

Konstantinos Kavoulakos | Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, kavoulakos@edlit.auth.gr

Beyond Form Lukács's Turn to Revolutionary Praxis

It is widely acknowledged that the concept of form occupies a central position and constitutes a focal point in Georg Lukács's early pre-Marxist work.¹ The essays of the collection *Die Seele und die Formen* (1911) rely upon a diagnosis of the problematic character of modern culture as it is reflected in the formal problems of modern art. In its opposition to the formlessness of modern art caused by modern world view relativism, form appears »as the expression of an absolute, which is essentially located beyond the things and is inherently fulfilled, complete and unified«. Thus, the form represents the bourgeois reaction to the crisis and negativity (the »problematic« character) of modern society.² Lukács's only utopia in *Die Seele und die Formen* is the utopia of form in the strict sense of the ›artistic form‹ (and not of an alleged wider »utopische Kultur«).³

The concept of form occupies a central position in Georg Lukács's early aestheticist work. Nevertheless, Lukács was aware of the limits of form in its confrontation with everyday life. In his critical appraisal, he revealed these limits in regard to aesthetic and ethical form. Neither can penetrate the ordinary life of men and they, thus, entrap the individual in a solipsistic relation to the world. In his pre-Marxist period, Lukács searched for an alternative in a kind of practical mysticism. This turn allowed him to discover a path beyond formalism in revolutionary, transformative praxis. This is the very path that finally led him to his dialectical-practical understanding of Marxism.

1 This contribution is a slightly reworked compilation of parts of the author's study *Georg Lukács's Philosophy of Praxis. From Neo-Kantianism to Marxism* (London/New York: Bloombury 2018).

2 See Asor Rosa: *Der junge Lukács*, pp. 97–98.

3 As claimed, e. g., in Grauer: *Die entzauberte Welt*, pp. 36–38.

As has been correctly pointed out, in his early work Lukács moves in the direction of a strict aestheticism.⁴

However, what has not been equally stressed in the relevant literature is how critical Lukács's notion of form was. Although Lukács eagerly participated in the quest for form that represented a wider trend among bourgeois intellectuals of that time, he clearly discerned the limits of the power of form in its confrontation with everyday life and established social institutions. Such limitations are firstly revealed through a critique of the aesthetic form that constitutes the basis of the utopian reality represented by the work of art. Lukács's critique reveals the art's incapability of penetrating the common life of men and its total isolation from everyday practice (see section 1). Secondly, the critique of form pertains to the limitations of an ethical formation of life, which tends to entrap the individual in the solipsistic consistency of mind (see section 2). During his pre-Marxist period, Lukács shifted his attention towards searching for a way out of formalism by turning to practice in the framework of a mystical ethics (see section 3). This turn allowed him to discover a path beyond formalism in revolutionary, transformative praxis (see section 4). This is the very path that finally led him to his dialectical-practical understanding of Marxism.

1. Aesthetic Utopian Reality and Its Critique

Lukács's early essay on Kierkegaard from *Die Seele und die Formen* is based on the opposition of everyday life and form. In this essay, he explained why an unambiguous, utopian unity of form and content is not possible in life, but only in the field of art.⁵ In a similar way, in his essay on *Die Metaphysik der Tragödie* from the same volume, Lukács described life as »anarchy of light and dark«, a formless sequence of experiences without inner necessity, which excludes anything unequivocal, complete and absolute that would represent »true life«. ⁶ Thus, the tragic conflict between the »regular accidentality«⁷ of »ordinary life«⁸ and the »real necessity« of the essential

4 Dannemann: *Ursprünge*, p. 44. On this strong aestheticist tendency of the young Lukács see Kavoulakos: *Kritik*; Kavoulakos: *Literatur und Utopie*.

5 Cf. Lukács: *Soul and Form*, p. 56 (*Die Seele und die Formen*, pp. 86–87).

6 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 175–176 (»Anarchie des Helldunkels«, »Das Leben«, *Die Seele und die Formen*, pp. 327–329).

7 *Ibid.*, p. 191 (»gesetzmäßige Zufälligkeit«, *Die Seele und die Formen*, p. 359).

8 *Ibid.*, p. 180 (»gewöhnliches Leben«, *Die Seele und die Formen*, p. 337).

or »lively life«⁹ cannot be practically resolved in the empirical world – it can only be represented through the integrated form in art, especially in the tragic drama.

The aestheticism that is characteristic of Lukács's early period finds its theoretical foundation in his first great *Ästhetik* he worked on in Heidelberg. Lukács developed his aesthetic theory within the frame of the neo-Kantian advocacy of the autonomy of aesthetics against other value-spheres. As a result, his theory strongly criticized every tendency to a metaphysical interpretation of aesthetics.¹⁰

In the first version of the *Ästhetik* on which Lukács worked between 1912 and 1914, the work of art is presented as the *realization* of a kind of ›coincidentia oppositorum‹, which thus represents the unity of value and experience, form and content, the universal-transindividual and the particular-individual. In this sense, art is the fulfillment of the human desire for unity of the most individual with the universal. Consequently, for men, works of art represent »a world of fulfillment«.¹¹ By claiming that the formations of aesthetics have a *symbolical* character, Lukács adopted a fundamental pair of concepts of the wider current of romantic aesthetics. However, he altered its meaning in such a way that the »symbol« is understood as »the overall structure of the work of art«.¹² At the same time, he explicitly rejected the connection between the concept of the symbol and the problems of metaphysics, to which classical German aesthetic idealism related it.¹³

In opposition to the allegorically constituted formations (e.g. in the field of ethics), the symbol achieves the reciprocal adjustment of form and content, so that they appear as inseparable and, at the same time, distinctive elements, not reducible to each other. The relation between form and content structurally resembles their ›interpenetration‹. Thus, the work of art constitutes a utopian reality with the traits of independency, closeness, totality and infinity.¹⁴

For Lukács, the quasi divine nature of the work of art as a utopian reality is due to the fact that its formation is guided by a fundamental »standpoint« or »world-view«, on the basis of which its material is selected and the essen-

9 Ibid., p. 180 (»wirkliche Notwendigkeit«, »lebendiges Leben«, *Die Seele und die Formen*, p. 336).

10 For an overview of Lukács's early aesthetic theory, see: Kavoulakos: *Ästhetizistische Kulturkritik und ethische Utopie*, pp. 83–118, 203–238.

