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ATTACK AGAINST THE ABSOLUTE: LUKÁCS AND HEIDEGGER*

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It was Lucien Goldmann who first presented the surprising and provocative thesis that there is a strict correlation between the philosophical development of Lukács and Heidegger. Goldmann's remarks, contained in the appendix of his book on Kant¹, amounted to two points: first, Lukács's collection of essays *Die Seele und die Formen* may be regarded as the foundation of modern existentialism in so far as it anticipates, and to a certain extent even works out, the later Heideggerian concepts of *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit*; second, the whole of *Sein und Zeit* is a hidden, and perhaps unconscious, polemic with Lukács's *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, a book considered by Goldmann as radically overcoming its author's earlier existentialism. Unfortunately, Goldmann never elaborated the subject in detail. His posthumously published book *Lukács and Heidegger*² contains no more than an introduction and a collection of lecture notes taken by students. In it, he examines almost exclusively the second point, next to neglecting the first. The question then is still open today, but I think that Goldmann's observations are fairly justified; moreover, books by Lukács and Heidegger published after Goldmann's death in 1970 seem to me to bring to light further evidence in favour of his thesis, making it, in the mean time, more complex and revealing new dimensions.

In what follows I propose to unfold in some detail the first of Goldmann's two points, and, in doing so, should like to refer it to the change of the intellectual and philosophical atmosphere that characterized the first decades of our century in Germany in Austria-Hungary.

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One of the central themes in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* is that traditional philosophy, in its description of man, operated with totally inadequate categories, such as "res cogitans", "reine Ich", "Bewußtsein überhaupt", "absolute Geist", etc. all of which refer to "fantastically ide-

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alized subjects"³ having in fact nothing to do with man's real being. His existential analytic, on the contrary, proposes to explore those very dimensions which remained hidden in the classical tradition, and which can, eventually, also account for the admission of these fictitious subjects. The being of man, *Dasein*, in sheer opposition to that of every other thing, is characterized by the fundamental fact that it is always his own. Man can however, and in fact often does, exist in such a way that his being is not his own. It is these two central modes of being that Heidegger calls authenticity and inauthenticity. Man always lives originally in an inauthentic way and reaches authenticity only in *Sein zum Tode* and *Entschlossenheit* (being-toward-death and resolute-decision). The concept of authentic existence is often explained by interpreters very rudely as something denoting a kind of aristocratic detachment from, and scornful contempt of, everyday life — something that a closer reading of the Heideggerian texts dismisses as wholly unfounded. Authenticity, in so far as it derives from inauthenticity, remains for ever bound to it; it is, as it were, blocked at half-way; authenticity, if I may use a paradox definition, is but the constant transition or passage from the inauthentic existence to the authentic, and not a kind of independent realm opposed to it. To put it roughly, authenticity consists in setting consciously a limit to one's manifold possibilities to be seen from now on against the background of his ultimate possibility, that is, death — a resolution which, once it has been taken, is capable of transforming one's life into a *whole* and lending it *selfhood*. (Ganzheit and Selbstheit). — The structure of authenticity contains then in Heidegger the mutually related elements of the whole or totality, and selfhood. *Sein zum Tode*, or more specifically, *Vorlaufen zum Tode* is the answer to the question of the whole, and *Entschlossenheit* to that of selfhood. The interrelatedness of the same structural elements in authenticity, and sometimes even the same terms, occur in the early work of Lukács.

The search for authentic existence, for selfhood, is the dominating theme of the most important essay in Lukács's *Die Seele und die Formen*, entitled "The Metaphysics of the Tragedy": "Die tiefste Sehnsucht der menschlichen Existenz ist [...] die Sehnsucht [...] nach seiner Selbstheit"⁴ — writes Lukács here and finds that only tragical heroes can reach it. In everyday life, we can read further, "gibt es keine Eindeutigkeit;" "im gewöhnlichen Leben erleben wir uns nur peripherisch [...] keine wirkliche Notwendigkeit hat hier unser Leben"; "im Leben kann nur die völlige Beschränktheit völlige Eindeutigkeit empfinden".⁵ The point of reaching one's own personality coincides, curiously enough, with a sort of de-personalization consisting in getting rid of, and leaving behind, the confused variety of psychological motives and properties so characteristic of people in everyday life. The abundance as well as the domination of individual habits, customs, inclinations, their determining role in the human relations of modern life, are seen by Lukács as a sign of decadence, dispersion, alienation. The realm of what he calls "psychology" or "empirical psychology" and its reflection in art, impressionism, is one of chaos which makes almost impossible for people to communicate among hem-

selves. In his aversion of psychogly, Lukács's attitude shows apparent parallels with the anti-psychologism of many contemporary thinkers, such as Husserl and Wittgenstein, and also Heidegger's central thesis is that psychology can by no means claim to be a leading science in the examination of man.

