in the phenomenic sphere. Between an ontological conception that distinguishes essence from phenomenon as distinct grades of being, and another conception that dilutes the essence in the phenomenon, Lukács countervails his tertium datur: because being is historical, its essence, is not only not given a priori, but also consubstantiates itself during the ontological process of development. There is, according to Lukács, no anteriority of the essence regarding the being and – we emphasize, not even of the essence regarding the entity –, likewise "the phenomenon is always something that is and not something contraposed to being"[8], is "existent part of social reality"[9].

Now, if Lukács rejects the conception of the essence as a condensed expression of the sphere of necessity while an ontological moment, how would it be possible to distinguish between phenomenon and essence? According to Lukács, essence consubstantiates itself, in the course of the historical process, in the complex of determinations which continue during the categorical unfolding of the being. The features that articulate, in unity, the heterogeneous moments of each processuality, compose the essence of this process. "The modern conceptions concerning being, proposes Lukács, have destroyed the static, immutable, conception of substance; notwithstanding it does not follow that there is need to deny it in the ambit of ontology, but simply the need to recognize its essentially dynamic character. The substance is that which, in the perennial change of things, changing itself, is able to preserve itself in its continuity. This dynamic self preservation, however, is not necessarily connected to an 'eternity': substance can emerge and perish, without ceasing to a substance, having dynamically preserved themselves during the period of the time of their existence."[10] And, similarly, " '(...) substantiality (...) is not a static-stationary relationship of self-conservation that countervails in rigid and excluding terms against the process of becoming; on the contrary, it conserves itself in its essence, but procedurally, transforming itself during the process, renewing itself, participating in the process."[11]

If, on one hand, the essence is not, in Lukács, a hypostatized necessity, on the other, the relationship between essence and phenomenon is such that the phenomenic sphere is not a passive unfolding of the essence. This means that between these two levels of being there is a reflexive determination (Reflexionsbestimmungen), in which the phenomenon plays an active role in the determinating of the essence. How this comes about should be disclosed case by case, from moment to moment.

For the counterpoint to Berman-Heller-Tamás one of the many consequences of these more general features of the Lukácsian Ontology is of fundamental importance. Through several mediations, which we cannot explore here, this Lukácsian conception concerning the relationship between essence and phenomenon is articulated, in the analysis of social reproduction, to the basic conception that men make History, but in circumstances they do not choose themselves. Synthetically, the development of the socio-generic essence of the social being is a consequence of the objectification of acts teleologically posited by the individuals. This objectification founds a new objectivity (the human world) which shows, in its global development, no teleological trait whatsoever. We do not wish to explore the articulations which convert the teleological element of the previous-idealization into a being that does not exhibit any teleology in its general development – we wish merely to point out that, to Lukács, the genesis and the development of human essence is a historical process mediated by infinite individual acts. These acts, while contributing to the construction of the socio-generic essence, also found the phenomenic sphere.

In the study of the making of the individual research about the reproduction of the individual, in the chapter of *Zur Ontologie* ... dedicated to social reproduction, for example, Lukács discusses exhaustively how the singular, phenomenic forms, of each one of the individualities, are also (thereby, not only) carriers of the most generic-essential determinations of the social being at each historical moment. And, furthermore, precisely because they are carriers of essential determinations of the human realm at each historical moment, it is not of indifference to the development of human essence the manner in which the individualities, through the choice between alternatives opened by the concrete social development, lead the development of humanity to one direction or another.

This permit us to perceive how mistaken Tamás's affirmations are concerning the hypostatization of the universal in Lukács. Nothing similar can be found in the Lukácsian work. In Lukács's Ontology, the socio-generic essence has its support as much in the totality of social formations as in each one of the individualities. Between human genre and individual there is no distinction that implies a differentiation in the ontological statute of each one of them. Not one pole of social reproduction is more "being" than the other, there is no "second class" being in this sphere. Likewise, neither genre is the unique carrier of essentiality, nor individuality the unique carrier of the phenomenic sphere. Both essence and phenomenon are present in the process of individualization and of the totality of social formation, and the differences that can be found here do not attain to an ontological primacy of one over the other.

The consequence to Lukács' Ontology of this radical historicity of essence and phenomenon, of universal and singular, is that, in quotidian acts, reality shows itself as an indissoluble unity between essence and phenomenon. In other words, not only is the essence carrier of any implacable determination to the ontological development; but also, in objectivity the essence particularizes itself, at every moment, in a complex totality that articulates essence and phenomenon. Hence, there is no teleological element in the global ontological process, there is no essential necessity which could, a priori, determine the global development of a process or an entity.