11 Lukács: *Heidelberger Philosophie*, pp. 54–55, translation K. K. In the original: »Welt der Erfüllung«.

12 Hoeschen: *Das ›Dostojewski-Projekt*, p. 175.

13 See *ibid.*, pp. 176–182.

14 Cf. Lukács: *Heidelberger Philosophie*, pp. 87–88.

tial is separated from the inessential – something impossible in everyday experienced reality. Through the procedure of constitutive ignorance of the elements that do not harmonize with the guiding »standpoint« the work reaches its internal homogenization.¹⁵ The characteristic independence and completeness of the work of art, its »free floating« above every particular experienced reality is due to precisely this »constitutive homogeneity« of its elements, the fact that they are all permeated by the form so as to constitute a »homogeneous formation«, i.e. an »internally complete system«.¹⁶

In the second version of his *Ästhetik*, on which he worked between 1916 and 1918, Lukács describes this independency of the work of art on the basis of the »symbolic and formal«, aesthetic concept of »microcosm«.¹⁷ The work of art »is an integrated, complete and self-contained totality«,¹⁸ it is a

microcosm, the cosmic character of which [...] is revealed in the fact that all that is possible in respect of its constitutive principles matures in it as reality, [in the fact] that the categories ›possible‹, ›real‹ and ›necessary‹ lose their distinctive meaning in it through their complete identification.¹⁹

Lukács describes the totalization achieved by the work of art through another remark: »[T]he problem of the thing in itself cannot be posed in aesthetics«, as »the world of aesthetic forms does not emerge out of chaos, [...] their ›production‹ does not draw upon the chaos«.²⁰ In this view, the aesthetic sphere is not opposed to chaos, but to the »absolute nothing«, since what is not posited within the work of art is merely inexistent for it.²¹ On the contrary, what is contained in the work of art is embraced by a form, which

15 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 83, 85, translation K. K. In the original: »Standpunkt«.

16 All quotes from *ibid.*, pp. 57–58, translation K. K. In the original: »das Freischwebende«, »konstitutive Homogenität«, »homogenen Gebildes«, »abgeschlossenes und immanent vollendetes System«.

17 Cf. Lukács: *Heidelberger Ästhetik*, pp. 110–111, translation K. K. In the original: »symbolisch und formell«, »Mikrokosmos«.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 110, translation K. K. In the original: »in sich abgeschlossene, vollendete und selbstgenügsame Totalität«.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 100, translation K. K. In the original: »Mikrokosmos, dessen kosmischer Charakter [...] sich darin offenbart, daß alles, was von seinen konstitutiven Prinzipien aus möglich ist, in ihm zur Wirklichkeit reift, daß die Kategorien ›möglich‹, ›wirklich‹ und ›notwendig‹ in ihm den Sinn ihrer Unterscheidbarkeit durch vollendetes Identischwerden verlieren.«

20 *Ibid.*, p. 59, translation K. K. In the original: »daß das Ding-an-sich-Problem in der Ästhetik nicht aufwerfbar ist, daß die Welt der ästhetischen Formen sich nicht vom Chaos abhebt, daß ihr ›erzeugen‹ nicht auf das Chaos zurückgreift.«

21 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 61, translation K. K. In the original: »absolutes Nichts«.

has become the »form of a concrete content, i.e. it does not only elevate it on the level of validity, but it becomes hereinafter inseparable from it.«²²

In his early *Ästhetik*, Lukács explained that the principle of the »primacy of content« over the form, the demand for a »materially authentic« (materialecht) – i.e. materially adjusted – form, in other words, the postulate of overcoming the »abstract transcendence of form must itself bring the concept of form close to the aesthetic element«²³ and away from both, the allegorical formations of ethics and the formlessness of everyday life.

In fact, in the *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst* (1912–1914), Lukács explicated the structure of the aesthetic sphere in terms of the necessary chasm between the subjectivity of experience and the objectivity of the work of art as the realization of artistic form.²⁴ This chasm renders the communicative function of art impossible, according to which the artist purportedly discloses an experience of his to other subjects who receive and understand it. Thus, in the field of art the inadequacy between the communicative form and the experiential content that permeates human communication in general is simply repeated.

Nevertheless, the symbolic constitution of the work of art, to which I have referred above, could lead to the wrong conclusion that it represents the *most appropriate means for constituting trans-subjective validity* and, moreover, for conceptualizing the highest, metaphysical unity of the world. Of course, such a conjecture would automatically lead to an infringement of the Kantian autonomy of the work of art and to its mythologization. In the *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst*, this rejectable version of aesthetic philosophy is connected with the »expressive theory« (Ausdruckstheorie) of art.²⁵

As such cases Lukács considers Schelling's²⁶ and Hegel's²⁷ theories of art, to whose critique he dedicates long analyses in the chapter of the *Heidelberger Ästhetik* (1916–1918), characteristically entitled »Die transcendente

22 Ibid., p. 60, translation K. K. In the original: »Dadurch, daß die Form die des bestimmten Inhalts geworden ist, was soviel bedeutet, daß sie diesen Inhalt nicht nur zur Geltung erhebt, sondern von ihm nunmehr unabtrennbar wird [...]«.

23 Ibid., p. 172, translation K. K. In the original: »der Inhalt einen bestimmten Primat [...] besitzt«, »Eine solche Überwindung der abstrakten Transcendenz der Form muß schon an und für sich den Formbegriff dem Ästhetischen nahebringen«.

24 Cf. Wirkus: *Dialektik*, pp. 107–108.

25 See the first chapter of the *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst* with the characteristic title »Art as ›expression‹ [Germ. »Kunst als ›Ausdruck‹] and the forms of notification of experienced reality« (Lukács: *Heidelberger Philosophie*, pp. 9–41).

26 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 16, 36.

27 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 36.

Dialektik der Schönheitsidee.«²⁸ It is remarkable that in his Marxist opus magnum, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (1923), Lukács continues to consider the »truly critical, not metaphysically hypostatized artistic view of the world«²⁹ as the main opponent of the mythologizing interpretation of the principle of art, referring indeed to his essay on the relation of subject and object in aesthetics.³⁰

Whereas, as we saw above, for the critical approach art represents a world of fulfillment of man's longings, this does not entail the reduction of the distance between the work of art and the man of everyday experienced reality. As Lukács explained in his *Ästhetik*, despite its self-completion and self-containment, the work of art is finally nothing but the scheme of every possible misunderstanding, since its symbolic nature is only the other side of the fact that it cannot have the communicative function of transmitting experiential contents.³¹

In the *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst*, the idea of the misunderstanding of art nourishes Lukács's view on the tragedy of the artist, i.e. the view that artists finally remain without redemption and »more speechless [...] than everyday men who are trapped in themselves«, in spite of their attempt to express their most personal and individual experiences in a universal way.³² Thus, the deep »longing for community and unity with the others«,³³ for »overcoming isolation«,³⁴ cannot find a true solution in art. Despite the »coincidentia oppositorum« within the work of art, the relation

28 See Lukács: *Heidelberger Ästhetik*, pp. 133–224.

29 See Lukács: *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 215, n. 53 (»die wirklich kritische, nicht metaphysisch hypostasierte, künstlerische Auffassung der Welt«, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, p. 154, n. 2). When Lukács describes the principle of art as the »creation of a concrete totality that springs from a conception of form which is precisely oriented towards the concrete content« (ibid., p. 137; »das Schaffen einer konkreten Totalität infolge einer Konzeption der Form, die gerade auf die konkrete Inhaltlichkeit ihres materiellen Substrats gerichtet ist«, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, p. 151), while synoptically rejecting Schelling's intellectual-mythologizing method (cf. ibid., p. 215, n. 52 and 53; *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, pp. 154–155, n. 1 and 2) and making critical comments on the aesthetics of early German romanticism (cf. ibid., p. 215, n. 53; *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, pp. 154–155, n. 2), he simply repeats the conclusion of the sharp critique of the philosophical tendencies towards a metaphysical interpretation of the aesthetic principle he had formulated in his early *Aesthetic*.

