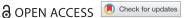Routledge
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REVIEW ESSAY

# Social Ontology and the Past, Present and Future of Critical Theory: A Critical Reading of *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*

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**ABSTRACT**

In both continental and analytical philosophy, social ontology has emerged as a particularly lively and increasingly sophisticated area of debate. This essay explores the potential contribution that social-ontological thinking can make to the continued development of critical theory via a critical reading of *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology* – a collection of essays edited by Michael J. Thompson and published by Brill as part of the *Studies in Critical Social Sciences* series. The essay argues that whilst social ontology as such no doubt offers a fruitful avenue for contemporary critical theory, the later philosophy of Georg Lukács represents an untenable and antiquated theoretical resource for such endeavours. The conceptual and systematic barriers to the revitalisation of the late Lukács are explored with specific reference to Lukács' specific interpretation of the paradigm of labour and, closely related to this, his philosophy of history.

*Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology,* edited by Michael J. Thompson, Brill, 2020.

In the opening passages of *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, editor Michael J. Thompson remarks that "the tradition of critical theory has charted an acute and steady departure from its foundation in Marx over the past decades".[1] Assuming, for a moment, that it is possible, let alone desirable, to continue to speak of a single, homogeneous tradition of "critical theory", this foundational premise, less true today than it would have been several decades ago,[2] is attributed to a lingering aversion to Marx's purported positivism, his reductivism and his economism. In this context, the works of Georg Lukács offer, Thompson maintains, a deeper and more philosophically defensible reading of Marx's theoretical legacy. This is, it must be said, a striking claim. One that will no doubt be met with some scepticism by interested readers,

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given not only the array of theoretical developments within Marxist discourse since Lukács' death but also Lukács' own persistent reputation for dogmatism. It is made all the more striking, indeed questionable, for the fact that the specific referent in this case is *not* Lukács' praxis philosophy of the 1920s but, rather, the works undertaken by in the 1950s and 1960s. In particular, Thompson appeals to the theoretical sophistication and contemporary relevance of Lukács' efforts towards the development of a social ontology in the two-volume odyssey *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaften Seins*.

The return to Lukács' later work championed by Thompson is not without significant obstacles, as he and several of the contributors to the volume more or less openly acknowledge. Lukács' later works of systematic philosophy have been comparatively neglected by English-language scholars. No doubt owing, in part, to the lack of availability. The *Ontologie* was only published in a fragmentary form and the earlier *Die Eigenart des Äesthetischen* has remained to this day unavailable to the reader of English (the exception here being the publication of the Introduction to this monumental work 1964).[3] The issues surrounding a general lack of reception, however, extend beyond the problem of availability. In the years surrounding its initial publication those closest to Lukács at the end of his life expressed substantial, highly critical, reservations about what remained an essentially incomplete text. Agnes Heller, for example, publicly adjudged the *Ontologie* a failure, owing principally to what she and her Budapest School colleagues perceived as the work's complete lack of internal coherence.[4] Further afield and somewhat earlier, Jürgen Habermas, at the time apparently interested in Lukács' return to philosophy proper, is reported to have been willing to consign the *Ontologie* to the historical past upon merely becoming acquainted with its basic content and structure in 1966.[5]

Does, then, *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology* succeed overcoming the obstacles facing a rehabilitation of Lukács' ontology, thereby establishing a place for it within contemporary critical-theoretical discourse? Not entirely. Without question this work represents the most comprehensive treatment of the *Ontologie* to have appeared in the English language. Further, it must be recognised as making the strongest case yet for a substantive reappraisal of, and reengagement with, this long-forgotten project. However, owing to the very categories of Lukács' thought, its very real limitations, and internal inconsistencies – many of which are recognised and explored throughout the work in question – the hoped-for return to Lukács is, in all probability, unlikely to gain wider support.

