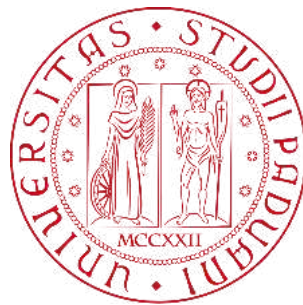**UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA**

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, LAW
AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

**Master's degree in
European and Global Studies**

Founding the Social: The Role of Subjectivity in Lukács' Ontology and Ethical Project

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List of Abbreviations

BMP Bolschevism as a Moral Problem

HCC History and Class Consciousness

TE Tactics and Ethics

Ontologie Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins [Original German Version]

Ontology The Ontology of Social Being [English Translation]

Introduction

György Lukács is one of the most prominent philosophers of the 20th century and one of the founders of Western Marxism. His insight into Marx's most pressing philosophical aspects, as presented throughout his work, including his *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins* [The Ontology of Social Being], has been highly regarded as an essential part of Marxist literature. Beyond that, and during his later years, he embarked on the ambitious task of presenting a coherent ethical project using some of the ideas of figures like G. W. F. Hegel and Marx himself as a foundation. Such a project is essential for two reasons. In the first place, it is meant to theoretically present, in a unitary manner, the convergence between the social (in its political form) and ethical aspects of Marxist theory. Second, it intended to give an ontologically-founded ethical view. Thus, by analysing the work of Lukács in the context of his unfinished ethical project we can gain a deeper understanding of the workings of ethical theory in a Marxist framework. Moreover, his timeless idea of the unitary foundation of ethics and politics remains relevant in an era in which the separation between these two dimensions is taken for granted.

Lukács' task of writing an ethical theory had to be grounded on a strong ontological system that served as the basis and framework where ethical concepts could be developed. His interest in presenting a sound ethical view had already been evinced in the development of his aesthetics. Additionally, his work *History and Class Consciousness* (HCC) already introduces the philosophical nomenclature, as pointed out by Antonino Infranca et al. (2019), that will set the ethical question in the context of the social. In order to ontologically ground his Ethics, Lukács presents labour [Arbeit] as an original phenomenon that serves as the activity for the creation of the social dimension. The "original act of labour", which every other human activity reproduces, follows the model structure of teleology, i.e. the idea that things or actions have an end purpose or goal. This characteristic of labour embodies the ontological idea that certain categories and structures of man's everyday life gain relevance in their historical and dialectical interpretation where human progress is the result of the goal-setting act of labour. As an original phenomenon, labour presents the only real teleological model as it presents the

most basic and fundamental interaction between man and nature: labour is the activity through which the materialisation of consciousness is carried out. In such an interaction the abstract intentional concept is transformed into an object through the manipulation of nature; it is the moment in which the ideal becomes material reality. Following the dialectic of labour, there is an important role for intentionality and the subject in the formation of social relations. As an activity that connects human consciousness with material reality, an analysis of the activity of labour exposes the tension between the individual and the collective. It emerges, in other words, the tension between the mechanics of the interaction between the individual teleological act of positing a goal and its further collectivisation. As a consequence, the role of concepts like "individuality", "subject", and "collectivity", extends beyond their mere act of labour to an understanding of the workings of other types of social interaction that emerge from it, expressed in the adoption and assimilation of rules within social relations and structures. Thus, any inquiry into possible Marxist ethics developed by Lukács must consider the foundational character of labour and its role in the emergence of normativity. Additionally, such an inquiry must be able to clarify the aforementioned tension between the individual, expressed through an account of what the subject is, and the collective. This task is fundamental to setting a coherent foundation for the unity of the social and ethical dimensions. To achieve this, this thesis will focus on a primary question:

Q1: "What is the role, in Lukács, of intentionality and subjectivity in Marxist ethics?"

This thesis aims to analyse, firstly, the place of intentionality and subjectivity in an ethical theory that fits Lukács' foundational framework. For this, we will take a closer look at the foundational ideas that inspired him. Looking at the works of Hegel and Marx, in addition to Lukács' core philosophical texts, we intend to specify and analyze the place that intentionality and the subject have in his system. Since Lukács could never finish his project of writing his Marxist ethics, the shape and structure of an ethical theory would involve some level of speculation. This implies, additionally, speculating over the specific mechanics of his ethics as grounded in the activity of labour. In the spirit of maintaining fidelity to his writings and aiming to set the

framework for his ethical views, we will explore the idea presented by Titus Stahl (2019) regarding the claim that *all* social normativity, and not just what could be termed as "political normativity", rests on labour. Stahl presents that a possible way of understanding the foundational role of labour in social normativity is through the development of a social pragmatism of linguistic meaning, as presented by Robert Brandom (1994, 2009, 2009). From this perspective, the standards of correctness set by the dynamics of labour and expressed through conceptual resources would be passed, by labour's original role, into other types of social interactions. Although Stahl's ideas are promising for getting a deeper understanding of the mechanics of Lukács' ethics, this thesis intends to go slightly beyond that and additionally explore David Copp's (1995, 2007, 2009) ideas on society-centred normativity. The reason for this is that Brandom's and Copp's theories about normativity and meaning, although diverse in scope, are able to capture one of Lukács' fundamental ideas, viz. The importance of society in the formation of the individual in the context of his concept of totality. By analysing Lukács' ethics with these works in mind we can get a deeper understanding of the possible mechanics of his theory, deepening even further the explanation of the role of the subjectivity. Thus, the thesis intends to answer a secondary research question:

Q2: "How does a society-centred theory of normativity complement Lukács' framework on the foundation of moral normativity?"

From this question, it remains to be seen whether the normative rules derived from the dynamics of labour can fully comprehend the nature of the moral phenomenon. After this, the role of intention and the subject in Lukács' Marxist ethics can be better assessed.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 intends to set the ontological basis of Lukács' framework. It starts by exploring the philosophical foundations of labour through a Hegelian and Marxist lens, focusing on the role of teleology in shaping human praxis. It outlines Lukács' teleological framework, discussing how Hegel and Marx, as precursors of Lukács' ideas, conceptualize the relationship between purpose and reality, particularly in the context of labour. The chapter then differentiates between

three forms of being: inorganic, organic, and social being and the role of labour as the phenomenon that connects these forms, especially through its transformative impact on both nature and society. Additionally, the relationship between subject and object in the act of labour is examined, emphasizing how labour is a defining element of human society and its evolution.

Having presented the basic nomenclature of Lukács' philosophy, Chapter 2 presents his ideas about Ethics, in the context of his original thoughts about the tension between the means used for achieving a revolutionary goal and morality. It introducesLukács' early ideas about morality, grounded in the realities of social and historical conditions of his time. This sets the context to understand how normativity arises in his framework, as morality is an eminently normative phenomenon. Thus, the Chapter then explores how labour forms the foundation of social normativity, suggesting that ethical principles and values arise from human activity and teleological positing. Through labour, humans create the social structures that give rise to shared norms and values, at the times that set the paraments of valuation for human action.

Lukács' concept of the *subject* is also analyzed, emphasizing how individual subjects are shaped by their involvement in collective labour and social life. The concept of totality is presented as one of the core elements of Lukács' framework that explains the interconnectedness between the elements of his system. The chapter also discusses how there is not a clear concept of individuality in Lukács, framing the subject within the broader context of social interdependence.

Finally, in Chapter 3 we examine the transition from social normativity to its concrete instantiation in morality. The idea that morality possesses a special normative force, diverse from other sources of normativity, is put into question. This gives the framework to assess in which way moral normativity should be treated in the context of Lukács' writings. By rejecting that morality possesses a "special dignity" to it, we are better positioned to give an account of moral normativity emerging from the original act of labour. The chapter then presents Brandom's and Copp's approaches to normativity. A general exposition of the key aspects of both society-centred accounts is given. This

aims to set the structure for a better understanding of the possible mechanics of Lukács' theory. work of social and historical processes.

The last section of Chapter 3 is dedicated to answering the questions posited for this thesis. By briefing and summarising some of the exposition carried out in the previous chapters, we discussed what the role of the individual is in Lukács' ethics. It discusses how intentional actions by individuals, viewed through the lens of Marxist theory, contribute to the development of ethical norms and values. The analysis highlights how Lukács integrates the idea of human agency and purposeful action into his understanding of ethics, emphasizing the connection between individual intentions and collective societal values. Finally, some possible mechanics of Lukács' ethics are discussed in light of the previous exposition of the society-centred theories of normativity.