30 See Lukács: *Subjekt-Objekt-Beziehung*. This essay is identical to the third chapter of the *Heidelberger Ästhetik* (see Lukács: *Heidelberger Ästhetik*, pp. 91–132).

31 Cf. Hoeschen: *Das ›Dostojewski-Projekt*, p. 183, 188.

32 Lukács: *Heidelberger Philosophie*, p. 80, translation K. K. In the original: »daß sie stummer, unausgesprochener bleiben als die in sich eingesperrten Menschen des gewöhnlichen Lebens«.

33 Ibid., p. 15, translation K. K. In the original: »tieferen Sehnsucht nach Gemeinschaft und Einheit miteinander«.

34 Ibid., p. 35, translation K. K. In the original: »Aufhebung der Isoliertheit«.

between art and ordinary empirical reality is finally »tragic«, given the fact that in art the »misunderstanding« that reigns in every communicative notification appears as »necessary, constitutive and, because of that, fruitful and blooming«. ³⁵

As has been aptly noted, »art transcends the alienation of life without abolishing it«, since it cannot »get rid of the inadequacy of interhuman communication which tends to isolate individuals«. ³⁶ We find the very same idea of an insuperable inadequacy in the *Heidelberger Ästhetik*, where Lukács describes the constitution of the normative subject of aesthetics in terms of the concept of pure experience, i.e. the specifically aesthetic-normative behavior of the subject vis-à-vis the aesthetic object, ³⁷ in which the normative subjectivity turns to the meaning, the value, without »losing its immediacy, its experiential character, its totality as an experiencing subject«. ³⁸ However, an abyss separates the pure experience of the internally homogenized, aesthetic »man ›wholly« (Mensch »ganz«) from the ordinary experience of the heterogeneous »whole man« (›ganzer Mensch«) of experienced reality. ³⁹

As has been noted in the relevant secondary bibliography, whereas from Lukács's peculiar neo-Kantian point of view the work of art can be regarded as a »theodicy that can give meaning to the dissonance, the irrationality of reality« by representing the complete unity of form and content, it nonetheless leaves »the subjects excluded from redemption«, a fact that defines its »luciferian traits«. ⁴⁰ Indeed, the homogenization of the experiential abilities of man »wholly« is internally linked with the luciferian (›luciferisch«) character of art, ⁴¹ i.e. with the misleading constitution of a utopian world that leaves the real, alienated world intact. ⁴²

35 Ibid, p. 74, translation K. K. In the original: »notwendig, konstitutiv und infolgedessen fruchtbar und blühend«.

36 Márkus: *Soul and Life*, p. 106.

37 See Hoeschen: *Das ›Dostojewski-Projekt*, p. 195.

38 Lukács: *Heidelberger Ästhetik*, p. 57, translation K. K. In the original: »darf dabei aber ihre Unmittelbarkeit, ihre Erlebnishaftigkeit, ihre Totalität als erlebendes Subjekt doch nicht verlieren«.

39 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 58. As Lukács explains, the »man ›wholly« means [...] a reduction of man's experiential possibilities to completely determined, and in this determination, homogenized, inner organs of the reception of the world«, through which »a world built in relation to those organs, internally formed into a totality, can come to life fulfilled in his experience« (›Der Mensch ›ganz« bedeutet dann eine Reduktion der Erlebnismöglichkeiten des Menschen auf ganz bestimmte und in dieser Bestimmtheit homogen gewordene innere Organe der Aufnahme der Welt [...], durch welche Reduktion eine in Bezug auf diese Organe aufgebaute, innerlich zur Totalität gefügte Welt in seinem Erlebnis erfüllt aufleben kann.«, *ibid.*, p. 100, translation K. K.).

40 Weisser: *Georg Lukács' Heidelberger Kunstphilosophie*, p. 170.

41 Lukács refers to the »luciferian« character of art at the end of the chapter on *Subjekt-Objekt-Beziehung* (cf. *ibid.*, p. 132).

42 See Čačinovič-Puhovski: *Lukács*, p. 65.

2. Lukács's Early Critique of Ethics

Already in his pre-Marxist period, Lukács repeatedly showed the limits of rationalist ethical philosophy. His critique can be summarized as follows: Even if ethics can internally transform the subject according to its formal standards, on the level of ethical praxis the alienation of the subjective forms from the merely given external reality of experience reaches its highest point. By definition the ethical subject has a contingent relation to the empirical world, which has the power to completely frustrate the purest ethical intents. This problem emerges in Lukács's early inquiries into different variations on the same basic theme, namely the insuperable opposition between the forms and life.

Firstly, in the essay on Kierkegaard from the collection *Die Seele und die Formen*, Lukács discusses Kierkegaard's »honest« and »heroic« attempt »to create forms from life«, »to live what cannot be lived«. ⁴³ Kierkegaard's gesture of appearing as a seducer by which he terminated his relationship with the much younger Regine Olsen is interpreted as »a movement which clearly expresses something unambiguous«. ⁴⁴ However, this ethical impulse towards the formation of life could only founder against the polysemous chaos of psychological experiences and opposing motives, the »most insubstantial [...] of all kingdoms [...], the kingdom of psychology«. ⁴⁵ The continually changing and chaotic character of psychic life does not allow for the unambiguous connection of a signifier or a sign to a specific experience. Thus, the intersubjective validity of actions and/or communicative forms is undermined. The form cannot impose itself on the chaotic material of empirical life; it can blossom only in the field of art, where the »material«, i. e. human psychology, is determined ad hoc by the artist. ⁴⁶

Secondly, similar reflections can be found in the essay *Von der Armut im Geiste* (1912). Here Lukács does not content himself with showing the necessary foundering of form against life, but also harshly critiques ethical formation itself. The ethical work, i.e. the realization of duty, expresses what is clear, which nevertheless presupposes »that everything that had tied it to the earth is cut away«. ⁴⁷ In fact, the constitution of the universal norms

43 Lukács: *Soul and Form*, p. 56 (»Formen schaffen aus dem Leben [...] leben, was man nicht leben kann«, *Die Seele und die Formen*, p. 88).

44 Ibid., p. 44 (»jene Bewegung, die das Eindeutige klar ausdrückt«, *Die Seele und die Formen*, p. 63).

45 Ibid., p. 56 (»und unter allen Reichen [...] das im Innersten Bodenlose [...] das Reich der Psychologie«, *Die Seele und die Formen*, p. 86).