The collection is divided into fours parts, each of which explores Lukács' ontology from a different perspective. The first section treats its conceptual foundations, unpacking its key categories and establishing its relation to some of its lesser-known antecedents. As Antonino Infranca and Miguel Vedda explain, Lukács' ontology is both metaphysical and systematic. For this, the authors claim, Lukács' work has been unduly criticised. Why such criticisms are, in fact, unjust, is never fully explained, save for an appeal to general and "substantial lack of knowledge of the work".[6] This is a curious claim, for in the same breath Infranca and Vedda accuse certain of Lukács' students, noted critics of the work, of also "pillaging the *Ontology* without restraint".[7] These issues aside, the question remains, precisely in what sense is Lukács' ontology a metaphysical system? Lukacs' is a metaphysical framework in the sense that it treats human society as an ontological structure, as a form or sphere of being distinct from, indeed higher than, other

spheres of being – namely the inorganic and the organic. Moreover, it is systematic inasmuch as it purports to deduce the *differentia specifica* of social being from a single ultimate principle. This principle is that of labour (*die Arbeit*). Labour is, according to Lukács, the original principle of human and social development. Infranca and Vedda spell out exactly what this means in the clearest of terms:

> With labour an organic being has set in motion a process that will lead him [*sic.*] to be fully human. Organic being, in turn, arose from inorganic being, but the complexity of organic being is a more developed level of being than the previous one, that is, than inorganic being. The same relationship occurs between social being and organic being: social being is a complex of complexes that manifests a level of complexity greater than mere organic being.[8]

We shall return to the topic of labour as the *Urphänomen* of social being in due course. More pressing is the principle by which Lukács attempts to differentiate the three spheres of being. To be sure, by attempting to establish a principle of unity in difference between the various spheres of being, Lukács was voicing a belated self-criticism of *History and Class Consciousness*, with its absolute scission of the socio-historical from the natural world.[9] In theorising the interrelation of the social, the organic, and the inorganic Lukács is speaking as our contemporary. Still, the claim that social being can be differentiated from other spheres of being by virtue of its heightened degree of *complexity* warrants far more critical scrutiny than it receives in this essay. It is difficult to understand how one can blanketly assert that by definition forms of social being ranging from shaking hands to criticising a painting, from global financial markets to a game of football display an inherently greater degree of complexity than, say, the human genome or the phenomenon of quantum entanglement. The Lukácsian response here would presumably be that the social represents a higher, "more complex", stage of being as compared to the organic inasmuch as the latter is subsumed within the former, whilst the former bears no traces of the latter. In this case, however, the category of labour must shoulder an immense explanatory burden. This is particularly problematic because, as will become evident in further analysis, Lukács offers only a rudimentary and highly simplistic model of labour and, by extension, social being itself. In the absence of such critical reflection, claims to the effect that Lukács' ontology warrants attention for having renewed "the tradition of great classical philosophy"[10] are likely to fall on deaf ears.

   The contributions of Endre Kiss and Matthew J. Smetona continue and conclude the first section respectively. Kiss's essay, despite being genuinely hampered by a difficult mode of expression manages to shed some light on the context that precipitated Lukács' ontological turn and the many parallels between this work and that of Nicolai Hartman, a largely forgotten figure in the history of philosophy but one who nevertheless exercised a profound influence on the later Lukács. In one of the more detailed and rigorous of the contributions, Smetona uncovers the critical foundations of Lukács' project via a reconstruction of what he terms Lukács' "ontological critique of the philosophy of intentionality".[11] There is much of value in this conscientious piece. By the same token, certain aspects, many of which centre on the understanding of Hegel, are bound to strike contemporary readers as anachronistic. The author's celebration of dialectical logic for its revelation of that "the negation of the modern constellation of social institutions is *necessitated*",[12] or the charge that the contemporary analytic conceptions of intentionality are guilty of a "selective incorporation of only those elements of Hegel's philosophical

system that are compatible with *bourgeois* thought" and thereby "simply [reproduce] its ideological mystifications in the contemporary terms of logic and semantics"[13] echo the shibboleths of twentieth century Marxism in a way that is far from conducive to the aim of a renewed interest in Lukács' ontological project; likewise, the claim that Lukács' account of the relationship between the "material and the mental", which, in the end, boils down to the mundane assertion that human action is inextricably linked to more or less conscious mental states, might profitably be used to redress critical theory's purported "shift away from the Marxist dialectical and materialist analysis of capitalist society, and therewith the abandonment of its critical character".[14]