Chapter 1: Founding the Social: Ontology

1.1 The Hegelian and Marxist Framework: Teleology

Considered by many as one of the founder figures of critical theory and Western Marxism, György Lukács expanded and reformulated some of the ideas developed by Karl Marx and, at a foundational level, G. W. F. Hegel. Lukács greatly developed a critique of the Marxist concept of "reification" at the time that offered an interpretation of Marxism as a self-conscious transformation of society (Stahl, 2023). His philosophical project, vast in the areas of aesthetics, ontology, and history of class consciousness, owes greatly to the previous ideas developed by the two aforementioned philosophers. Thus, when reading Lukács's work, it is clear from the outset that Hegel's influence on it is fundamental to the development of his philosophical positions. It is not contingent that the first book of his *Ontology* is completely dedicated to analyzing Hegel's system. The assessment, spanning from Hegel's ideas on morality to his view on history, pays special attention to the idea of totality as being grounded in history not just as being constituted by acts of individuals but a whole realization with an ontological goal with logic as its framework (Ontology I, p. 11).[1] Thus, Lukács recognizes Hegel's philosophical achievements in the ideas that ground the general framework later to be reformulated and used by himself. This is evinced in his Ontology as Lukács' recognition and distinction of the "real" and "false" ontology presented in Hegel's system. While the real Hegelean ontology, i.e. the right way of understanding reality, interprets historically human events and categories from everyday life, the false ontology transforms and organizes these categories in idealist terms, in contrast with a materialist understanding of such categories (Infranca et al., 2019).

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[1]   For citation purposes, and due to the lack of a complete publication of Lukács' writings in English we will refers to his main work, *The Ontology of Social Being*, in two ways. We will refer to this work in its English version as *Ontology*, specifying the volume being cited. Otherwise, we will cite his work as *Ontologie* when referring to the original German version that does not have an equivalent in English. For non-citation purposes, we will refer to this work simply as *Ontology*.

One of the most profound and pervasive concepts developed by Hegel, but that found criticism in Lukács' work,   is the notion of teleology. The consequent Marxist reassessment of this concept, in its influence on the understanding of labour as an original phenomenon, attracted Lukács to his enterprise to overthrow Hegelian philosophy (ibid). Lukács' use of the Hegelian dialectic to make sense of historical progress and his rejection of the teleological structure to the subordination of logic as an idealist perspective gives the essential foundation for developing his philosophical position. While Hegel developed a conception of teleology as determined and transformed by idealist terms, the Marxist turn in the materialist interpretation of the concept found a follower in Lukács   (ibid).   The root of Hegel's teleological interpretation of history lies in his abandonment of the idea of egoistic reason as developed by the Enlightenment. He presented the contradiction of the conception of mind as rooted in the relation between mind and society (Ontology I, p. 24). From this perspective, Hegel's idea of reason is an instrumental element crucial for human self-consciousness and autonomy. Reason, for Hegel, is not static but evolves through historical development and it drives historical progression, leading to advancements in knowledge, culture, institutions, and ethical ideals (Infranca et al., 2019) Regarding this, Hegel says "The consciousness which is this truth has this path behind it and has forgotten it, and comes on the scene immediately as Reason; in other words, this Reason which comes immediately on the scene appears only as the certainty of that truth. Thus it merely asserts that it is all reality, but does not itself comprehend this; for it is along that forgotten path that this immediately expressed assertion is comprehended." (Phenomenology of Spirit, 233)

According to Infranca et al. (2019) the renewed Hegelian understanding of reason greatly influenced Lukács as the concept of "cunning reason" (List der Vernunft) allows to dialectically explain the transformation of means and objects through labour, i.e. it helps to give a historical explanation and aim to human affairs in the wide context of reality. Thanks to this, a dialectical understanding of history is possible, in which Hegel cleverly understands social-historical progress as a processual totality structured by contradictions, highlighting the objectivity of social reality (Stahl, 2019). This objective understanding of reality is foundational for developing Hegel's view.

Philosophically understood, a teleological grasp of a phenomenon involves an explanation of the phenomenon itself by highlighting the function or end (telos) of the phenomenon itself. In the case of Hegel, teleology is fundamental for understanding history and the role of individuals in it. For him, teleology presupposes the existence of a concept or judgment that is presented in reality, he says "The connection of purpose is therefore more than judgment; it is the syllogism of the self-subsistent free concept that through objectivity unites itself with itself in conclusion." (Science of logic, 12.159). How Hegel conceives teleology is closely linked to historical progress and human development through self-consciousness, as the *telos* of historical progress are subordinated to the structure of logic, thanks to which dialectical process takes place (Redding, 2020). Hegel sees teleology as divided into three moments: the position of the subjective purpose, the investigation of the means to accomplish such purpose, and the purpose achieved, with consequent preservation of the means used (Infranca et al., 2019, p.). The philosopher describes teleology as "the subjective concept, but posited as referring in and for itself to the objectivity, as purpose." (Science of Logic, 12.132) The increased awareness of mankind and the contraposition of ideas in the course of history are essential traits of Hegel's teleological understanding of the world as they present the general dialectical structure that helps explain the present, future, and past as entangled elements leading to an ultimate resolution. As a consequence, Hegel's views about the role of teleology in the development of human history and the history of the world are inherently linked to his views about the nature of the world and reality, i.e. teleology is an essential aspect of his ontology. This aspect of Hegelian philosophy is adopted and praised by Lukács as it grounds the essence of reality in a dialectical process, as Hegel also recognizes the essential role of labour. Hegel sees labour as a crucial component within reality's teleological framework. Human labour, according to him, is not merely a mechanical function but an active force that shapes and modifies the environment toward specific aims or objectives. This labour process embodies purpose and direction, illustrating Hegel's belief in the teleological essence of human affairs. Thus, Hegel's rejection of assessing history as individual teleological acts individuated by labour leads to a view about a broader evolution of human societies. According to Lukács, Hegel interprets history as a deliberate unfolding where each

developmental stage (thesis) naturally gives rise to its negation (antithesis), ultimately leading to a higher synthesis. This dialectical progression is possible thanks to human labour and its transformative impact on social frameworks, institutions, and conceptual paradigms. About this, Lukács says that Hegel "discovered labour as the principle which expresses the genuine form of teleology, the positing and actual realization of the end by a conscious subject; on the other hand, this genuine ontological category is structured into the homogenous medium of a system dominated by logical principles." (Ontology, p. 53); an idea that he will end up rejecting in favour of a Marxist interpretation.

Lukács attributes Hegel's discovery of the teleological nature of the labour process, yet criticizes him for overextending this teleological framework beyond labour. About this, Lukács says that for Hegel

> genuine ontological relationships only find their adequate mental expression in the forms of logical categories, while on the other hand these logical categories are not conceived simply as determinations of thought, but must be understood as dynamic components of reality (Ontologie 1, p. 20-21).

For Lukács, Hegel is faulted for universalizing teleology through his logical system, where he presents the concept in broad, all-encompassing terms. According to Lukács, Hegel's contribution lies in recognizing labour as the primary expression of teleology, showcasing how a conscious subject posits and achieves an end. However, Hegel's philosophical system integrates this genuine ontological category into a logical framework, thereby diluting its specificity and embedding it within a uniform medium governed by logical principles (Smetona, 2019). At this point, Lukács turns to Marx for a reevaluation of the shape of teleological positing. Lukács initiates his exploration of Marx by highlighting his lack of a distinct ontological framework, as Marx never directly dealt with ontological inquiries on their own terms. The primary reason for this absence is Marx's adoption of Hegel's framework and his subsequent inversion of Hegel's dialectical method, which eliminates the subordination of ontology to logic and refrains from extending teleology beyond labour (Ibid). Nevertheless, Marx's rejection of Hegel's hierarchical arrangement of ontology under logic leads to a pivotal shift in

understanding the dialectics of history. In Marx's new materialism, social reality becomes the main criterion for evaluating the existence or absence of a phenomenon. This perspective highlights concreteness in understanding forms and relationships, a significantly different interpretation from the abstract and idealist nature of Hegel's system. Despite Marx and Lukács inheriting elements from Hegel, Marx's unique ontological foundation in human life's production and reproduction (particularly in labour) emerges as the crucial cornerstone for Lukács' ontology (ibid). This emphasis on labour signifies Lukács' prioritization of labour as the fundamental basis, a perspective that will be elaborated upon further in his writings and that, as I will elaborate later in this thesis, will be pivotal for the further development of his project of Marxist ethics.