"When considering the global process in its totality, it is clearly seen that the movement of the essence (...) is not a fatal necessity that previously determines everything (...) [on the contrary] it continuously brings forth new formations of reality from which praxis extracts the only real field of

maneuver existent at each time. The sphere of contents that men can put to themselves as the aim of this praxis is determined – while horizon – by this necessity of development of the essence, but precisely while horizon, as field for maneuver of the possibile real teleological positions within it [the horizon], not by an inevitable general determinism of all practical content. Within this field, every teleological position presents itself as a form of alternative (...) which ends up excluding all pre-determination, [and] the necessity of the essence obligatorily assumes the form of possibility to human individuals."[12]

The essence, in this purpose, instead of an "inevitable general determinism of all practical content", designs the horizon of possibilities from which can unfold the essential character of alternative of every human act. The gnosiological problems stemming from this ontological conception of Lukács, above all, the fact that only post festum can we theoretically clearly distinguish between essence and phenomenon, together with the fact that knowledge of the essential tendencies of the process allow, with great variations in each case, some degree of previsibility of the future unfolding of the process, is an aspect that we cannot even slightly touch on in this article, and we limit ourselves to draw only the attention to this matter.

Tamás accuses Lukács of hypostatizing the universal and of assuming the universal essence as absolute necessity -just as St. Anselmo would had done. Of course, we do not wish to deny that, according to the Hungarian philosopher, an effective relation unfolds between essence and necessity. It is evident to everyone who has minimally studied his Ontology that, to Lukács, essence and necessity can only exist in a reflexive determination (Reflexionsbestimmungen). However, as we have already argued, this relation is not given a priori, neither can it develop itself, at every moment, without being continuously permeated by a quantum of casualness. Lukács strongly argues that every necessity has an if ... so character (Wenn-Dann-Notwendigkeit), in other words, is always reflexively articulated to the casualness (the if). Necessity is never absolute and, because of this, if we conceive a somewhat implacable determination in the relation between necessity and essence, untouched by the phenomenical variations or by individual acts, we confer the essence with a rigidity that cannot be attributed to Lukács.

However, what is most important is that Tamás completely ignores that if we can find in Lukács' ontology, the affirmation of an indispensable ontological articulation between essence and necessity, it is not less true that an analogous statement can be found regarding the connection between phenomenon and necessity. In fact, according to Lukács, every phenomenon, even the most casual, is the bearer of some necessity. Every phenomenon, even the most casual, shows an if ... so dimension. "The phenomenon, says Lukács, is a social entity much as the essence, (...) both are supported by the same social necessities, and they are reciprocally indissoluble elements of this historic social complex" [Lukács refers to the complex formed by values, wealth and development of the human genre].[13]

Thus, it is not possible to distinguish, in Lukács, essence from phenomenon referring only to the sphere of the necessity, as is done in traditional ontology. Both the phenomenic world and the essential determinations can only exist and develop themselves when closely connected to the necessary determinations of each processuality. What is fundamental for the distinction between essence and phenomenon, to Lukács, is the category of continuity. We repeat: to the Hungarian thinker, the relation between necessity and the complex essence-phenomenon in no way proximate to that of the traditional conceptions. It is not in the relation to necessity that we find the decisive elements of his distinction between phenomenon and essential determinations, but in the relation between the complex essence-phenomenon and the category of continuity.

Once again disregarding fundamental mediations, it is this that permits Lukács, in the most generic theoretical level, to avoid all teleological conceptions of the becoming and of history. Every teleological ontological conception necessarily exhibits an excessive approximation (if not an identification) between essence and necessity. Only this way is it possible to conceive becoming as something that comprehends at its beginning, though still in nuce, all

posterior development. Without meaning to settle the question in this article, we fell it indispensable to remark that, in our opinion, in the Lukácsian ontology there is no trace whatsoever of such an approximation between essence and necessity. On the contrary, not only is this approximation rejected every time the Hungarian philosopher criticizes the various forms assumed by the teleological conception of becoming; as yet Lukács indicates the relation between essence and continuity as being the locus in which the distinction between phenomenon and essence is substantiated.

In short, for the author of *Zur Ontologie* ..., not only is the connection with necessity not exclusive to the essence – there is an equivalent connection with the phenomenon –, as also the essence has in the phenomenon its concrete mode of particularization in each historical moment.

