

Nicolas Tertulian and the reading of Lukács' *Ontology* in Brazil

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In Brazil, as everywhere, the debate on the *Ontology* has focused mainly on two aspects. The first one is its usefulness to understand the changing world of our days. The second aspect is directly related to the role and place of the *Ontology* in Lukács' intellectual development. Of course, in the debate these questions not seldom appear articulated or very closed related.

Although it might seem as a paradox, in Brazil the importance of Lukács' *Ontology* for the comprehension of the moment of transition in which we live has been underlined by theorizations as those of Claus Offe and the last Habermas. Not that these authors meant it, but as they challenged the centrality of labour for the human realm, they met in Lukács the most finished, better elaborated and developed defense of the Marxian conception of the ontological centrality of labour for the social being. As a result certainly not expected by Offe and Habermas, the questioning they put forward brought a new interest to Lukács' last work. Not a few have lately looked for Lukács' ontological conceptions as support for the criticism of theories such as Habermas' and Offe's.

As to the question of the role of the *Ontology* in Lukács' theoretical evolution, the international debate exhibits at least three very distinct positions. The first one was that of the more prominent members of the old «Budapest School». The core of their argumentation was that the *Ontology* was a «failure» (Heller) because it attempted to rationalize what could not be rationalized: the belief of Lukács in the Soviet Socialism. Lukács' last work, in the eyes of his former students, amounted to no more than a pointless effort of endlessly chasing some metaphysical ground for his absolute faith in the Soviet Union.

Directly against this interpretation of the *Ontology* soon stood another one, mainly in Italy and France. Through direct and exegetic investigations of the Lukácsian text, they demonstrated in a definitive way that all and every one of the arguments put forward by the old «Budapest School» were gross falsifications and misunderstandings of the Lukácsian thought. Vitoria Franco, Constanzo Preve, Guido Oldrini and Alberto Scarponi, together with Nicolas Tertulian, were the main names involved in this effort to offer a new interpretation of Lukács' last major work.

István Mészáros proposed a third interpretation of the relationship between the *Ontology* and Lukács' intellectual development in his monumental *Beyond Capital*. From a maximalist and leftist perspective, he argues that the traces of moralism, voluntarism and ethicism we can find in the young Lukács are also present in his last work. *Mutatis mutandis*, for obviously Mészáros recognizes the huge difference between works as *History and Class Consciousness* and the *Ontology*, for the author of *Beyond Capital* this moralism would be the main reason why Lukács couldn't solve some decisive ontological questions in a dialectical and Marxian way, as for example the theory of value.

All these questions are present at the Brazilian side of this international debate. With some important particularities, however.

We never had a strong wing aligned with the thesis of the former members of the Budapest School. But, instead, we have a very significant academic current that, through some proximity with the Frankfurt School, understandably concentrates its investigations on the works of the young Lukács, especially *History and Class Consciousness*. Besides, we have in Brazil a much stronger influence of Mészáros' works than we have in France or Italy.

Secondly, it is necessary to remember that in the late seventies and early eighties, Brazil was going through its «process of democratization», a subtle way by which the old dominant classes during the military dictatorship maintained their political power in a more democratic fashion. As a result of this historical determination, the political questions were the most urgent, and the ontological and, so to speak, more abstract ones were for the moment put aside.

Only well into the eighties the debate on the *Ontology* was again more widely undertaken. Meanwhile much had been written and published in Europe, and we, Brazilians had loosed our contact with what was going on in the «Old Continent».

It was in this intellectual environment that Prof. Nicolas Tertulian's reading of Lukács' *Ontology* made a very strong impact in Brazil:

1) First of all, Professor Tertulian has something to say about all the main questions in debate: Lukács is a philosopher most important for the understanding of our changing sociability, the former members of Budapest School are completely mistaken in each and every one of their arguments; and, against Mészáros, argues that there is no trace of moralism or ethicism in the *Ontology*.

2) Prof. Tertulian's reading of the *Ontology* had yet another decisive influence. It contributed, with its intellectual authority, to consolidate the exegetic investigations that were, and still are today, under way in Brazil.

3) And last, but not the least, Prof. Tertulian's reading of the *Ontology* inaugurated, and not only in Brazil, a new possibility of understanding Lukács' posthumous works: we might have in them a materialistic, a dialectally Marxian, phenomenology of the subjectivity.

Bio-bibliographie>

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