Lukács' turn to concreteness by embracing Marxist understanding of teleology allows him to present the *telos* of human advancement in the context of a broader Hegelian ontological foundation. An important and additional point worth mentioning concerning these ontological aspects is the Hegelian interpretation of the advancement of being, closely linked to his teleological understanding of reality and his philosophy of nature, in the historical process (Skomvoulis, 2019; Tertulian, 1988). This aspect is fundamental for contextualizing Lukács' grasp of social being and its constitutive aspects. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel's emphasis on the objectivity of reality is divided, despite constituting a totality, into three main spheres: the inorganic realm, the organic realm, and the societal realm (Hegel, 1979). Although these domains exhibit discontinuities, they also exhibit essential continuities. The emergence of the organic realm from interactions within the inorganic realm, and subsequently the societal realm from both, illustrates this progression. Moving from one domain to another ontologically necessitates retaining the categories of the prior domain while simultaneously transcending it qualitatively (Ibid). In ontological development, if biological reproduction stands out as a novelty compared to the inorganic realm, its processuality can only unfold through internal and external interactions with this preceding realm. Likewise, the emergence of societal existence introduces the novel ability to reproduce through teleological actions, yet this reproduction is contingent and

can only occur due to the continuities shared by the societal realm with the preceding two ontological domains (Van der Laan, 2019).

This framework on the advancement and development from inorganic to social beings gives Lukács an additional element to his ontological framework. Nevertheless, Lukács approaches social ontology differently from Hegel. While he shares an interest in presenting a naturalistic perspective, Lukács directs his focus toward understanding how social institutions and activities relate to a larger context of human interaction with the environment. Lukács aims not only to explore the metaphysical aspects of groups and different forms of collective intentional actions but also to explain how nearly all activities within a developed society are interconnected within a network or "totality." This network is deeply rooted in the deliberate engagement of humans with their natural surroundings (Stahl, 2019). As a consequence, Lukács' account of the development of the different modes of being deserves special attention as it further positions his views on the social being in an ontological framework.

1.2 Inorganic, Organic, and Social Being

Before dwelling into the core aspects of Lukács' philosophy it is necessary to take a closer look at his borrowed notion of the development of being, derived from his readings on Marx and Hegel. As the end of the previous section anticipated, a proper understanding of the social being must start from an interpretation of the different modes of being found in the total reality.

Lukács' philosophy and framework are meant to give a unified explanation of nature and reality. His deviation from the Hegelian idealist perspective leads him to deny a "hierarchical" ontological view in which the material world is preceded by a transcendental or spiritual sphere (Vellay, 2019). To give an explanation of reality means, for Lukács, to present an account of the world that acknowledges the differences found in the natural beings while including the "less natural" realm of the social. Additionally, his disagreement with the analytic philosophical tradition, seeking to explain and give an account of human affairs through an analysis of language, led

Lukács to direct his efforts into broadening our understanding of the social realm. For this, he needed to introduce the three modes of being that need to be taken into account to elaborate on the general problems of the social being. Thus, his enterprise of writing an ontology of the social being involves, as it has been implied, presenting the relationship between natural and social ontology (ibid).

Lukács materialist ontology is articulated around the central category of being while the notion of necessity, previously presented by Hegel in the context of a totality determined by logic, is abandoned. It is in this context that Lukács manages to turn his ontological foundations to Marxism aiming to show the operations of the social being while emphasizing the emergence of consciousness and, more specifically, individuality (ibid). The dynamics of the relationship between nature and the social involves an explanation of the relationship between a natural world, dominated by causal connections, and the social world in which we see the emergence and primacy of a *telos*. In the words of Lukács: "A real ontology of social being is not possible without a correct contrasting of natural causality and labour teleology, without the presentation of their concrete dialectical interconnections" (Ontology 1, p. 53-54). The reason for this necessity lies in the aforementioned deviation of the Hegelian idealist teleology, which sets the need for Lukács to place que *quid* of the social world in something else than logic. This surging need derives from the Marxist criticism of Hegel's system and the discrepancy, highlighted also by Lukács himself, regarding the existence of an external, logical, *telos*. To put it in other words, Hegel's discrepancy lies in the inclusion of an idealist teleology in a framework of unity between subject and object that is logically determined; it is at least problematic to regard as truly teleological a notion derived from human individuality while subordinating it to a transcendental ontological realm. Such discrepancy expresses, as Lukács notes, the "difference and opposition between nature and society" (ibid, p. 55) as Hegel himself presents logic as the starting point of his system, preceding ontology, giving logic an explicit ontological categorization. This is expressed by Hegel when saying "Accordingly, logic is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought. This realm is truth unveiled, truth as it is in and for itself." (Science of Logic, 2.34). This aspect of Hegel's ontology has as a consequence a neglected relevance of the social being. What Hegel does, according

to Lukács, is that "with his abstractly universal logical generalization of negation into a fundamental moment of any dialectical process, [he] thereby obliterates the specificity of social being [...]" (Ontology 1, p. 44). Lukács argues that Hegel, after explaining and giving an account of the "blind" necessity found in nature that is overcome by the development of human purpose or intent, proceeds to strip away the concreteness of his system by overgeneralizing such necessity into transcendence (ibid, p. 97).

As a consequence of his abandonment of a Hegelian view, Lukács must not only present the root and problem of this interpretation but his materialist alternative at the time that he revindicates the importance of the ontology of the social. He recognizes the merits of Marxian ontology since it is based on his materialist and dialectical unity of law and fact as "the former is realized in the former and the latter obtains its specificity from the mode in which the former permeates it in intersecting interactions." (Ontology 2, p. 68). This constant dynamic and denial of hierarchical transcendental predetermination became Lukács' grounding soil from which erected his philosophy of the social.

The explanation of social being must come from a denial of logic as the "truth as it is in and for itself". The particularity of the social realm is that it is the *locus* for the proper understanding of the role of materialistic teleology in nature. The reason for this is that the development from inorganic to organic nature gave origin to consciousness, a characteristic of organic beings that is the cornerstone of teleological positing in nature. Since interest-governed action is an essential aspect of social being and such characteristic is fundamental for expressing the relationship between the social being and the other types, the existence of individuality and intention acquires preponderant importance (Ontology 2, p. 16). Lukács, in his historical view of the development of being, emphasises this point because it is here where we can see the dynamic interaction between the social and natural worlds in humans' original attempt at teleological guided action. What characterizes the social being is that the main aspects of this ontological level, and the ontological negation found here, is that "their characteristic nature is a product of the fact that every human social activity is necessarily the product of alternatives, and presupposes a choice or decision in relation to these." (Ontology 1, p.

45-46). The following passage of Lukács is helpful in clarifying his view on the characteristics of the social being and the difference between his view and Hegel's:

> It is only in specifically human, social being, even if already at a very primitive stage, in labour and speech, that immediacy and mediations are both separate and combined, and appear as ontological reflection determinations. Here we are thus confronted with a categorical relationship that is characteristic of social being alone, even though, as we have seen, even a specifically social determination of this kind could not be present without having had its 'forerunners' in nature. Hegel also overlooks the social significance of this reflection determination, as is shown by his analysis of habit as 'second nature' in the Philosophy of Mind. (Ontology 1, p. 90-91)

The step from a naturally determined way of life found in animals to the modes of life found in the social being represents a distinctive feature that changed radically the determinacy of life (Vellay, 2019). This is not to say, as Thomas Telios (2019) emphasizes, that Lukács believes that nature and society are realms respectively governed by causality and the lack thereof through intentions. The important aspect is that there is a constant and reciprocal interplay between the three modes of being. Lukács challenges a Kantian division of necessity and freedom, arguing that both are interwoven across these realms. While Kant in his works presents a clear and categoric separation between the freedom springing from the use of reason and natural determination, Lukács sees the relationship from a materialist perspective. Rejecting the notion of nature solely embodying necessity and society representing freedom, Lukács criticizes Kantian epistemology for hindering societal critique by likening societal structures to the unknowable "thing in itself." (ibid). Likewise, viewing society as inherently free risks glossing over critical analysis. Lukács stresses the interconnectedness of these realms, emphasizing that privileging one over the others obscures the complex dynamics shaping reality. The social being, Lukács says "presupposes in general and in all specific processes the existence of inorganic and organic nature [...] [it] cannot be conceived as independent from natural being and as its exclusive opposite [...]" (Ontology 2, p. 7). Thus, understanding the reciprocal influence of inorganic and organic nature alongside societal structures is essential for grasping the nuances of necessity and freedom in social existence (ibid). Moreover, it is important to

highlight that the development of ontological beings and arising features do not imply a "negation, but merely a chain of transformations from one being into another [...]" (Ontology 1, p. 43) in which we find simultaneity of otherness and a "being-for-other" (ibid).