The concept which serves to Lukács to show the transition from inauthentic existence to *Selbstheit*, as well as to differentiate between the two modes of living, is that of *limit* (Grenze). Since inauthentic existence knows of no limits, it is no wonder that the moment in which the tragical hero finds himself, his own personality, is identical with his becoming conscious of his own unsurmountable limits. "Das Erleben der Grenze ist das zum Bewußtsein, zum Selbstbewußtsein Erwachen der Seele".⁶ It is the limit which gives the hero selfhood, and the limit in itself, Lukács, says significantly, is death. The limit however, explains Lukács, should not be conceived as merely external. "Die Grenze", he writes, "ist nur von außen ein begrenzendes Prinzip. Für die erwachte Seele ist sie das Erkennen des wahrhaft zu ihr Gehörigen."⁷ The limit is seen to be external only from the point of view of inauthentic man, for whom real existence, freedom, is but "die des Befreit-seins von allen Banden [...] von allem, was stark und von innen bindet"⁸. Becoming conscious of the limit is gaining a new and definite knowledge. In everyday life however, "die Menschen hassen das Eindeutige und fürchten es".⁹ — Apart from the apparent similarities with Heidegger's later analyses, here we come upon an identity in terminology, too. For one of the concepts used by Heidegger in his description of inauthentic existence, of *das Man*, is *Zweideutigkeit*.¹⁰

The word 'Grenze' rarely occurs in Heidegger, and when it does, it has different connotations. There is a concept, however, which bears the same methodological function and is elaborated in great detail: that of *finitude* (Endlichkeit). By way of illustration, let me quote just two examples: "Die ergriffene Endlichkeit der Existenz reißt aus der endlosen Mannigfaltigkeit der sich anbietenden nächsten Möglichkeiten des Behagens, Leichtnehmens, Sichdrückens zurück und bringt das Dasein in die Einfachheit seines Schicksals". "Nur eigentliche Zeitlichkeit, die zugleich endlich ist, macht so etwas wie Schicksal [...] möglich".¹¹ It should be noted too that the concept of *Schicksal* is also found in Lukács's essay "The Metaphysics of the Tragedy", and is reserved, just like in Heidegger, for the authentic way of existence. A further parallel is that both Lukács and Heidegger connect in their analyses authenticity and guilt.

The Lukácsian characterization of everyday life shows considerable resemblance to Heidegger's analyses of *Alltäglichkeit* and *das Man*. There is an important difference, however, between the vivid and pictorial style of the Lukácsian essays and the highly compressed phenomenological language of Heidegger. Considering their form, the Lukácsian essays may perhaps be best ranked as pertaining to what the English call 'criticism' that is to say, a critique of art and life at one and the same time. Describing *Alltäglichkeit*, Lukács does not stick to a single term; he uses expressions like 'gewöhnliche Leben', 'wirkliche Leben', or just 'Leben'. In a

subsequent work however, generally known as the *Heidelberg Aesthetics* written during the first World War but published only posthumously in 1974, we can find a rigorously philosophical — I should say the *first* properly philosophical — analysis of *Alltäglichkeit* fixed terminologically as *Erlebniswirklichkeit*. The description of the subject of *Erlebniswirklichkeit*, named also 'der ganze Mensch', within the framework of a Neokantian-Husserlian philosophical perspective, may be regarded as a mediating link between his earlier essays and Heidegger's analysis of *Alltäglichkeit*.