46 Cf. *ibid.* (*Die Seele und die Formen*, pp. 86–87).

47 Lukács: *On Poverty of the Spirit*, p. 210 (*Von der Armut am Geiste*, p. 83).

of an ethics of the Kantian type demands abstracting from all content of empirical life. For most people fulfilling their duty may then represent the »only possible exaltation of their lives«,⁴⁸ but at the expense of blocking authentic human communication caused by the alienation of ethical form from the content of life. The »ethical work« is thus »a bridge that separates; a bridge upon which we go back and forth, always coming upon ourselves and never meeting one another«. ⁴⁹ Indeed, in his notes from this period Lukács referred to the inhuman character of Kantian ethics.⁵⁰

Finally, Lukács offers a more elaborate version of his early critique of ethics in his neo-Kantian *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst*. Here, the ethical sphere appears to be constituted through its separation from the so-called experienced reality of the subject, to which ethics must consequently return to actively intervene. According to Lukács, in opposition to the symbolic character of aesthetic formations ethics shows an *allegorical constitution*. As allegorical one should understand the inadequacy between the significance and the content which it organizes, i. e. the contingent and arbitrary relation between form and material. Thus, ethics

presupposes an alien and heterogeneous external world and a psychic reality that are confronted with its subject, the ethical-purified will, and it will be right to consider as inexistent anything that cannot be thought of as clearly opposite or as a mute obstacle to ethical action. For experience, however, all these will be present, and as they will – for experience – be inseparably mixed with the ethically precious and the ethically malefic, the ethical formations appear in experienced reality as inadequate, as external, in other words, as allegoric.⁵¹

As Lukács explains, the problem of ethics described in this quote does not pertain to the opposition between ethical norms and man's natural inclinations, but to the inertia of elements of life that, while remaining untouched by ethical decision, retain an indeterminate number of links with the subject and its life. Thus, the allegorical relation between the pure ethical form and the material of everyday life is a relation of total indifference and alienation.⁵²

48 Ibid., pp. 203–204 (*Von der Armut am Geiste*, p. 71).

49 Ibid., p. 204 (*Von der Armut am Geiste*, pp. 71–72).

50 Lukács: *Heidelberger Notizen*, p. 60.

51 Lukács: *Heidelberger Philosophie*, p. 86, translation K. K. In the original: »Diese setzt zwar eine ihrem Subjekt, dem ethisch-reingewordenen Willen, fremd und heterogen gegenüberstehende Außenwelt und seelische Wirklichkeit voraus, und wird mit vollem Recht alles, was nicht als dem ethischen Tun klar widerstrebend oder es dumpf hemmend gedacht werden kann, als nicht seiend betrachten. Für das Erleben aber wird all dies doch da sein, und da es – für das Erleben – mit dem ethisch Wertvollen und Wertfeindlichen unzerlegbar vermischt ist, erscheinen die ethischen Formungen in der Erlebniswirklichkeit als dieser unangemessen, äußerlich, mit einem Wort als allegorisch.«

52 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 85–86.

As in the case of the aesthetic sphere, the similar alienating consequences of ethical formalism are also criticised in *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*.

In fact, in concordance with his early views, in the section of the Reification essay on Fichte, Lukács briefly analyses how the inadequacy of form and content that characterizes the structure of the formal-rational relation of man and the world in general is repeated in the field of formalist ethical practice. As he points out, in Kant freedom is transformed into a ›point of view‹, from which the actions of the subject are considered. These same actions appear from another point of view, that of theoretical reason, as products of subjectively independent, objective laws. Thus, the dualism of freedom and necessity is reproduced on a higher level and this separation of the two principles is conveyed to the subject splitting it into phenomenon and noumenon.

Consequently, Kantian ethics relies on the pure rational form, while its content depends on a world of phenomena that is alien to it.⁵³ Ethics is, thus, obliged to find its content ready-made in the merely given reality.⁵⁴ A true way out of the vicissitudes of ethical formalism would presuppose the discovery of the »essence of the practical« that »consists in sublating *that indifference of form towards content*«. ⁵⁵ The distinctive characteristic of such a practical behavior is the fact that, instead of reproducing the given, it turns towards *changing the world*: »[T]he principle of the practical as the principle of changing the reality must be tailored to the concrete, material substratum of action, so as to affect it through its activation«. ⁵⁶ At any rate, this demand apparently lies beyond the scope of ethical practice.

3. Beyond Form: Lukács's Practical Mysticism

Clearly discerning the insuperable dualism of the ethical formation of the world, Lukács searched for a solution. He distinguished the first ethic, the ethic of rational forms, from a mystical second ethic. The first ethic includes the »authentic ethic«, i. e. the subjective ethics of the Kantian type,⁵⁷ as well as the Hegelian ethics of ethical life (*Sittlichkeitsethik*), i.e. the ethics of »rights

53 Cf. Lukács: *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 124–125 (*Geschichte und Klassebewusstsein*, pp. 137–138).

54 Ibid., p. 125 (*Geschichte und Klassebewusstsein*, p. 138).

55 Ibid. p. 126 (»das Wesen des Praktischen darin besteht: *die Gleichgültigkeit der Form dem Inhalt gegenüber* [...] aufzuheben«, *Geschichte und Klassebewusstsein*, p. 139).

56 Ibid. (»Das Prinzip des Praktischen als Prinzip des Veränderns der Wirklichkeit muß deshalb auf das konkrete, materielle Substrat des Handelns zugeschnitten sein, um infolge seines Inkrafttretens auf dieses in solcher Weise einwirken zu können.«, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 139).

57 Cf. Lukács: *On Poverty of Spirit*, p. 210 (*Von der Armut am Geiste*, p. 83).

and duties that are derived from an ethically internalized institution«.⁵⁸ In opposition to these two versions of ethical formation, the mystical »second ethic« totally overrides ethical forms. Even though it does not totally abolish them, it retains an »absolute priority«⁵⁹ over them.

For this »metaphysical ethics«⁶⁰ it becomes possible what for the first ethic is impossible: overcoming solipsism. The second ethic paves the way for authentic communication in the sense of a direct, unmediated contact of the souls. Therefore, it is characterized as the ethics of »soul-reality«, i.e. of that utopian situation which the young Lukács had planned to indirectly treat through the »formal analysis« of Dostoevsky's works.⁶¹ Lukács never wrote this book apart from its introduction, which he published in 1916 under the title *Die Theorie des Romans*. Relying on his notes for this book, it can be assumed that Lukács aspired to show that Dostoevsky can be read as the representative of a »new world« beyond the »age of absolute sinfulness«. ⁶² Dostoevsky's new world is precisely the utopian world of soul-reality.