This change in the determinacy of life has been the product of a long development and it signifies a dialectical leap from a natural, or causal, determined consciousness, also found in other types of organic beings, to a determination of nature by intent, a purely human characteristic (Vellay, 2019, p. 213). But the characterization of the different types of being and their interconnectedness to one another serves just to ground what is one of the most fundamental aspects in the philosophy of Lukács, i.e. the role of labour. As we will see in the next section, the resulting complexity of social beings is the result of the teleological mastering of the natural environment through labour. In Lukács' philosophy, labour assumes a relevant role as the primary means through which individuals interact with their environment, i.e. the way in which the social being interacts with the other two ontological beings. This is not merely an act of production but an existential, purposeful, and social force, shaping both the external world and the inner consciousness of individuals. labour's centrality is evident in Lukács' critique of capitalism, where he argues that alienation from labour underpins social oppression and fractures individuals' sense of self. However, he also sees labour as a potential site of resistance and transformation, emphasizing its capacity to challenge and reshape societal structures toward a more just and equitable order. Thus, for Lukács, understanding and confronting the dynamics of labour is essential for comprehending broader issues of exploitation, alienation, and societal change.

1.3 Labour as an Original Phenomenon

We have seen thus far that Lukács' project is grounded on two core ideas: the concept of teleology as an ontological category and the development of the ontological being understood as the point of divergence between the social being and its predecessors. It is impossible, nevertheless, to fully understand these ideas without grasping the role of labour and its importance for the coherence of the ontological task Lukács set himself to

present. As we have been proceeding, to get a hold of Lukács' view of labour, it is necessary to first take a look at his predecessors' perspectives of the concept.

Within Hegel's philosophical framework, the role of labour is paramount. As mentioned above, he recognized the role of labour as a primary instance of teleological positing and a *locus* for freedom. In Hegel's philosophy, labour plays a crucial role in the development of human consciousness and self-realization. For Hegel, labour is not merely a means of survival or production but rather a fundamental activity through which individuals engage with the external world, transform it and thereby realize their own potential and freedom. labour emerges in Hegel's Realphilosophie as a sign of humanity's increasing recognition of its confrontation with and distinction from nature. As the property is established, it formalizes human relations by assimilating the objective world into consciousness, integrating nature into human history (Avineri, 1971). Similarly, labour signifies the evolution of desires from initially destructive to constructive engagement with the objective world. While primitive humans and animals consume and destroy nature, labour presents an object of desire not through negation but through creation. Put in these terms, labour has a characteristically formative element in it, a unique human characteristic that allows for the transformation of nature and the formation of something new. Regarding this, Hegel specifies that this "formative" characteristic is varied. He says

> In empirical contexts, this giving of form may assume the most varied shapes. The field which I cultivate is hereby given form. As far as the inorganic realm is concerned, I do not always give it form directly. If, for example, I build a windmill, I have not given form to the air, but I have constructed a form in order to utilize the air. . . . Even the fact that I conserve game may be regarded as a way of imparting form, for it is a mode of conduct calculated to preserve the object in question. The training of animals is, of course, a more direct way of giving them form, and I play a greater role in this process. (Hegel, 1991, §56A, 86.)

In addition, Hegel's analysis of labour has a dual aspect: he demonstrates the inherent connection between labour and alienation. Alienation, for Hegel, is not peripheral but

intrinsic to the social structure, resisting easy rectification or reform (Avineri, 1971). This description of labour is a consequence of Hegel seeing it as a dialectical process. Through this act, the individual confronts the raw materials of nature and due to his creative effort, imposes his will upon it, thereby giving shape and purpose to the material world. This act of labour involves a constant interaction between the subjective intentions of the individual and the objective reality of the external world. It is a relevant act where the intentionality of the individual plays a role in shaping and re-shaping the objective external world. Through this dialectical process, individuals come to understand themselves better and actualize their capacities, leading to self-awareness and self-realization. As Schlomo Avineri describes, "to Hegel [labour] is the positive outcome of man's confrontation with the natural, external, objective world. The process of labour is an objectification of man's subjective powers, and it is through the instrumentality of work on an object that man, a subject, becomes an objective actuality" (Avineri, 1971, p. 102). Furthermore, Hegel sees labour as a social activity that not only shapes individual identity but also forms the basis of social relations and institutions. Through labour, individuals enter into relationships of mutual dependence and cooperation, creating bonds of solidarity and interdependence within society.

In Hegel's view, the ultimate significance of labour lies in its role in the realization of human freedom. Through labour, individuals transcend their immediate desires and impulses, and through the process of work, they develop self-discipline, mastery, and autonomy. Thus, labour becomes a pathway to freedom, as individuals exercise their will and creativity to shape their own destinies and contribute to the collective development of humanity. This is one of the core aspects considered by Lukács in his own understanding of labour. Nevertheless, between Hegel's and Lukács's understanding of labour, the mid-point transition through Marx is necessary.

The view of labour held by Hegel was later further developed and used as a central concept for a new philosophical position by Marx. It is important to note that Marx's understanding of labour touches, as it happened with Hegel, upon concepts such as freedom, value (as I will show in more detail below), and alienation. Authors like Sean Sayers (2007, 1984)) argue that there is a double interpretation of Marx's view of

labour. These two contrasting interpretations regarding Marx's conceptualization of labour are often framed as either a "productivist" model or as rooted in the paradigm of craftwork (Sayers, 2007). On the one hand, Marx's depiction of labour is deeply entrenched in an industrial framework, evoking the imagery of the factory setting. Conversely, another view of his understanding of labour aligns Marx's conception of labour with a romanticized notion of handicraft activity. Regardless of the interpretation, the broader philosophical conceptualization of labour is the one inherited from Hegel, the one concerning the teleological relationship between humans and nature (Ibid). It is, from a philosophical perspective, a more "universal" account of labour that does not refer to any specific form of work but as a general but largely relevant human activity as it was presented by Hegel. This universal conceptualization of labour entails a direct engagement with nature, such as hunting, fishing, or gathering plants. In such activities, individuals interact with nature in its immediate state without altering the objects themselves. Although this form of labour remains closely linked to unmediated natural processes, it embodies distinctively human characteristics. Unlike purely instinctual behaviours observed in non-human creatures, human labour of this kind is intentional, socially coordinated, and typically involves the utilization of tools or weapons (Ibid). This last point is famously captured by Marx in his description of labour presented in *Capital*, where he says:

> We are not now dealing with those primitive instinctive forms of labour that remind us of the mere animal. An immeasurable interval of time separates the state of things in which a man brings his labour-power to market for sale as a commodity, from that state in which human labour was still in its first instinctive stage. We pre-suppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will. And this subordination is no mere momentary act. Besides the exertion of the bodily organs, the process demands

that, during the whole operation, the workman's will be steadily in consonance with his purpose. This means close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of the work, and the mode in which it is carried on, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as something which gives play to his bodily and mental powers, the more close his attention is forced to be. (Marx, 1976, Ch. 7)

Thus, Marx's theory of labour as a "formative" activity is, as well as for Hegel, a central element within his systematic philosophical framework. At the core of Marx's view, labour is presented as a distinctly human activity, distinguishing it from the instinct-driven behaviors of non-human animals. Human labour entails a mediated relationship with nature, wherein the immediate satisfaction of needs is deferred as individuals engage in transformative work, shaping objects and imbuing them with human essence (Sayers, 2007). Through labour, humans not only satisfy their material needs but also undergo a process of self-realization and social development, as labour is inherently a social activity that involves and sustains relations with others.

Another very important element of labour according to Marx is his view of this activity in the context of his theory of value. In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx sees labour as the cornerstone of his critique of capitalism. Marx defines a commodity as an external object produced for exchange in a market, requiring two key conditions: the existence of a market for exchange and a social division of labour. Marx argues that commodities possess both use-value and exchange-value, the latter initially equated with their price. While use-value is easily understood, exchange-value presents a puzzling phenomenon requiring explanation, which Marx addresses through the concept of socially necessary labour time. According to the labour theory of value, a commodity's value is determined by the quantity of socially necessary labour time invested in its production (Wolff and Leopold, 2021).