Section two examines the Hegelian-Marxist underpinnings of Lukács' ontology. Murillo van der Lann undertakes an expansive and critical analysis of Lukács' ontological interpretation of Marx's labour theory of value, whilst Michalis Skomvoulis reconstructs Lukács' changing and ambiguous relationship to Hegel. According to Skomvoulis, the abiding presence of Hegel throughout the various stages of Lukács' oeuvre is indicative of a foundational commitment to dialectics as the method by which the real dynamics of history are disclosed. Moreover, it is, Skomvoulis claims, his late appropriation of Hegel that allows Lukács to complete his genuine self-criticism of *History and Class Consciousness* with its speculative conception of the proletariat as the identical subject/object of history. In place of this conceptual mythology, Skomvoulis highlights the later Lukács' emphasis on the increasing complexity of social structures and, with this, an increasing emphasis on the problem of social alternatives which historical actors are forced to confront and choose between in the ongoing reproduction of social life. This, in turn, broadens the scope and domain of meaningful political practice far beyond the limited eschatological act of revolution that characterises Lukács early Marxist politics of redemption. The argument here is dense, technical and highly challenging; the upshot, however, is that it is via his renewed engagement with Hegel's logic that Lukács is able to provide a socio-ontological basis for both praxis philosophy and emancipatory politics, one that foregoes the ultimately idealistic philosophy of history of *History and Class Consciousness* and conceives of social reality as a complex, developmental whole whose very structure *qua* historically emergent objectivity imposes certain imperatives and restrictions upon social actors whilst at the same time being fundamentally open to the "endogenous genesis of the new"[15] via the self-positing and self-transcending subject. Those interested in Lukács' post-1950s development with find this a useful, if difficult, essay. Its broader relevance, however, remains to be seen and is very much predicated upon the extent to which the framework it advocates can engage with more contemporary accounts of political action and social change.

For his contribution, Andreas Giesbert takes up a concept that has seen a modest return to prominence of late: alienation. As is the case with Skomvoulis' essay, Giesbert's reconstruction of Lukács' changing conceptions of alienation and the ways in which this concept comes to assume the central critical-diagnostic role formerly played by the concept of reification will be of significant interest to Lukács scholars. To my knowledge there simply exists no comparable treatment available to English language readers. According to Giesbert, Lukács characterises alienation as the "unreal unfolding of individuality".[16] *Prima face* this characterisation alone seems to bring Lukács' conception into proximity with that of Rahel Jaeggi – the most important recent theorist of alienation – who casts alienation as a "relation of relationlessness."[17] However, the very real distance

between these accounts soon reveals itself in the fact that the Lukácsian conception is inextricably embedded within a normative philosophy of history as the progressive unfolding of the species-being of humanity – a framework very much at odds with Jaeggi's overall intentions. As Giesbert demonstrates, Lukács posits History as a developmental process along three key axes: the growth of free time owing to the reduction of the duration of labor, the increasing socialisation of human beings (more specifically their *needs*, which Marx termed "pushing back the limits of nature") and the intensification of global relations between human communities. Taken together, these three trends reveal that at the level of *the species* human history bears witness to the ever-increasing unfolding of freedom and universality. Alienation, then, is understood as the *gap* which separates the life of the species and the life of the individual – the overcoming of which signifies the reconciliation of the essence and existence of human beings. These themes will, of course, be familiar to those acquainted with the "revisionist Marxism" of post-War Eastern Europe. Similar ideas are found in the contemporaneous works of both the Praxis and Budapest schools.[18] They were, however, abandoned as early as the 1970s. Admittedly, this was as much for political as theoretical reasons. However, there are very real theoretical problems with this model, problems which Giesbert's essay offers no ready response. In his *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* Habermas draws attention to the fact that theories of history grounded in the metabolism between human beings and nature offer two criteria for evaluating social evolution: "the increase in technically useful knowledge, and the differentiation as well as universalisation of needs".[19] This is, as Giesbert shows, profoundly true of the late Lukács. The challenge which Habermas poses, and the challenge that those few who are still willing to defend such theories have yet to satisfactorily confront, is the fact that these criteria can, as Habermas states, "be subsumed under the functionalist viewpoint of an increase in complexity".[20] It is one thing to suggest that human history represents a *progressive* development simply by virtue of the increasing complexity of social systems. It is another thing entirely to derive from this tendency norms according to which the transcendence of alienation might be established. Until such claims are adequately refuted, Lukács' late theory of alienation seems doomed to being of merely documentary or highly specialised relevance.