And precisely because of this, the unfolding of the essence is also determined by the unfolding of the particular phenomenic forms. Much the opposite of a deus absconditus, the essence in Lukács, in the most abstract level, is that which, in the ontological becoming, stands as the deepest basis of the last instance unity of the process. If we are right, in Lukács the essence distinguishes itself from the phenomenon through its peculiar relation with continuity, rather than through a rigid association with the moments of necessity. And, being so, the Lukácsian ontology does not exhibit any trace of the teleological conception of Being, as found in Hegel or in religious conceptions.

We underline this aspect: for the Hungarian philosopher, being is essentially historical. The categorial unfolding of being along time gives rise to two distinct

moments, but intrinsically articulated in the concrete processuality. The first one, composed of the moments which articulate in unity the process as such (essence). The second moment arises from the elements which make each instant of the process distinct from every other (phenomenon). This phenomenic sphere, however, can only arise if articulated to the moments of continuity that make these phenomenic characteristics parts of a given general process. And this, we emphasize, as much regarding the social being as the being in general.

Essence and phenomenon, therefore, to Lukács, do not oppose each other while distinct levels of being; the essence is not more, nor less, "a bearer of being" than the phenomenon: in this respect, both are equally real. The historic conception of substantiality inaugurated by Marx strongly demands, again according to Lukács, that essence and phenomenon have the same ontological statute.

There is not in Lukács, thus, any articulation between essence and phenomenon which resembles those proper to medieval or even to Hegelian conceptions, – what discredits, hence, all the interpretations, like that of Tamás's, which affirm that Lukács's ontology is nothing more than the establishment of the communist creed, just as St. Anselmo established the Christian faith.

Furthermore, the inexistence of such static relation between essence/necessity and phenomenon/casualness also discredits interpretations, such as Heller's or Berman's taken as examples in this article, which comprehend in Lukács' intellectual course of development a process fundamentally marked by the development of the messianic and teleological elements – consider by some to be "religious" – in *History and Class Consciousness*.

Between *History and Class Consciousness* and *Zur Ontologie ...* there is an effective rupture. And, having for most time ignored this fact, has depreciated the fundamental importance of Lukács' *Zur Ontologie ...* in the contemporaneous debate.

Notes:

[1] With some changes, this text was first made public at Simpósio Lukács – a propósito de História e Consciência de Classe, Unicamp, Brasil, 1993.

[2] *Per l'ontologia dell' Essere Sociale*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1976-1981. The German edition is from 1984, by Luchterhand Verlag. We would like to acknowledge our debt to Prof. Barbara E. W. Ramos, whose teachings were indispensable for the translation of this article to English.

[3] See, for exemple, *Per una Ontologia ...*, vol I, p.328-332 and vol II* p. 79-82 and p. 171-3. Also, Lessa, S. "A Centralidade do Trabalho na Ontologia de Lukács". PhD Thesis, Unicamp, Brasil, 1994.

[4] Tamás's quotations are very difficult to locate for Occidental readers. They refer to the Hungarian edition, and not the German (the original one), or Italian editions, which are much more frequently quoted. Furthermore, the quotations have been translated to English, not from German but from Hungarian, which increase the difficulty in locating them. Because of this, we have not taken into consideration the very few quotations used by Tamás, but have focused ourselves just on the kernel of his arguments. It should be remembered, though, that Sein, as with every noun in Germam, is written with a capital letter, and no translation whatsoever of *Zur Ontologie ...*, whether it be to English, or to Italian or to French, to this day, except that by Tamás, maintained the capital letter in being. The reason for translating Sein to being (and not Being) is to express the immanence of this category in Lukács, in opposition to the transcendence of this category in the medieval tradition.

[5] Lukács, G. *Prolegomeni all'ontologia dell'essere sociale*. Guerini e Associati, Milano, 1990, p. 292.

[6] Marx, K. *Die Frühschriften*. A Kroner Verlag, 1971, p. 274.

[7] Lukács, G. *Prolegomini ...* op. cit., p. 226. "(...) to correctly understand Marxism, the historicity of being, as its fundamental characteristic, represents the ontological starting point that leads to the correct interpretation of every problem." Idem, ibidem, p. 90. See also p. 99.

[8] Lukács, G. vol I, p. 327.

[9] Lukács, G. vol II*, p. 92.

[10] Lukács, G., vol II, p. 92. Our mention.

[11] Lukács, G. vol I, p. 364. Our mention.

[12] Lukács, G. *Per una Ontologia ...*, vol II*, p. 475.

[13] Lukács, G. *Per una Ontologia ...*, vol I., p. 330-1.