Marx builds a two-stage argument for the labour theory of value, first presenting the necessity of a common element shared by commodities for comparison. He then identifies labour as this common element, given its universality across all commodities. Capitalism, Marx asserts, stands apart from other forms of commodity exchange due to its pursuit of profit through the exploitation of labour (Ibid). Capitalists advance capital

to generate profit by purchasing labour power, the value of which is determined by the socially necessary labour required for its production (ibid). The surplus labour extracted from workers beyond what is necessary for their wages constitutes surplus value, the source of profit in capitalism. In the words of Marx:

> In the labour process, therefore, man's activity, via the instruments of labour, effects an alteration in the object of labour which was intended from the outset. The process is extinguished in the product. The product of the process is a use-value, a piece of natural material adapted to human needs by means of a change in its form. Labour has become bound up in its object: labour has been objectified, the object has been worked on. (Marx, 1976, p. 287)

Marx's account of labour, as shown by his theory of value, although possessing an ontological character, is the result of his direct influence from Hegel's. With this in mind, it is worth noticing that Lukács' view on labour, as I will show, attempts to capture the essence of both. While Lukács acknowledges the relevance of the ontological character of labour as the *locus* for teleological positing, he is also ready to recognize its importance in shaping social relations, a process stripped from its dependence on logical categories.

As a consequence of his adoption of a Hegelian and Marxist framework, Lukács conceives labour as an "original phenomenon" from which all other social phenomena derive. In order to explain the importance of labour for Lukács we will follow his own division, as presented in his *Ontology*. Thus, the first element to be analyzed will be labour in terms of teleological positing, then we will follow with labour as a model for social practice, and finally the relation between object and subject, a topic mostly covered in the next section, in the dynamic of labour.

Lukács, in the third volume of his *Ontology*, directly refers to the Hegelian and Marxist influence of his view on labour. Thus, the first element to highlight regarding this acknowledgement is his emphasis on the ontological character of this dynamic. As a consequence of the view of the development of being, the first task for Lukács, in order

to give a concrete and material explanation of labour, is to present and justify the uniqueness of this phenomenon that is seen in human existence. As the differentiation made by Marx before him, Lukács acknowledges, thus recognizing the intentional character of this act, that there is an ontological difference between the act of *human* labour in contrast with what could be counted as its animal counterpart. The human act of labour is not biologically rooted, meaning that it is not a mere mode of adaptation of the species to its environment. More than that, the act of labour is able to produce its own conditions of reproduction, conditions always "determined by the structure of the society of the time, and not the biological properties of its members." (Ontology 3, p. 2-3). This aspect is what gives labour its ontological category. Through labour, Lukács says, a particular interaction between the mind and matter occurs; a process that gives rise to a new type of objectivity, i.e. the social world. Thus, labour becomes the original phenomenon of any social practice. It becomes, in other words, its genesis. This is so because teleological positing, with the involvement of consciousness and matter, starts a new process that is separated, although not totally, from causality. In nature, the chain of causality operates automatically, following its inherent necessity of cause and consequence. In labour, however, not only is the goal teleologically posited, but the causal chain to achieve it must also be transformed into a posited causality (Ibid, p. 33). Both the means and the object of labour are inherently natural things subject to natural causality and it is only through teleological positing that they acquire the characteristics of social existence within the labour process, even though they remain natural objects. This view presents labour not as just one instance of teleological positing, but the only real dynamic in which this occurs because, by being distinct and separate from causality, it constitutes its own path into the development of being. Lukács attributes this important acknowledgement to Marx, when he says:

> Marx's understanding of labour teleology already goes far beyond the attempted solutions of even such great predecessors as Aristotle and Hegel, since for Marx labour is not one of the many phenomenal forms of teleology in general, but rather the only point at which a teleological positing can be ontologically established as a real moment of material actuality (Ontology 3, p. 8)

For Lukács Marx's precise and strictly defined restriction of teleology to labour (or to social practice), while excluding it from all other modes of being, enhances its significance. This understanding reveals that teleology is a distinctive and defining feature of the highest level of being. It shows that social being, through labour, transcends its foundational level of organic life and attains a new, autonomous form of existence characterized by purposeful and goal-directed activity (ibid). With the presentation of labour as having an ontological character, Lukács explicitly states, something not done by Marx, that the real motor of historical progress has an ontological character and that it is the means through which organic being can become fully human (Infranca et al., 2019). For both Marx and Lukács, the goal established in labour represents the point at which the ideal becomes a fundamental component of social-material reality, influencing the causal sequence of determinations of being (ibid). As Michael Thompson (2019) describes, social being is embedded within a broader ontology of material reality, not determined by material reality in a mechanistic sense. According to him, Lukács seeks to explore how subjective agency transforms the material world and how this transformative activity is central to social reality and the articulation of social forms. Moreover, his premise is that the capacity for intentional activity is a fundamental power that distinguishes humans as a species (Ibid). By relegating the other modes of being to the functioning of causality, Lukács metaphysically grounds and justifies the existence of the social being.

In order to properly understand labour, Lukács says, it is important to recognize how two completely opposite categories interact with each other. For this, we have to consider the two acts involved in the process of labour, i.e. the positing of the goal and the investigation of the means (Ibid, p. 11). The categories of causality and teleology come together in the act of labour as the investigation of the means to achieve a posited goal requires an objective understanding of how to initiate the necessary processes and conditions. Teleology and causality are heterogeneous principles that together form the ontological foundation of certain complexes of motion. Despite their contradictions, they coexist inseparably and are only ontologically possible within the realm of social being. Their effectiveness within this realm produces the major characteristic of this level of being. Thus, the positing of the goal and the exploration of methods do not

create anything new, as natural reality must remain as a system of complexes governed by unchanging laws governed by causality, indifferent to human efforts and ideas. The investigation has a dual function: it reveals what is happening independently of human consciousness in the objects being studied, and it identifies new combinations and functional possibilities within these objects that can be activated to achieve the goal (Ontology 3, 1971). For example, objects can only serve a specified function if their existing properties allow for such a use, as it would be the case of wood and the construction of a house. As a consequence of this, Lukács establishes that the realizability of a goal is strictly dependent on the knowledge of nature we possess. At this point, he highlights the further implication: with labour, human consciousness ceases to be merely an epiphenomenon in the ontological sense (Ibid, p. 21), an aspect that will be further analyzed in the following section. Only through labour, by setting a goal and determining the means to achieve it, does consciousness elevate itself through a self-directed act beyond mere adaptation to the environment. This contrasts with animal activities that, while they may change nature, do so without deliberate intention. Human labour initiates changes in nature that are exclusive to human intervention. As realization becomes a transformative and creative force in nature, the consciousness that drives and guides this process can no longer be considered merely an ontological epiphenomenon. For Lukács, while animal consciousness is an undeniable reality, it remains a limited aspect that serves the biologically driven reproduction process, which follows biological laws. Human consciousness escapes this dynamic and through the process of labour gives rise to a new reality. This positions consciousness and the subject as a central element of the process of labour. About this Lukács says:

> If we conceive labour in its essential original –nature as the producer of use-values– as an 'eternal' form that persists through the change in social formations, ie., the metabolism between man (society) and nature, it is then clear that the intention that defines the character of the alternative is directed towards a change in natural objects, even though it is induced by social needs. (Ontology 3, p. 39-40)

The relationship that labour creates between man and nature is, as we have seen, the only real teleological positing for Lukács. As a consequence of this role, labour has a special place as an activity that, by instantiating the *locus* where causality and consciousness intersect, gives origin to a new type of being with its proper relations and

characteristics, i.e. the social being. Thus, labour involves a process between human activity and nature, where actions are directed towards transforming natural objects into use-values. In itself, labour is the original and most basic social interaction that gives origin to all the rest. In more developed forms of social practice, Lukács says, the focus shifts to the impact on other people, ultimately aiming at the production of use-values. Here, the teleological intentions attempt to induce other people to undertake specific teleological actions themselves. In derived social interactions teleological positing shifts its focus into changing and giving origin to other types of teleological positing with the ultimate aim of changing nature (Ibid). This issue arises once labour becomes sufficiently social to require cooperation among several individuals, regardless of whether the problem of exchange-value has emerged or if the cooperation is simply directed towards use-value production. Thus, this second form of teleological intention, where the goal is to set goals for others, can appear. Although the operating features of this complex process are not thoroughly specified by Lukács, still he offers a panoramic of its implications. Lukács implies that part of this complex interaction has been feasible and enhanced by the use of language. About this, Lukács believes that a genetic derivation of speech or conceptual thought from labour is possible, as the labour process imposes demands on the subject that can only be met by transforming pre-existing abilities into language and conceptual thought (Ibid, p. 49). The ability of speech, undoubtedly important in the practice of labour, is additionally in close relationship with the social character of man. From this, Lukács says that humanity's ontological conceptions are influenced by social factors of different sorts (Ibid). These ideas play a crucial role in social practice and can often solidify into a social power, leading to a conflict between ontological conceptions with an objective scientific basis and those rooted solely in social being.