Section three explores Lukács' ontology as it intersects with various themes within contemporary philosophy. In his essay entitled "Unlikely Affinities: J.L. Borges, Kuhn, Lakatos and Ontological Critique", Mario Duayer develops a critical exposition of what he claims are the frequently obfuscated ontological commitments upon which social-scientific and natural-scientific epistemologies are inherently based. The political dimensions of ontology that form the backdrop of Duayer's analyses come very much to the fore in Christoph Henning's comparative study of the ontologies of Lukács and Bruno Latour. Whilst Thomas Telios returns to the leitmotif of Lukács scholarship – the concept of reification – through the lens of post-structuralist and feminist theory. The outcome of Telios' novel approach is a reinterpretation of reification as a social tendency that involves not the suppression (Lukács' term is *Ausschaltung*) of the qualitative aspects of subjectivity, but, rather, the pathological production of subjectivity itself. This is a contentious essay; one which expressly challenges a number of the core premises on which the reception of the early-Marxist Lukács has traditionally been based. Moreover, it is one which raises claims central to the critique of reification within continuing evolution of capitalist modernity. A full appraisal of its key claims is, however, not possible

within the purview of this essay and must, therefore, be deferred. Still, it may suffice to say that Telios has very much successfully pinpointed the issue on which the contemporary relevance, or otherwise, of the Lukácsian concept of reification stands.

In recent decades, social ontology emerged as a vital, highly productive, sub-discipline, particularly within the analytic tradition. One of the major accomplishments of the present work is to have offered significant insights into the ways in which Lukács' approach, steeped as it is in the categories of classical German philosophy, differs from the kinds of social ontology that have been developed by predominantly English-speaking, analytically trained philosophers.[21] In particular, the contribution of Claudius Vellay offers both a general exploration of that which differentiates Lukács' social ontology from the approaches and problems characteristic of the contemporary analytic debate and a Lukácsian critique of the most important representative of the latter – John Searle's – specific conception of the constitution of social reality. As Vellay explains, for Searle the social world is constituted in and through the according of a certain meaning to certain things, states of affairs and actions. In consequence, not only does Searle see language as paradigmatic in the ontology of the social, but also the analysis of the logical structure of speech acts as the privileged perspective from which the constitution of social reality can be grasped. In contrast to this view Vellay advances the claim that "logical analysis is not the right approach to understand what human society is".[22] Vellay defends, in other words, social ontology as the *disclosure* of "what really is"[23] – the things in themselves, so to speak – as opposed to the *analysis* of the ways in which such things are spoken about. The divergence here relates to the distinction Vellay draws between the Searlian notion of *constitution* as against the Lukácsian conception of the practical *construction* of social reality. Underlying this distinction is a methodological conflict be the paradigm of language and the logical, *a priori,* or "transcendental",[24] analysis of the structure of speech acts and the paradigm of labour and the genealogy of social being in the productive, laboring activities of human beings. To be sure, Vellay's claims regarding the constitutive historicity of the social and his insistence that social ontology must itself be capable of explicating this historicity, in both its continuity and ruptures, are well made, notable and persuasive. Moreover, his concerns that Searle's quasi-transcendental, "logicist", methodology is simply incapable of offering any account of the historical as an ineliminable dimension of the social are not without some merit. Less meritorious is Vellay's claim that Lukács' social ontology and the paradigm of labour represent a viable alternative to that offered by analytic philosophy in general and Searle in particular. According to Vellay, "The distinctive character of social being is the teleological moment, which has no equivalent in inorganic being and just some precursor biological forms among animals".[25] As such, Labour is paradigmatic of the social inasmuch as "the teleological moment is developing in labour, which is therefore the original form of human practice and remains the foundational category of social being".[26] Setting to the side the question of the anthropological antecedence of labour versus language and even the denial of anything but the most rudimentary social life to non-human animals of any species, [27] foundational issues arise surrounding the extent to which all forms of social action – including so-called "secondary teleological positings"[28] – can be understood on the basis of structural model of labor. This framework has been roundly and at times very persuasively criticised in the relevant literature,[29] none of which is referenced or challenged in the essay in question. It is neither possible nor necessary to