In his short book on Béla Balázs of 1918⁶³ Lukács clarifies the significance of Dostoevsky's utopia of »soul-reality as the authentic reality«, ⁶⁴ delimiting it against the merely contingent, conventional-social engagement of man:

[P]ositing soul-reality as the only reality means a radical shift in man's sociological stance: on the level of soul-reality all these bonds through which soul was normally bound to its social position, class, origin, etc., are separated from it and in their place new, concrete relations between soul and soul are put. The discovery of this world was Dostoevsky's great achievement.⁶⁵

In Dostoevsky Lukács finds a world free of sociological and psychological determinations that keep human souls bound to meaningless, social-cultural »formations of the objective spirit«. ⁶⁶ He finds a world without the solipsism of ordinary psychic life and without that of the ethics of duty. This world

58 Lukács's letter to Paul Ernst (on 4 May 1915), in: Lukács: *Selected Correspondence*, p. 248 (*Briefwechsel 1902–1917*, p. 352).

59 Ibid.

60 Which Lukács announced in a letter to Paul Ernst, in March 1915, in: *ibid.*, p. 244 (*Briefwechsel 1902–1917*, p. 345).

61 Lukács: *Theory of the Novel*, p. 152 (*Theorie des Romans*, p. 168).

62 As Lukács calls the modern epoch of Western civilization, using a category of Fichte's philosophy of history (cf. Lukács: *Theory of the Novel*, pp. 152–153; »neue Welt«, »Epoche der vollendeten Sündhaftigkeit«, *Theorie des Romans*, pp. 167–168).

63 *Balázs Béla és akiknek nem kell*. The part of the text that interests us here was translated into German under the title »Béla Balázs: Tödliche Jugend« (see Lukács: *Béla Balázs*).

64 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 156.

66 Lukács's letter to Paul Ernst (4 May 1915), in: Lukács: *Selected Correspondence*, p. 247 (*Briefwechsel 1902–1917*, p. 352).

no longer depends on the power of the »bridge that separates«,⁶⁷ on the power of the ethical-practical (normative or conventional) form, which is totally overridden. In his eyes, the persons in Dostoevsky's novels are »nude concrete souls« due to a mystical »abolition of every form«.⁶⁸

However, in opposition to Eastern mysticism, in which the abolition of forms and the unification with the divine simultaneously entails the abolition of the concrete, finite relations between the souls, in Dostoevsky's world overcoming forms and approaching the »non-social, non-empirical level of the soul's arrival to itself« coincides with »a connection between people that is equally concrete with the empirical one; it is precisely [...] an authentic ›living life‹, because it is the immediately experienced connection of concrete souls with the absolute«.⁶⁹

The ›living life‹ represents the world of the realized ›second ethic‹. In this respect, the second ethic corresponds to a ›paracletic‹ (parakletisch) ethics of ›goodness‹. As has been noted, this is a »communitarian ethics of personality«,⁷⁰ in which every man's way to his own soul passes through his relation with the others. According to Lukács's typology of solidarity found in his notes on Dostoevsky, Russian solidarity – the model of his paracletic ethics – means that »the other is my brother; when I find myself, by finding myself, I find him«.⁷¹

In Lukács's notes on Dostoevsky, it becomes apparent that the second ethic stands in absolute opposition to the first ethic of the »formations of the objective spirit«, i.e. the ethic that makes them »thing-like and metaphysical«. However, given the fact that »only the soul can possess metaphysical reality«, the question is posed, what must be done when the duties imposed by the social formations oppose the »imperatives of the soul«.⁷² Then, every concession to the authority of the formations is a »deadly sin against the spirit«. It is the sin »of German thought since Hegel's time: offering metaphysical consecration to every power«.⁷³

The aim of Lukács's ethics was not to eliminate social formations in a society of immediate brotherhood, as a frequent critique contends.⁷⁴ Its aim was rather to change the relation of man to the institutions, to change the hierarchical order between the »rights and duties« stemming from the

67 Lukács: *On Poverty of Spirit*, p. 204 (*Von der Armut am Geiste*, p. 71).

68 Lukács: *Béla Balázs*, p. 156.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 157.

70 Fehér: *Scheideweg*, p. 311; Beiersdörfer: *Max Weber*, p. 83.

71 Lukács: *Dostojewski*, p. 181.

72 All quotes from: Lukács: *Selected Correspondence*, p. 248 (*Briefwechsel 1902–1917*, p. 352).

73 Lukács's letter to Paul Ernst (14 April 1915), in: *ibid.*, p. 246 (*Briefwechsel 1902–1917*, p. 349).

74 Cf., e.g., Arato/Breines: *Young Lukács*, pp. 70–71; Bermbach: *Aufhebung*.

institutions and the essential issues of the »soul« that always have priority.⁷⁵ Certainly, at the time of the First World War and the subsequent enormous increase in the power of oppressive institutions, the idea of their de-fetishization seemed particularly timely.⁷⁶

Lukács also recognized that in these conditions it had no meaning to merely suggest a utopian ethics as the solution to world problems. The utopian vision of a new community could at most function as a »mystical doctrine of community as a reflection of redemption«.⁷⁷ As soon as one acknowledges that »there is no immediate health of the spirit«,⁷⁸ the question of how to find an appropriate treatment must be posed.⁷⁹ From this question a further version of second ethics emerges. It is the ethics of a »new man«, of the »Russian revolutionary who is sacrificed in the Christian way«.⁸⁰ According to Michael Löwy, this is a variation of the Russian mysticism of the community that takes on the form of an »authentic atheism«: »The most interesting point here is that the highest expression of such mystical atheism is seen in the *Russian terrorist*«.⁸¹

Hence, Lukács poses the »ethical problem of terrorism«⁸² and its »peculiar dialectical complications«.⁸³ In terrorist action, we have »a new form of appearance of the old conflict between the first [...] and the second ethics« that calls for a new ethico-philosophical comprehension: Out of love for humanity, the »political man, the revolutionary« turns against the »jehovistic« formations – as Lukács calls the fetishized social institutions of the Greek-Western world –, in this case against the state, aiming to abolish it. However, for ethical reasons emanating from the higher second ethic, he is compelled to infringe the prohibition of murder: »Here the soul must be sacrificed in order to save the soul: One must become a cruel *Realpolitiker* out of a mystical ethic and has to violate the absolute commandment: ›Thou shalt not kill«.⁸⁴

75 Cf. Lukács: *Selected Correspondence*, p. 248 (*Briefwechsel 1902–1917*, p. 352).

76 Cf. Lukács's letter to Paul Ernst (14 April 1915), in: Lukács: *Selected Correspondence*, p. 246 (*Briefwechsel 1902–1917*, p. 349). During that time, Lukács strongly opposed chauvinism and militarism. In his letter to Ernst (4 May 1915) he characteristically noted that he considers »the modern practice of general conscription to be the vilest slavery that has ever existed« (ibid.; *Briefwechsel 1902–1917*, p. 352).