1.4 Subject and Object in Labour

In the context of presenting the complexity of the influence of labour as the original social practice, special attention should be put to the significance of the phenomenon in the understanding of the relationship between the conscious subject and the object of her action. As mentioned above, Lukács dedicated a whole section to developing a

proper understanding of this relationship given the teleological significance of the phenomenon. As an intersecting point between consciousness and causality, the dynamic presented by labour has deep implications for the conscious subject. One aspect to be considered regarding this relationship is the consequential distancing between subject and object thanks to the phenomenon of labour.

This distancing, Lukács says, creates a foundation for human social existence since it gives rise to language, a complex phenomenon of its own. The crucial leap between what could be counted as animal communication and the human one is to be understood in terms of the distance between subject and object (Ontology 3, p. 100). There is, in our way of communicating, a contrast between our immediate existence and that of the object we are talking about and this contrast takes two forms. First, it posits the object as independently existing; Second, it presents the independent object as something concrete by striving through language to describe it. The means of expression about objects, in their design to work properly in several different contexts, gives origin to verbal signs which are separated from the objects they describe, becoming a mental representation for a group of particular phenomena. This relevantly contrasts with other types of communication found in the animal kingdom, because even when animals communicate some content, it is tied to specific situations they are involved in (Ibid). In this sense, Lukács says that human communication is the only real instance in which we can properly talk about subjects and objects. The representational and abstract character of this type of interaction makes it exclusively human and particular. The simultaneous positing of subject and object in labour, and the language arising from it, Lukács says, distances the subject from the object, as well as the concrete object from its concept. This distancing enables an understanding and mastery of the object by humans that is infinitely extendable and shapes human understanding of nature, as well as the understanding of humanity itself as the product of being the object of this practice. Moreover, labour continually introduces a series of mediations between humans and the ultimate goals they seek to achieve. This process leads to a distinction between immediate and more mediated goals, which results in entirely new relationships and structures, all still originating in labour. Language, by mentally distancing objects,

makes the real distancing that arises from labour communicable, allowing it to become a shared possession of society.

The distancing between subject and object gives rise to a type of relationship that works both ways. While, as presented in the previous section, objects are transformed by the teleological positing carried out by the conscious subject, this is also in turn affected by the act of labour. The direction of this change is determined by the teleological goals posited by the subject and their practical realisation. The central issue in the internal transformation of humans, Lukács presents, is achieving conscious self-control (Ontology 3, p. 103). While the goal exists in the mind of the labourer before its material realisation, the latter must plan each moment in advance and continually monitor the execution of these plans to achieve the optimal concrete result. This mastery of the human body by consciousness, understood as changes of habit, emotions, and instincts, shapes the way individuals perceive themselves, requiring a self-relationship that is qualitatively distinct from animal existence. The emergence of this consciousness, which unlike in animals is not merely a biological byproduct, becomes an essential component of the social being since it is the bearer of teleological goals of practice (ibid). Nevertheless, the relationship and interplay between the nature behind and prior to consciousness generates a double complexity. First, the ontological fact that the existence and effectiveness of consciousness are inseparably linked with the living organism, so individual consciousness arises with the body and perishes with it. Second, the determining role of consciousness in relation to the body, in which the body appears as the means for the execution of teleological goals that originate from and are determined by consciousness. This double complexity, showing the interplay between the body and consciousness, or between a material and non-material object is, Lukács says, the ontological foundation of consciousness. It is, in other words, what constitutes its existence and limits.

The external and self-knowledge that man gains through the process of labour is essential. As the process that allows for teleological positing, labour is fundamental for the process of humanisation. This is evinced in Lukács' emphasis of the role of labour in answering the fundamental question of freedom. He expresses that thanks to labour the

ontological basis for freedom can be given. Through labour, we gain conscious control over our environment, moving from necessity to freedom. This occurs through a dialectical development of labour and freedom, where social and historical changes continually modify their original structures, leading to new forms and understandings of freedom in various social spheres. Consciousness decides which goal to posit and how to transform the necessary causal series into means for realisation, thus creating a dynamic reality. At a basic level, Lukács sees freedom as an act of consciousness resulting in a new being posited by itself. Freedom, as a meaningful aspect of reality, is rooted in concrete decisions between different material possibilities (Ontology 3, p. 104). Also, freedom inherently involves a desire to alter reality, which includes maintaining a given situation, with reality remaining the goal of change even in abstract forms either in terms of changing the material world or other individuals. As a consequence, freedom involves the intention to alter reality, the possession of knowledge of the means for this change to occur, and the proper 'educated' decision to make such a change happen. All labour presupposes that humans recognise the suitability of certain properties of an object for achieving their goals. These properties must be objectively present and intrinsic to the object, though they generally remain latent as mere possibilities in the object's natural state. For example, certain stones have the inherent property that, when cut appropriately, they can be used as tools like knives or axes. However, without transforming these natural possibilities into reality, all labour would fail and become impossible. This is not about a necessity becoming conscious but about a latent possibility being consciously actualised through labour.

This aspect of labour highlights the transformation of latent possibilities into reality. Additionally, labour involves the transformation of the labouring subject itself, systematically awakening previously dormant potentials. Movements and methods used in labour, such as handling objects, were likely unknown or unused before labour processes began. Through labour, Lukács argues, these dormant possibilities are developed into capacities, enabling a continuous process of development and the realisation of new possibilities. This latter aspect is what Lukács, following Engels, emphasises about the nature of freedom in its relationship with labour. Freedom, he believes, expresses in man in the knowledge of natural laws, as well as the functioning

laws of the mental and physical aspects of mankind itself, and his use of such knowledge to make them work towards a definite end. Thus, labour, along with the teleologically directed process that defines it, is oriented towards concreteness. Finding the right methods by which nature can be changed with the intention of reaching a goal is a fundamental aspect of the process of labour. But as it has been mentioned, the process is not just subject-object directed for the subject also changes in the process. Reaching a successful task and producing useful items, as it occurs in the dynamics of labour, depends on the worker's consistent self-discipline and change. This requirement for self-control is true for achieving any practical goal. Regardless of the worker's awareness, through labour, individuals produce themselves as members of the human race, they reaffirm such conditions and, in doing so, they contribute to the creation and development of humanity itself. Lukács would be open to arguing that the journey from instinctual behaviour to conscious self-control is the true path to human freedom (Ontology 3, p. 135). Even though we can think of ways in which human action is determined, the effort to gain control over one's organic nature is an undeniable act of freedom. About this, Lukács adds that there is an intrinsic link between human freedom and its social condition. The overcoming of the organic character through labour is what gives humanity its real and tangible freedom as it has as an outcome "the mastery of the individual acting in the nature of his species over his merely natural and particular individuality" (Ontology 3, p. 136). Realisation in labour is not just the tangible outcome that humans achieve through their manipulation of nature, it also adds ontologically new elements into the social being. Lukács emphasizes that while labour, in its basic form of producing use-values, is the starting point for human development and civilization, it contains inherent dynamics that lead it beyond this initial state. Within this basic labour, some inherent tendencies and potentials drive it to evolve into more sophisticated forms of human practice. In labour, humans confront the *entire* reality involved. Necessity understood as concrete lawfulness of connections of causes and consequences, is an essential component of this complex reality, but it is only one part. The reality engaged in labour is far more extensive than the connections defined by necessity alone, it involves new complexes that derive from it. It involves a totality.

1.5 Labour, Reproduction and Complexes

As mentioned in the previous section, the complexity of the social phenomenon, initiated and developed through labour, goes beyond the superation of humanity's organic being and the mere manipulation of nature. In its own complexity, labour initiates the process of change that affects reality as a whole, in all its complexity. From this perspective, the ontological role of labour opens the possibility for not only the development of being, from organic to social but for the further development of the social phenomenon itself. In his analysis of labour, as we have thus far seen, Lukács acknowledges the artificiality of isolating the process of labour from other phenomena, especially those eminently human, as labour is deeply interconnected with, and is the foundation for, several aspects of social life. For this reason, mention and analysis of broader social contexts is necessary to grasp how relevant labour is as an original phenomenon and for the development of humanity as such. Strongly linked to this, are Lukács' ideas of social reproduction and economic reproduction in the broader context of the development of the social being. As such, the concept of reproduction, either in the social or in the economy, implies the maintenance and perpetuation (and indirectly but consequently the development) of certain dynamics that are inherent to the human condition, either in its organic or social dimension in all its sub-complexes. It is just this type of being, in contrast with the organic whose elements of reproduction exhaust it as such, reproduction implies by principle internal and external changes. Social reality, Lukács presents, consists of various complexes, whose dynamics, through their interactions and mutual influences, shape the social totality. These interactions have their origin and are drawn upon the foundational process of labour for the social phenomenon, a complex of complexes which builds on the idea of totality, as I will shortly present. As a consequence, reaching some of the most prominent and relevant concepts in Lukács, such as the concept of totality, implies a progression through concepts like reproduction and "complex of complexes". The interconnectedness of the social, within the social and with human nature as a whole, only can be grasped through the careful exposition of these concepts