rehearse these criticisms here. Rather it is apt to simply highlight the remarkable reductivism which characterises this model. According to Lukács, labour encompasses three distinct though interrelated moments: the positing of a goal, deliberation, and selection of the means to be employed and, finally, the realised object.[30] So understood, labour is, uncontroversially, a form of *making* – *poiēsis* in the classical terminology. It is entirely problematic to assert that all forms of social action, all determinations of social being, have the character of making. There are myriad elements of human social life – shaking hands, a game of football, criticising a painting, to refer to some of the aforementioned examples – which simply cannot be subsumed within the structure of making. They are, rather, at least *prima facie*, forms of *doing* – *praxis* in the classical terminology. Yes, these are teleologically guided actions; however, their *telos* is not the production of an object. In fact, each of these examples could be said to aim at the realisation of a number of distinct, autonomous, and contextually dependant goals. Lukács' ontology is reductive not because it posits humans as essentially labouring beings – that is, it posits labour as the species-activity of human beings – but because it collapses the distinction between various ends that human beings *de facto* pursue. With such architectonic limitations, it is difficult to understand how Lukács' social ontology offers a meaningful alternative to those which presently enjoy a preeminent status in the debate.

Finally, Section four concludes the volume by exploring Lukács' contribution to development of a contemporary *critical* social ontology. Michael Morris positions a Lukácsian critical ontology as a timely response to what he sees as the problematic legacy of Frankfurt School critical theory. This is an exhaustive, original, and challenging text, one which raises a wealth of topics and problems that significantly exceeds the necessary constraints of the present context. However, doubts remain about what may be termed the essay's positive or reconstructive elements. Let us, for the moment, assent to the claim advanced by Morris that the very real lacunae of first-generation Frankfurt School critical theory can only be remedied by a conscious return to ontologically oriented modes of theorising and critique. The questions that must then be raised are: why, given the limitations sketched previously, should this "return to ontology" be articulated as a return to the social ontology of the later Lukács? What is to be *gained* theoretically and are the gains enough to warrant such enormous *sacrifices*? Most emphatically that which Morris champions in Lukács is the ontological conception of *totality* – the conception which construes the socio-historical as a complex developmental whole, unfolding in and through the mediation of its constituent moments.[31] However, what this framework certainly offers in terms of diachronic *breadth*, is, owing to its particular employment of the paradigm of labour, severely undermined by a complete lack of *depth* at both the diachronic and synchronic levels.