77 Lukács: *Dostojewski*, p. 182.

78 Ibid., p. 173.

79 Dannemann: *Prinzip*, p. 195.

80 Fehér: *Scheideweg*, p. 308.

81 Löwy: *Georg Lukács*, p. 119.

82 Lukács: *Selected Correspondence*, p. 245 (*Briefwechsel 1902–1917*, p. 348).

83 Ibid., p. 248 (*Briefwechsel 1902–1917*, p. 352).

84 All quotes from ibid. (*Briefwechsel 1902–1917*, p. 352).

Next to the »paracletic« a »luciferic« (luciferisch) variant of the second ethic emerges.⁸⁵ The »dialectical complication« that occurs in it refers to the tragedy of revolutionary action, to the sacrifice of the soul (»sacrificio del' anima«)⁸⁶ of the revolutionary, who is obliged to carry the burden of the guilt for acts of violence he performs for the sake of humanity. For, »[i]f the external shaping of the world has an ethical meaning«, then the problem of »ethical transcendence, political action« is posed.⁸⁷ But »one cannot act without sin (but even not acting is an act = sin)«. ⁸⁸ Therefore, sin is unavoidable, since the revolutionary is conscious of his responsibility for the pains of all others.⁸⁹ His choice retains all of its tragic character, given the fact that the luciferic second ethic does not rely upon an abstract ethical demand for subversive action that would make his responsibility for concrete persons a secondary issue.

In any case, Lukács knew that his luciferic second ethic revealed a significant inadequacy: It was not able to offer directions, nor credible roads to social change. As Dannemann notes, Lukács's ethic could not solve »the problem he had posed for himself, to reconcile the soul and the formations in a homogenous immediacy«. ⁹⁰ Neither paracletic goodness that remains within the inwardness of soul-reality nor the tragic activism of revolutionary goodness can achieve the harmonization of the subject with objectivity – they end up reproducing the »ubiquitous dualism between internal and external world«. ⁹¹

Lukács's notes include only two hints at a possible solution to this problem that foreshadow his subsequent intellectual development. Firstly, he transcribes a quote from the introduction to the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843–1844), in which Marx alludes to the truly revolutionary atheism and comments on it positively as »Russian Feuerbachism«, referring to the necessary »program: disillusion« that will make man turn from religion to his own powers.⁹² Secondly, he points to a way of transcending the unavoidable restrictions of ethico-philosophical reflection by noting

85 Cf. Lukács: *Dostojewski*, p. 176.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

89 Beiersdörfer highlighted the fact that this description of the »tragic« choice of the terrorist is unintelligible without involving Weber's notion of the ethic of responsibility (cf. Beiersdörfer: *Max Weber*, pp. 88–96).

90 Dannemann: *Prinzip*, pp. 196–197.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 197.

92 Lukács: *Dostojewski*, pp. 79–80, 128.

that the knowledge of the »true structure of objective spirit« depends on the philosophy of history: »here lies the significance of Marx«. ⁹³

4. Lukács's Turn to Revolutionary Praxis

In the years that followed the publication of *The Theory of the Novel* (1916), Lukács continued to discuss the problems of his second ethic in the »Sunday circle« he formed at the end of 1915. ⁹⁴ However, his public interventions in 1918 were confined to the frame of »progressive politics« with neo-Kantian fundamentals. This holds true for his »Contribution to a Discussion on Conservative and Progressive Idealism«, which he presented at a public discussion on progressive politics, organized by the Society of Social Sciences, in March and April 1918, in Budapest, ⁹⁵ as well as for his article *Bolshevism as a Moral Problem* (1918), which he published shortly before joining the Communist Party. In this article, he explicitly distanced himself from revolutionary action, arguing that it is humanly impossible to foresee all the ethical consequences of a violation of the rules of democratic politics. Thus, the revolutionary tactic for changing the world compels the individual to confront an »insoluble ethical problem« since it relies on the »metaphysical assumption that good can issue from evil«. ⁹⁶

Lukács's vacillation ended at the end of 1918, when he became a member of the newly founded Hungarian Communist Party. This shift ceases to seem so »sudden« ⁹⁷ if one takes into account that, in his notes on Dostoevsky, Lukács had already located the possibility of a mediation between revolutionary action and reality. In fact, following his note on the historico-philosophical knowledge of the objective spirit I alluded to at the end of the previous section, Lukács integrated revolutionary action and its tragedy into the wider framework of a *new concept of objectivity*, thus suggesting a new solution to the problem of human alienation.

Shortly after his engagement with the Communist Party, in the first months of 1919, Lukács developed relevant reflections in his essay *Tactics*

93 Ibid., p. 90.

94 On the »Sunday circle«, see particularly: Karádi: *Einleitung*, pp. 16–17; Bendl: *Zwischen Heirat*, pp. 36–37.

95 For the Hungarian Society of Social Sciences and its activity, cf. Kettler: *Culture*, pp. 41–47. For Lukács's intervention in this specific discussion, cf. Karádi: *Einleitung*, p. 19.

96 Lukács: *Bolshevism*, p. 220 (*Bolschewismus*, p. 33).

97 As was characterized by Anna Lesznai, a close friend of Lukács from the »Sunday circle«, in a private discussion with David Kettler (cf. Kettler: *Culture*, p. 69).

and Ethics.⁹⁸ Very briefly, here for the first time, Lukács introduces the concept of ›class consciousness‹ as that form of knowledge of the historical process in the framework of which »the subject and the known object are homogeneous in respect to their essence«. ⁹⁹ The so-called »historico-philosophical consciousness« is a kind of *practical knowledge* that pertains to the *tendencies* of class struggle, i.e. to the objective possibility of establishing an emancipated society.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, it is constituted on the basis of the Hegelian dialectic and has, thus, a holistic character.¹⁰¹ Whatever the inadequacies in the dialectical constitution of Lukács's early understanding of the historico-philosophical consciousness might be,¹⁰² it is clear that in the first months of 1919, he had already started to work out the basic idea of the theory of class consciousness he would develop in the following years.

However, in *Tactics and Ethics* the continuity to Lukács's early reflections on the ethical dilemmas of revolutionary action is apparent. In spite of the weight ascribed to the mediating historico-philosophical consciousness for choosing the right political engagement, Lukács equally emphasizes the question on the relation of »conscience« and the »sense of responsibility« of the individual with »the problem of the tactically correct collective action«. For Lukács, these two levels are closely interwoven, as taking the individual responsibility for the realization of the objectively possible utopian goal can be avoided no longer, »once the purely ethically motivated action of the individual brings him into the field of politics«. Then, »its objective (historico-philosophical) correctness«¹⁰³ must be judged on the basis of class consciousness that »must raise itself above the level of its merely real facticity and reflect its world-historical mission and the consciousness of its responsibility«. ¹⁰⁴

In view of the historico-philosophical consciousness, no one can avoid taking the responsibility for a possible new world, neither the one who is for the revolution nor the one who is for the perpetuation of the existing regime. Therefore, Lukács notes that moral conscience is confronted with the demand that the individual »must act as if the changing of the world's destiny

98 This text was initially published as a brochure of the commissariat of education (in which Lukács held the position of deputy commissar of the people) in May 1919, about two months after the proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic on the March 21 of the same year.

99 Lukács: *Tactics*, p. 15, n. 2 (*Taktik*, p. 58, n. 2).

100 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 9–10 (*Taktik*, p. 51–52).