What is characteristic of the 'ganze Mensch', we can read here, is that "die Ausdehnung seiner Subjektivität ungehemmt und ins Schrankenlose gestattet [ist]"; "er als Subjekt einerseits ganz ohne gegenständliche Gebundenheit [...] ist, andererseits jedoch vollständig den Objekten seiner Erlebnisse ausgeliefert ist: er ist nur insofern als er an einem Objekt [...] etwas erlebt [...] Diese Doppelseitigkeit", Lukács concludes, "der schrankenlosen Willkür und der normenlosen Gebundenheit macht das Subjekt von sich aus [...] gestaltlos und verschwimmend".¹² 'Schrankenlose Willkür' and 'normenlose Gebundenheit' are the two opposed and yet closely connected poles of everyday existence in which, as he wrote earlier, everything is always possible because nothing is ever achieved, and inversely, nothing is ever achieved because everything is, and remains, always possible. And the adjectives 'gestaltlos' and 'verschwimmend' remind us of the world of *das Man* where everybody is somebody else and nobody is himself (Jeder ist der Andere und Keiner er selbst¹³).

In another collection of essays, *Aesthetic Culture*, Lukács writes that complete freedom is the most terrible bondage, the most cruel slavery, for one is at the mercy of what the ever changing instants happen to offer him.¹⁴ The dissolution of everything organic, everything which, as he writes, "von innen bindet" is the manifestation of freedom in the world of inauthentic existence: phenomena to which Heidegger applies the terms 'Bodenlosigkeit' and 'Zerstreuung'.¹⁵ Every kind of stability has disappeared from life, Lukács complains, and then it is no mere accident that authentic existence should reveal, on the contrary, stability. Heidegger also lays great emphasis on the stability of the self and, in his analysis of authenticity, of 'vorlaufende Entschlossenheit', he arrives at uniting the structural elements of 'Selbstheit', 'Ständigkeit' and 'Selbstständigkeit' in one of his typical and revealing neologisms: *Selbst-ständigkeit*, which he opposes to the 'Unselbst-ständigkeit' of *das Man* and the 'Beharrlichkeit' of things.¹⁶ Stability as an element is contained in the Lukácsian concept of *Grenze*, too. "[Die Seele] ist, weil sie begrenzt ist; ist nur weil und insofern begrenzt ist", he writes in 'The Metaphysics of the Tragedy', and in his dialogue on *Sterne* one of the protagonists says: "wir dürfen nie vergessen, daß es Grenzen in uns gibt, die nicht unsere Schwäche, Feigheit oder Empfindungslosigkeit [...] ziehen, sondern das Leben selbst. Unser Leben. [...] Wir fühlen: nur innerhalb dieser Grenzen liegt unser Leben und was außer ihnen ist, ist nur Krankheit und Auflösung. Die Anarchie ist der Tod. Darum hasse ich sie und bekämpfe ich sie. Im Namen des Lebens. Im Namen des Reich-tums des Lebens."¹⁷

The repugnance against the idea of man's becoming God, the idea of the infinite, the Absolute — an almost indispensable pre-requisite of classical philosophy — is an ever recurring theme in the texts of both thinkers mentioned thus far. Man, Lukács and Heidegger suggest, in order to be able to live and act *qua man*, should be finite and limited, and ought also to accept his finitude and limits in making them the conditions of his activity. "Nur für eine abstrakt absolute Idee des Menschen ist alles Menschliche möglich", Lukács remarks significantly, suggesting that those ideas contribute only to make him more and more rootless. The idea of a divine existence, when referred to man, becomes contradictory, he claims in quoting approvingly Paul Ernst: "Kann ich noch wollen, wenn ich alles kann [?]", and proceeds to ask: "Kann ein Gott leben?"¹⁸, meaning, of course, not the mere conceivability of the divine life, but this: could man, if he were unlimited, still live; that is to say, have aims and realize them? Does not perfection make every active existence impossible? And the answer, clearly suggested but not provided by Lukács himself, may be given by Wittgenstein's words: "Not only is there no guarantee of the temporal immortality of the human soul", he writes, "[...] but, in any case, this assumption completely fails to accomplish the purpose for which it has always been intended. Or is some riddle solved by my surviving for ever? Is not this eternal life as much of a riddle as our present life?"¹⁹ — Mentioning Wittgenstein, whom in fact I have often had in mind when preparing this contribution, I think it is needless to dwell upon the central role which 'Grenze' and other similar concepts have both in the *Tractatus* and in his later work, and also upon his constant refusal of the idea of man's unlimited autonomy. In the above formulation Wittgenstein plainly turns the fundamental question upside down. And also Heidegger thinks that the question primarily to be answered is *not* why man is finite and not infinite, or whether and how he can ever attain to the infinite, but rather: why, under what conditions man, who is originally and definitely finite, comes to ask the question concerning the infinite and whether, to put it bluntly, the form of life it suggests, the constant pursuing of the infinite, lends him selfhood or not.