Similar concerns surround the essays of Reha Kadakal and Michael J, Thompson, both of which turn to Lukács in response to criticisms directed towards predominant tendencies in contemporary thought, be it the purported persistent inability of modern social theory to secure its normative foundations (Kadakal) or the so-called "neo-Idealist" turn in critical theory (Thompson). Again, these essays offer much that is of value for understanding our present theoretical conjecture and its possible future directions. This is particularly so of Thompson's work. His fundamental contention is that the Marxian/Lukácsian project of a critical social ontology represents a singularly central factor in the rapprochement between theoretical criticism, politically engaged judgement, and

transformative agency. Critical ontology, as understood by Thompson, is constituted through a form of reasoning that is orientated to the question of ends – the *teloi* that implicitly or explicitly guide any society in its historical reproduction. As such, critical social ontology represents a form of critique in which the antinomy of fact and value is overcome, since, as Thompson claims, "the very act of positing a *telos* … entails the capacity to *judge*, to evaluate that *telos* as well as the activities, relations, structures and processes that brought it into being".[32] As previously discussed, there are a number of more or less significant problems surrounding the normative content of the paradigm of labour itself. Nevertheless, Thompson's is a provocative and potentially fruitful intervention. Not the least because it places on the agenda once more the condition in which historically specific *aims* of social reproduction, such as those that govern capitalist modernity and, I would stress, instaurate a hierarchical system of relations of domination, come to assume the character of timeless, taken-for-granted and, hence, naturalised facts of social life. The condition, that is, of reification, understood as "the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with their historical and social specificity".[33] What remains questionable, however, is the extent to which the social ontology of the later Lukács represents the most effective and theoretically compelling avenue for the pursuit of this important project.

For this reason, the contribution of Titus Stahl represents a high point within *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*. Like Vellay, Stahl begins his analysis by situating Lukács' later works with reference to analytical social ontology. According to Stahl, the contemporary analytic debate in social ontology has crystallised around two key questions: "First, how can we account for social facts from within a broadly naturalist perspective? Second, how can we account for social facts in a way that makes causal explanations possible?"[34] In consequence, there has, Stahl explains, been a general drift towards theories which privilege the derivation of the existence of social facts from the intentional states of social actors. By contrast Lukács offers a more expansive and ambitious social-ontological framework – one that seeks to ground complex networks of social action in the intentional engagements of human beings with the natural world. From these broad bases, Stahl proceeds to further differentiate these two approaches through reference to the fact Lukács' basic theoretical orientation offers a number of meaningful conceptual resources for the development of a *critical* social ontology. To be sure both contemporary analytic and critical-emancipatory approaches share the fundamental premise of all social ontology, that is, the existence of social facts. However, a critical social ontology is distinguished by not only its *reflexive* character – that is, its inclusion of itself within its "object domain"[35] – but also its commitment to *immanent* critique.[36] Through its systematic attempt to ground social norms in the productive activities and relations of human beings and its commitment to the primacy of the category of the social totality, Lukács' project offers, Stahl claims, an instructive, if flawed and incomplete, critical alternative to the perspectives which dominate contemporary philosophy.

As has been shown, it is from the formal structure of labor that Lukács sought to derive the ontology of the social in all its complexity. Among the most significant of these derivations, and one would presume, among the most contentious, is that of social norms. For Lukács, all normative social phenomena have their ontological genesis in the original "ought" established in the moment of teleological anticipation;

i.e. the hypothetical imperative(s) of purposive-rational social action. On these terms, Stahl is entirely justified in his scepticism concerning the prospect that Lukács' framework can be taken up or remobilised *as is*. His attempt to "rescue" this reductive model of social normativity through recourse to a materialist reinterpretation of social pragmatist theories of meaning ala Robert Brandom and a Marx-inspired theory of recognition whose locus of sociality is the metabolic exchange between human beings and the natural world in the collective satiation of needs is equally original and compelling. The further results of this line of thought should be eagerly awaited. Beyond the question of the normative basis for the immanent critique of contemporary society, Lukács' social ontology addresses the criterion of reflexivity, as previously noted, through its deployment of the category of totality. Of course, there is a long-standing and rich history of engagement with the Lukácsian concept of totality; however, seldom has this engagement extended to those of Lukács' works published after the 1930s. Stahl's *reconstructive* reading of the concept of totality in Lukács' *Ontologie* is significant then not only for the light it sheds on the centrality of the category of totality for the development of a critical social ontology but also for its subtle understanding of the lines of continuity and discontinuity between Lukács' later usage of the concept and his earlier, more well-known and influential ones. Virtually alone amongst the contributors, Stahl looks to Lukács not for *answers* to the problem of a critical social ontology but for the *questions* to which any such theory must properly respond. To my mind it is *this* approach which, ultimately, best does justice to this venerable, though problematic theoretical legacy.