101 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 19–24 (*Taktik*, pp. 63–64, 66–68, 70).

102 Commentators detect a one-sided emphasis on the voluntarist dimension of social change in Lukács's first Marxist texts. Cf. e. g. Schmidt: *Concrete Totality*, pp. 17–18; Arato/Breines: *Young Lukács*, pp. 85–88; Löwy: *Georg Lukács*, pp. 148–149, 173–174.

103 All quotes from: Lukács: *Tactics*, p. 7 (*Taktik*, p. 49).

104 *Ibid.*, p. 9 (*Taktik*, p. 51).

depended on his action or inaction«. ¹⁰⁵ Here, it is not difficult to recognize reflections formulated in the notes on Dostoevsky on the responsibility of everyone for all others, from which the revolutionary is not exempted, nor is it the social-democratic proponent of a gradual social change that would amount to the continuation of barbarism for an indefinite period of time. ¹⁰⁶

By taking recourse on class consciousness, Lukács reverses the »ethic of responsibility« we met in *Bolshevism as a Moral Problem*. The behavior that realizes imperatives derived from the historico-philosophical consciousness is now responsible and not the one that persists with abstract, universal duties within a given social-historical context. In the terminology of the notes on Dostoevsky, one could say that in the conflict between the first and the second ethic the primacy belongs to the latter. ¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, this does not mean that the use of violence is really »justified« on the level of the *individual ethical conscience* of the revolutionary. On the contrary, as is also the case in the »luciferic second ethic« of the terrorist, in the communist political engagement the individual confronts an authentically *tragic dilemma* to which it is compelled to answer through the sacrifice of its moral conscience for the sake of realizing the objectively possible, collective goal. ¹⁰⁸

Such reflections of the *individual moral decision* of the revolutionary were rapidly displaced by that part of the theory which already played the role of the mediating third between the ethical subject and reality: the theory of class consciousness. What remains from Lukács's early mystical ethics In *History and Class Consciousness* is only the conviction that the solution to the problem of alienation cannot be theoretical but only practical, in the sense of practically changing the social formations and man's relation to them. Only now, the issue is no longer about the individual, but the collective praxis; the only one that allows the possibility of a harmonization of subject and object, form and content, freedom and necessity. The mystical ethics has now been replaced by a theory of the conscious political practice of self-determination of a collective subject.

105 Ibid., p. 8 (*Taktik*, p. 50).

106 Cf. ibid. (*Taktik*, p. 50).

107 In his recollections from the time of the Soviet Republic, József Lengyel notes that, in the hotel in which the members of the revolutionary government stayed, the group around Lukács was known as the »ethicists«, who had long discussions – with references to Dostoevsky and Hebbel's *Judith* – on the idea that the communists' mission, like Judas, is to carry the sins of the world to save it from evil (cf. Lengyel: *Visegráder*, pp. 244–246; also: Kettler: *Culture*, pp. 75–76).

108 Cf. Lukács: *Tactics*, pp. 10–11 (*Taktik*, p. 53).

5. Conclusion: A New Concept of Form

With his turn to Marxism, Lukács definitely realized the inadequacy of *all* ethico-philosophical attempts to solve the problem of the indifference of social formations and conventions towards the individual subject. A radical philosophy of praxis would need another notion of practice, beyond individual ethical practice. The solution Lukács searched for lies beyond the problems raised in *Tactics and Ethics*; however in a direction that had already been opened up by this text: The dualism of ought and being can be overcome only through a holistic theory of social-historical reality in unity with a practice that »is in essence the penetration and transformation of reality«. ¹⁰⁹ This dual, theoretical and practical penetration of reality cannot be achieved by the individual subject, but only by »a subject which is itself a totality«. ¹¹⁰ This subject is the class.

Espousing the standpoint of class in matters of knowledge and practice presupposes a theory that stands in lively interaction with the ›historical-dialectical process‹. It is exactly this meeting of theory and history which is represented, according to Lukács, by Marx's conceptualization of man as »simultaneously the subject and object of the socio-historical process«, of man »as a social being«. ¹¹¹ This notion of historical materialism that being is the »hitherto unconscious product of human activity« ¹¹² is itself a historical product: It became possible for the first time in the capitalist epoch, when the postulate of the formal equality of men destroyed the previous ›natural‹ social bonds and, above all, gave birth to a new social class, the proletariat. ¹¹³ As Lukács notes elsewhere, »the proletariat is the first, and until now, the *only* subject in the course of history for which this perception is valid«. ¹¹⁴ Obviously, for Lukács after 1918, the holistic theory of *history and class consciousness*, tentatively crystallized in *History and Class Consciousness*, ¹¹⁵ was supposed to offer the resolution of the difficulties of the notion of form he had searched for in his pre-Marxist period.

109 Lukács: *History*, p. 39 (»ihrem Wesen nach ein Durchdringen, ein Verwandeln der Wirklichkeit«, *Geschichte*, p. 51).

110 Ibid. (»ein Subjekt, das selbst Totalität ist«, *Geschichte*, p. 51).

111 Ibid., p. 19 (»gleichzeitiges [...] Subjekt und Objekt des gesellschaftlich-geschichtlichen Geschehen. [...] als Gesellschaftswesen«, *Geschichte*, p. 33).

112 Ibid. (»bisher freilich unbewußtes Produkt menschlicher Tätigkeit«, *Geschichte*, p. 33).

113 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 19–20 (*Geschichte*, pp. 33–34).