One of the consequences of Labour is the manufacture of implements and the exploitation of natural forces which gives rise, at certain stages of development, to nodal points that qualitatively transform the structure and dynamics of individual societies. One of these nodal points, as Lukács presents, is the development of language. About this, Lukács says that language is rendered primordial in the development of labour as it helps communicate those teleological positions that "do not aim to transform, exploit, etc., a natural object, but instead intend to induce other men to fulfil the teleological position desired by the speaking subject." (Ontologie Vol. II, p. 119 [translation mine]), thus bringing further development to the process. While individuality plays an important role in teleological positing, as it is primitively in individual consciousness where teleological positions originate, language makes this process go beyond the individual and reach a higher social level. Thus, as labour, the division of labour, and cooperation advance, language must also evolve to higher levels, becoming richer, more flexible, and more differentiated. This evolution allows new objects and relationships to be communicated commonly. Consequently, human control over nature is reflected in the increasing number of objects and relationships that can be named. Moreover, actions and relationships, Lukács says, are always interactions between complexes (Ibid). From this perspective, the role of language serves the elaboration and development of these complexes at the same time. It serves as a medium for expressing and communicating the intricate social relations that emerge from labour, especially as it becomes more specialized and divided.

Through language, labour goes beyond individuality as humans develop a collective consciousness essential for understanding their social and material conditions. Language also facilitates the transmission of knowledge across generations, enabling the accumulation and advancement of skills and techniques related to labour (Ibid). Moreover, the complexity of labour requires a correspondingly sophisticated language capable of capturing and managing these complexities, integrating various components into cohesive social structures. (Ibid) Ultimately, language shapes social reality by framing how labour and social relations are perceived, perpetuating or challenging specific forms of interaction derived from the former. An important element of all this is that, for Lukács, "all actions, relationships, etc. [...] are always correlations between

complexes, where the elements of these have real operational effectiveness only as constitutive parts of the complex to which they belong." (Ontologie Vol. II, p. 119 [Translation Mine]), encapsulating his dialectical view of society. Lukács presents that individual actions and relationships do not exist in isolation but are interconnected in complexes. These complexes determine the meaning and effectiveness of individual elements within them, shaping their impact on society. The elements composing these complexes have real operational effectiveness only as integral parts of the complex to which they belong. This perspective also highlights the previously mentioned Lukács's historical materialist approach, emphasizing that societal development and change emerge from material conditions. By recognizing these correlations, Lukács acknowledges that social relations are dynamic processes. This has a consequence that, for example, groups produced by the division of labour cannot exist and function independently of each other, without mutual interrelations facilitated by language. Thus, even in its most primitive stage, social being represents a complex of complexes, where there are continuous interactions both among partial complexes and between the total complex and its parts. From here Lukács reveals the reproductive process of the total complex in question, where even the partial complexes reproduce as autonomous facts, though only relatively. However, in each of these processes, it is the reproduction of the whole that, in this manifold system of interactions, constitutes the overriding moment.

It is in this context that Lukács highlights one of the decisive moments within the process of development of the social being, i.e. the division of labour. Lukács says, in a section of his Ontology dedicated to developing the concept of reproduction, that the division of labour originally derived from the biological differentiation among members of the human group, suffered a transformation of this differentiation principle from a biological basis to various social contexts (Ibid). The social context, overriding biological factors, led to the phenomenon in which forms of biological relationships became ultimately shaped by the social structure prevailing at each stage of reproduction. This pattern is observable across all domains, as Lukács presents the example of the relationship between the young and the elderly. While this, Lukács says, may initially appear to be a biological relationship, in reality, the authority of the elderly derives from the experiences amassed over a longer lifespan (Ontologie Vol. II, p. 120).

These experiences the elderly obtain are founded on social activities, primarily labour in its broadest sense, and given that nature serves merely as the backdrop for labour, a longer life merely provides the biological foundation for the accumulation of socially significant life experiences.

This determinant aspect of the social towards other areas of the process of labour is also evinced in how the technical division of labour develops from the social division of labour. The division of labour begins when individual occupations become autonomous trades, considering that the differentiation of professions has as its social premise that in all fields of labour, everyone can reproduce the immediately necessary products for living without having to produce them themselves. This division of labour appears relatively early, says Lukács, but it is only in manufacturing that the labour process as such is divided as it is with the advent of machinery that the true technological division of labour begins (Ibid). Nevertheless, the importance of the division of labour is that specialization results in alienation, fragmenting the labour process and disconnecting workers from their products, each other, and their humanity, contributing to reification, i.e. where human interactions are seen as relations between things and not between people. Technological advancements intensify this division, reshaping social relations and labour practices, implying that the relationship between the social and the non-social (or technical) is somehow symbiotic. The reproduction of labour, then has both economic and social dimensions within it that influence one another and contribute to their joint development. We can see from Lukác's emphasis on the relevance of the division of labour that it plays a significant role in its reproduction in both dimensions. The development of the division of labour gives origin to social categories with their own dynamics. Specifically, Lukács refers to the exchange of commodities and the economic value relationship that comes into action with it, showing that the investigation of the economy of capitalism implies an analysis of a phenomenon which is already largely social (Ibid).

The complexity of the process of labour, when the products of labour are transformed into commodities and the division of labour emerges as such, reaches a higher stage of sociality in the context of the process of its reproduction. This evinces, Lukács presents, that the development of society starts being dominated by purely social categories,

leaving the natural ones behind (Ontologie Vol. II, p. 123). As a consequence, the modes of reproduction emerging from the process of labour acquire a greater social character and expand. The development of the division of labour drives the exchange of commodities, which, in turn, reinforces and perpetuates the division of labour in the same direction. In this sense, Lukács notes the tendency towards the continuous reproduction of labour and its modes and also an inherent impulse for this reproduction to ascend into more advanced forms of the economic-social structure. This development follows a double path. On the one hand, there is the process of constant and continuous evolution within labour itself. On the other, an extended effect, beyond labour, towards the improvement of its original conditions.

In this respect, Lukács presents an interesting example of how the economic relations of individuals are regulated by the socially necessary labour time and that the socialization of production in the exchange of commodities is a vehicle of progress toward sociality (Ontologie Vol. II, p. 125). When workers are hired by a capitalist to produce, Lukács goes, a use value is purchased, that of labour power, which is their capacity to produce more than what is needed for their own reproduction. This is the property that determines the exchange value of labour power. Only through the execution of labour within the framework of socially necessary labour time are the products that have now come to light (which are also use values) allowed to acquire in turn an exchange value, in which the specific product of the use value of labour-power is contained as surplus value. For the goods produced by the workers to gain an exchange value, they must be created within a certain amount of time deemed necessary by society. These goods, initially just use values, then obtain an exchange value. Part of this exchange value includes the surplus value, which is the extra value created by the worker's labour power beyond what is needed for their own sustenance. This shows the deep implications of the social development of activities that otherwise might be regarded as purely economic. The social, thus, appears as all-encompassing and ontologically determinant in other areas of human existence. Regarding this, Lukács highlights that social development evinces what he calls an "ontological priority" of the organic over the social (Ontologie Vol. II, p. 151). Because of its ontological priority, the biological reproduction of human life takes precedence over every other human activity and practice. As Lukács explains, labour is where the ontological specificity of social being

first becomes evident. Initially and for long periods, labour is at the service of direct biological reproduction. However, this biological reproduction is simultaneously the ontological foundation of social being. Over time, all aspects of the biological reproduction of human life increasingly take on a social character, resulting in determinations unequalled to biological reproduction. Furthermore, through the dialectic of labour and its division, activities connected to biological reproduction become more mediated and acquire an increasingly pure social constitution.