## Notes

1. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020, 1.
2. See, for example, Rahel Jaeggi and Nancy Fraser, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).
3. Georg Lukács, "Introduction to a Monograph on Aethetics," *New Hungarian Quarterly* 14 (1964). A shorter summary of a number of the key themes in Lukács' late final aesthetics is also found in Georg Lukács, "Specific Particularity as the Central Category of Aesthetics," in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Cazeaux (London and New York Routledge, 2000).
4. Agnes Heller, "The Philosophy of the Late Lukács," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 6, no. 2 (1979).
5. See Ferenc Féher et al., "Notes on Lukacs' Ontology," *Telos*, no. 29 (1976).
6. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 15.
7. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 17. It is unclear which students of Lukács the authors have in mind here. There are some, largely formal, similarities between Lukács' ontology and the philosophy of praxis developed by the Budapest School. These similarities were explicitly highlighted in György Márkus, "Debates and Trends in Marxist Philosophy," in *Communism and Eastern Europe: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Frantisek Silnitsky, Larisa Silnitsky, and Karl Reyman (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1979). To say, however, that Heller, Fehér, Márkus or Vajda was guilty of pillaging the *Ontology* is a gross mistake. Márkus developed his understanding of Marxism largely independently of Lukács' influence. See Georg Lukács, *Georg Lukács: Record of a Life*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso Books, 1983), 140. Heller, for her part, was influenced far more by the conception of objectivation present in Lukács' aesthetics than by the framework developed in the ontology. See Agnes Heller, "Wert und Geschichte,"

*Praxis* 1, no. 1–2 (1966); Agnes Heller, "Lukács' Aesthetics," *New Hungarian Quarterly* 24, no. 7 (1966).

8. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 21.
9. See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consiousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge; MA.: The MIT Press, 1971), xvi. See also J. F. Dorahy, *The Budapest School: Beyond Marxism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 27-28.
10. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 26.
11. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 42.
12. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 49.
13. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 50.
14. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 61.
15. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 170.
16. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 125.
17. Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*, trans. Frederick Neuhauser and Allan E. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
18. The most significant example of the former is György Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology: The Concept of 'Human Essence' in the Philosophy of Marx* (Berlin and Sydney: Modem Verlag, 2014). For a helpful introduction to the latter see Mihailo Markovic and Robert S. Cohen, *Yugoslavia: The Rise and Fall of Socialist Humanism, A History of the Praxis Group* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1975).
19. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 81.
20. Ibid.
21. It should be emphasised that Lukács' is far from the only example of a social ontology inspired by the German philosophical tradition. The group of thinkers associated with the *Journal of Social Ontology*, for example, represent a contemporary alternative to Lukács' in many ways outmoded engagement with classical German philosophy. See, for example, Heikki Ikaheimo and Arto Laitinen, eds., *Recognition and Social Ontology* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011). For the most part, however, these theoretical developments remain outside the scope of the work in question.
22. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 185.
23. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 185.
24. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 192.
25. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 211-212.
26. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 212.
27. Two problems that are, in all probability, the proper domain of specialists as opposed to philosophers.
28. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 214.
29. For example, Agnes Heller, "Paradigm of Work – Paradigm of Production," in *The Power of Shame: A Rational Perspective* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).
30. Georg Lukács, "The Dialectic of Labor: Beyond Causality and Teleology," *Telos* 6, no. Fall (1970).
31. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 359.
32. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 445.
33. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. David Fernbach, vol. III (London: Penguin Classics, 1981), 969.
34. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 366.
35. Michael J. Thompson (ed.), *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, 367.
36. The latter claim is more fully explored in Titus Stahl, *Immanente Kritik: Elemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2013).

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