114 Lukács: *Talism*, p. 53 (*Chvostismus*, p. 11).

115 For a thorough reconstruction of it, see: Kavoulakos: *Georg Lukács's Philosophy*.

References

- Arato, Andrew; Breines, Paul: *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism*. London: Pluto Press 1979.
- Asor Rosa, Alberto: *Der junge Lukács – Theoretiker der bürgerlichen Kunst*. In: *Lehrstück Lukács*. Ed. Jutta Matzner. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1974, pp. 65–111.
- Beiersdörfer, Kurt: *Max Weber und Georg Lukács. Über die Beziehung von verstehender Soziologie und westlichem Marxismus*. Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus 1986.
- Bendl, Julia: *Zwischen Heirat und Habilitation in Heidelberg*. *Jahrbuch der Internationalen Georg-Lukács-Gesellschaft* 1 (1997), pp. 17–45.
- Bermbach, Udo: *Die Aufhebung der Politik durch revolutionäre Philosophie. Überlegungen zu einigen frühen Schriften von Georg Lukács*. In: *Georg Lukács. Kultur-Politik-Ontologie*. Eds. Udo Bermbach, Günter Trautmann. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag 1987, pp. 156–176.
- Čačinovič-Puhovski, Nadežda: *Lukács in Heidelberg*. In: *Georg Lukács, ersehnte Totalität*. Eds. Gvozden Flego, Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik. Bochum: Germinal 1986, pp. 61–68.
- Dannemann, Rüdiger: *Das Prinzip Verdinglichung. Studie zur Philosophie Georg Lukács'*. Frankfurt/M.: Sendler Verlag 1987.
- Dannemann, Rüdiger: *Ursprünge radikalen Philosophierens beim frühen Lukács. Chaos des Lebens und Metaphysik der Formen*. »Jahrbuch der Internationalen Georg-Lukács-Gesellschaft« 10–11 (2007), pp. 41–55.
- Fehér, Ferenc: *Am Scheideweg des romantischen Antikapitalismus. Typologie und Beitrag zur deutschen Ideologieggeschichte gelegentlich des Briefwechsels zwischen Paul Ernst und Georg Lukács*. In: *Die Seele und das Leben. Studien zum frühen Lukács*. Eds. Agnes Heller et al. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1977, pp. 241–327.
- Grauer, Michael: *Die entzauberte Welt. Tragik und Dialektik der Moderne im frühen Werk von Georg Lukács*. Königstein: Anton Hein 1985.
- Hoeschen, Andreas: *Das »Dostojewski«-Projekt. Lukács' neukantianisches Frühwerk in seinem ideengeschichtlichen Kontext*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer 1999.
- Karádi, Éva: *Einleitung*. In: *Georg Lukács, Karl Mannheim und der Sonntagskreis*. Eds. Éva Karádi, Erzsébet Vezér. Frankfurt/M.: Sendler 1985, pp. 7–27.
- Kavoulakos, Konstantinos: *Ästhetizistische Kulturkritik und ethische Utopie. Georg Lukács' neukantianisches Frühwerk*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter 2014.
- Kavoulakos, Konstantinos: *Kritik der modernen Kultur und tragische Weltanschauung. Zu Georg Lukács' »Die Seele und die Formen«*. »Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie« 8/1 (2014), pp. 121–135.
- Kavoulakos, Konstantinos: *Ästhetizistische Kulturkritik. Literatur und Utopie in Lukács' »Entwicklungsgeschichte des modernen Dramas«*. »Jahrbuch der Internationalen Georg-Lukács-Gesellschaft« 14–15 (2015), pp. 211–231.
- Kavoulakos, Konstantinos: *Georg Lukács's Philosophy of Praxis. From Neo-Kantianism to Marxism*. London, New York: Bloombury 2018.
- Kettler, David: *Culture and Revolution. Lukács in the Hungarian Revolution of 1918–1919*. »Telos« 10 (1971), pp. 35–92.
- Lengyel, József: *Visegráder Strasse*. Berlin: Dietz 1959.
- Löwy, Michael: *Georg Lukács – From Romanticism to Bolshevism*. London: NLB 1979.
- Lukács, Georg von: *Die Subjekt-Objekt-Beziehung in der Aesthetik*. »Logos« VII (1917/1918), pp. 1–39.

- Lukács, Georg: *Die Theorie des Romans. Ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der großen Epik*. Berlin: Paul Cassirer 1920.
- Lukács, Georg: *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press 1971 (Lukács, Georg: *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein. Studien über marxistische Dialektik*. Berlin: Malik 1923).
- Lukács, Georg: *Tactics and Ethics*. In: Lukács, Georg: *Tactics and Ethics: Political Writings 1919–1929*. Ed. Rodney Livingstone. Trans. Michael McColgan. London: NLB 1973, pp. 3–36.
- Lukács, Georg: *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst (1912–1914) (Georg Lukács Werke. Vol. 16)*. Eds. György Márkus; Frank Benseler. Darmstadt, Neuwied: Luchterhand 1974.
- Lukács, Georg: *Heidelberger Ästhetik (1916–1918) (Georg Lukács Werke. Vol. 17)*. Eds. György Márkus; Frank Benseler. Darmstadt, Neuwied: Luchterhand 1975.
- Lukács, Georg: *Der Bolschewismus als moralisches Problem (1918)*. In: Lukács, Georg: *Taktik und Ethik. Politische Aufsätze I*. Darmstadt, Neuwied: Luchterhand 1975, pp. 27–33.
- Lukács, Georg: *Taktik und Ethik (1919)*. In: Lukács, Georg: *Taktik und Ethik. Politische Aufsätze I*. Darmstadt, Neuwied: Luchterhand 1975, pp. 43–84.
- Lukács, Georg: *The Theory of the Novel. A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*. Trans. Anna Bostock. London: Merlin Press 1978.
- Lukács, Georg: *Béla Balázs: Tödliche Jugend*. In: *Georg Lukács, Karl Mannheim und der Sonntagskreis*. Ed. Éva Karádi; Erzsébet Vezér. Frankfurt/M.: Sandler 1985, pp. 154–158 (*Balázs Béla és akiknek nem kell*. Gyoma: Kner 1918).
- Lukács, Georg: *Dostojewski. Notizen und Entwürfe*. Ed. J. C. Nyíri. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó 1985.
- Lukács, Georg: *Selected Correspondence 1902–1920*. Eds. and trans. Judith Marcus; Zoltán Tar. Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1986 (Lukács, Georg: *Briefwechsel 1902–1917*. Eds. Éva Karádi; Éva Fekete. Stuttgart: Metzler 1982).
- Lukács, Georg: *Chvostismus und Dialektik*. Ed. László Illés. Budapest: Áron 1996.
- Lukács, Georg: *Bolshevism as an Ethical Problem*. In: *The Lukács Reader*. Ed. Arpad Kadaray. Oxford, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell 1995, pp. 216–221.
- Lukács, Georg: *Heidelberger Notizen (1910–1913). Eine Textauswahl*. Ed. Béla Bacsó. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó 1997.
- Lukács, Georg, *Tailism and the Dialectic. A Defence of ›History and Class Consciousness‹*. Trans. Esther Leslie. London, New York: Verso 2000.
- Lukács, Georg: *Soul and Form*. Trans. Anna Bostock. Eds. John T. Sanders; Katie Terezakis. New York: Columbia University Press 2010 (*Die Seele und die Formen*. Berlin: Egon Fleischel & Co. 1911).
- Lukács, Georg: *On Poverty of Spirit. A Conversation and a Letter*. In: Lukács, Georg: *Soul and Form*. New York: Columbia University Press 2010, pp. 201–214 (*Von der Armut am Geiste. Ein Gespräch und ein Brief*, »Neue Blätter« II/5–6 (1912), pp. 67–92).
- Márkus, György: *The Soul and Life: The Young Lukács and the Problem of Culture*. »Telos« 32 (1977), pp. 95–115.
- Schmidt, James: *The Concrete Totality and Lukács' Concept of Proletarian Bildung*. »Telos« 21 (1975), pp. 2–40.
- Weisser, Elisabeth: *Georg Lukács' Heidelberger Kunstphilosophie*. Bonn, Berlin: Bouvier 1992.
- Wirkus, Bernd: *Zur Dialektik der Aufklärung in der Ästhetik. Struktur- und Methodenprobleme der Ästhetik Georg Lukács'*. PhD diss. Cologne: Faculty of Philosophy, University of Cologne 1975.