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That is the new starting point of philosophy, which may both transcend and comprehend in itself the perspective of classical philosophy: overcome its restrictions and still not break with it totally. The question concerning the Absolute does not have to be wholly dispensed with as if it were a mere historical relic; nor, for that matter, has it to be uncritically accepted as a necessary and quite natural question philosophies of all times should ask. It may be preserved, but in any case, the occasional shifts of meaning which it may have undergone from an age to another are to be taken into account. Seen in this light, I think it would be too much to say that the attack launched against the Absolute should imply a radical break with it: it means rather, it seems to me, an abandonment of its old concept and the elaboration of a new one. For not only is the concept of finite authen-

tic existence a rival of that of the Absolute, but is, for this very reason, a new concept of it.

What is the reason, we might ask finally, why these important thinkers made an attack against *that* idea of the Absolute — an idea which, eventually, kept the previous century under its spell? The obvious answer would be to say that the reason is that the hopes and expectations connected to it had not, or had only partially, come true. But I think it would be also true, or perhaps truer, to say that the change of the intellectual atmosphere in Austria — Hungary and in Germany is due to the fact that those ideas *did* come true, and in doing so, revealed their internal contradictions, and also turned, finally, into their opposite. The idea of total freedom e.g., when put into practice, turned out to be a world of inauthenticity, mediocrity, an ever growing mechanization of life, a world 'of das Man' — the very opposite of what was contained in the idea. It is the diagnosis of this fact, the elaboration of concepts for its comprehension, as well as of a philosophical perspective for a new understanding of man and his world that these thinkers accomplished — a perspective which was itself to be subject to various transformations in their subsequent philosophical thought.

NOTES

¹ L. Goldmann, *Mensch, Gemeinschaft und Welt in der Philosophie Immanuel Kants. Studien zur Geschichte der Dialektik*. Zürich/New York: Europa Verlag, 1945, 241 ff. In the French edition of the book, Goldmann omitted this appendix (*La Communauté humaine et l'Univers chez Kant*. Paris: P. U. F. 1948.).

² L. Goldmann, *Lukács et Heidegger*. Fragments posthumes établis et présentés par Youssef Ishaghpour. Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1973. English translation: *Lukács and Heidegger. Towards a New Philosophy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.

³ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*. Fünfte, an Hand der Gesamtausgabe durchgesehene Auflage mit den Randbemerkungen aus der Handexemplar des Autors im Anhang. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1979, pp. 22, 92ff., 229.

⁴ G. Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen*. Neuwied und Berlin: Luchterhand, 1971 (first edition: Berlin: Egon Fleischel, 1911.) p. 233.

⁵ *ibid.* 61, 224f.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 231.

⁷ *ibid.* p. 232.

⁸ *ibid.* p. 249.

⁹ *ibid.* p. 220.

¹⁰ *Sein und Zeit*. op. cit. §. 37. p. 173f.

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 384., p. 385.

¹² G. Lukács, *Heidelberger Ästhetik (1916–1918)*. Aus dem Nachlaß herausgegeben von György Márkus und Frank Benseler. Georg Lukács, Werke, Band 17. Darmstadt und Neuwied. Luchterhand Verlag, 1974. p. 34.

¹³ *Sein und Zeit*. op. cit. p. 128.

¹⁴ Lukács, „Eszttétikai kultúra”. In: Lukács, *Ifjúkori művek (1902–1918)*. ed. Timár Árpád. Budapest: Magvető, 1977. p. 425. (First edition: *Eszttétikai kultúra*. Budapest: Atheneum, 1913.)

¹⁵ *Sein und Zeit*. op. cit. see for example pp. 21, 178., 389ff.

¹⁶ *ibid.* § 64. pp. 316–323.

¹⁷ *Die Seele und die Formen*. op. cit. p. 231 and p. 185.

¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 231.

¹⁹ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. 6. 4312.