The theoretical framework in which the development and reproduction of the social takes place has at its centre one of the most relevant concepts in the philosophy of Lukács, viz. The concept of totality. Totality, essential as it adds meaning to discussions about reproduction, refers to the idea that social phenomena should be understood as parts of an interconnected whole. Thus, Lukács emphasises the importance of viewing elements within the context of the entire social structure rather than in isolation, seeing social reality as a dynamic and interrelated process where changes in one part of the system affect the whole, and the whole, in turn, influences its parts. Lukács himself describes totality as the "subordination of every part to the whole unity of history and thought" (Lukács, 1971, p. 27). As described by Martin Jay (1977), the concept of totality in Lukács derives from the Marxist tradition that inherited the concept from Hegelian philosophy. According to Jay, Lukács' use of the concept of totality is to be understood by regarding it as a "longitudinal totality", where totality is not confined to specific historical configurations that have emerged through history, but it is seen as the whole of universal history (Jay, 1977, p. 150). Lukács expanded the idea of totality beyond individual cultures to the entire historical process, viewing universal history as a real historical power rather than a mechanical aggregation of events. Lukács believed, Jay says, that understanding the totality and the cognitive process of knowing it were intertwined from the outset. Moreover, Lukács' concept of the social whole was a concrete, complexly mediated totality, not an abstract entity opposed to the isolated individual (Ibid). In this, the role of labour plays an essential role as Lukács sees totality as the product of a creative act. He understands history as the creation of a conscious subject, rather than as a collection of structures or processes with origins that cannot be traced back to human agency. Thus the activity of labour starts the historical and purposeful process of history whose central origin is reflected in all its various aspects.

In the context of the framework of Lukács' view on totality, we see that the social being comprehends two dynamic complexes that appear in the reproductive process: the individual and society itself (Ontologie Vol. II, p. 157). Human biological constitution inherently makes it a complex being but, with its development into a social being, there is a fundamental change in the nature of its interaction with the environment. Through the teleological act of labour, the environment is subjected to conscious and intentional transformations. Even at the primitive stage, a complex of social determinations is introduced between the environment and the transformation of means for the reproduction of man (ibid). This complex ultimately plays a decisive role in human reactions to changes in nature. Man, now more than just a biological being, becomes a working member of a social group and no longer maintains an immediate relationship with the organic and inorganic nature around him, nor even with himself as a biological entity. Instead, all these inevitable interactions are mediated through society. Since human sociality involves active and practical engagement with his entire environment, he does not merely accept and adapt to the surrounding world and its changes. Instead, there is an active response and challenge to the transformations of the external world with humans' own actions, creating an inseparable unity between adaptation to the unavoidable objective reality and the new purposeful directions derived from consciousness. About this last point, Istvan Meszaros (1972) highlights the importance of social mediation. Understanding totality without including the concept of mediation, Meszaros argues, is akin to "freedom without equality": an abstract and empty notion (Meszaros, 1972, p. 63). The concept of totality exists through various mediations linking specific complexes into a dynamic whole, hence the complex of complexes. Human action and its limits, Meszaros explains "cannot be therefore assessed except in relation to a dialectical grasp of the structure of totality." (Ibid, p. 63). As a consequence, any grasp of the totality involves a grasp of the complex mediations that constitute it, an idea that is not indifferent to the depth of his work. Mediation is an essential point in the philosophy of Lukács, without which his understanding of totality, and the role that labour plays in its constitution, cannot gain coherence.

The perpetual reproduction of labour makes the mediation between man and nature increasingly intricate. In many cases, it is no longer immediately evident how certain changes in humans and their relationships have their ontological origin in the organic

exchange between society and nature. In the course of this process, humanity also transforms. the organic exchange between society and nature poses concrete alternatives and humanity must react to them with active alternative decisions, with new teleological positions. In the course of their practical execution, certain possibilities are liberated and actualized and, since the alternatives correctly posed and resolved are socially fixed, they become embedded in the social reproduction of humans. Thus, they become integral parts of the continuum of individual and societal reproduction, consolidating as an increase in the overall vitality of society and as the diffusion and deepening of individual faculties (Ontologie Vol. II, p. 159).

Yet, the social aspect of labour does not appear as such from the very beginning. Reaching an understanding of the whole in its parts and the connections to one another derives from the development of the social. Originally, in its primitive form, consciousness acts upon individual instances of labour without necessarily evincing that such an act is, in essence, social. The reproduction of the modes of socialising is what brings about the fact of its own social character. Thus, the development of humanity does not just imply the leap from one type of being to another through labour, but by the unfolding of its own being through the further development of the social (Ontologie Vol. II, p. 161). By highlighting these connections and this process of self-development of the social, we reach what Lukács refers to when referring to the social being, as the "complex of complexes". The development of the social being is the result of the development of complexes within social reality, such as language, that have allowed for its reproduction. Thus, elements such as language can be regarded as organs and mediums of the continuity of social being where every human praxis, originating from and developing labour, advances the knowledge of the phenomenon itself. This general framework makes labour gain yet a more profound relevance in the philosophy of Lukács. The notion of totality encapsulates the interconnectedness and interdependence of all elements within a social formation, emphasising their dialectical unity. In this context, reproduction refers not only to the biological processes of the organic being but also to the social reproduction of relations, institutions, and ideologies that sustain a given social order. The concept of the complex denotes the set of relationships and structures in the social world, where each part contributes to and is influenced by the whole. Beyond the original phenomenon labour, for Lukács, becomes more pivotal as it

is the transformative activity through which humans engage with and change their environment, starting the process of socialization, whose further development implies the aforementioned interconnected whole. It is through labour that the complex social relations of production and reproduction are mediated, reflecting and reinforcing the totality of social life. Together, these concepts form the basis of Lukács's dialectical understanding of society, where the dynamic interaction between labour, reproduction, and the totality of social relations drives historical development and shapes human consciousness.

Chapter 2: The Origin of Normativity and Value

2.1 Lukács' Original Ethical Project

After presenting Lukács' ontological framework we find ourselves in a better position to understand and give sense to his general ethical project. Even though Lukács died before writing his Ethics, there is enough material for us to get a picture of how that project would have been. After all, without the depth of the content presented in the *Ontology,* his Ethics would not have had a solid foundation. The necessary precedence of an ontological framework to a work on Ethics is partially evinced in the numerous references to the forthcoming work. Several discussions, initiated in the course of his *Ontology,* were meant to be further developed. An example of this is the problem of freedom, a discussion that Lukács acknowledged could only have been adequately treated in his Ethics (Ontology 3, p. 113). Nevertheless, in order to understand Lukács' Ethical project we should also understand what his specific aims were and what sort of questions were meant to be discussed in the course of that work. With this aim in mind, it is worth assessing some of his earlier works in which the subject matter is discussed.

One of the earliest works in which Lukács makes mention of the problem of morality and Ethics is in his essay *Bolshevism as a Moral Problem.* This work is a first step toward understanding the scope in which the Ethical discussion gains its relevance and strength. There, he assesses the ethical and moral considerations surrounding the Bolshevik revolution and the resulting societal changes deriving from it. With the question in mind about the "ripeness" of the economic and social conditions of his time, Lukács focuses on the ethical discussion regarding the justification of the use of methods to achieve a revolutionary goal and the tension that this justification brings about between the individual and the collective. Bolshevism, with socialism as its "ethical objective of a coming world order" (BMP, p. 420), is confronted with the dilemma of whether the violent and oppressing means for the achievement of the end of class struggle, a *conditio sine qua non* for true freedom, is justified.

He analyses, thus, the moral dilemma inherent in revolutionary action, focusing on the Bolsheviks' use of violence and coercion to achieve their political goals and pondering the moral costs of such a strategy. This dilemma makes Lukács confront the complexities of revolutionary ethics, where pursuing a perceived greater good often demands morally questionable actions, raising concerns about the long-term impact on the moral integrity of the revolution itself. This exploration of violence as a moral issue reflects Lukács' broader concern with how revolutionary tactics can compromise the ethical aspirations of a movement. Lukács primary worry about this is that the obtention of a society in which there is no more class struggle will involve options in which we run the risk of "committing unpardonable sins and innumerable errors." (BMP, p. 422). Thus, the dilemma revolves around the idea that a truly democratic way of achieving the end might end up not nourishing the proper conditions for its obtention while, on the other hand, the Bolshevik path will certainly imply oppression and terror. The ethical dilemma posed by Lukács is about tactics, which evinces how individual moral choices are subsumed under the collective goals of the revolution. He questions whether personal moral integrity can be maintained in the face of collective revolutionary demands, rendering the centre of the discussion the issue of the use of means to achieve the ultimate human goal and the tensions it leads to.

Lukács further critiques the concept of historical necessity, often invoked by Bolsheviks to justify their actions. He warns against the dangers of moral relativism, where any action can be deemed acceptable if it is considered necessary for historical progress. This perspective, he argues, can lead to a dangerous erosion of moral standards and the justification of atrocities in the name of a perceived greater good. Despite his critiques, Lukács does not entirely dismiss the potential for moral regeneration within Bolshevism. However, given their reliance on coercive methods, he remains sceptical about whether the Bolsheviks can achieve this.

The meaning of Lukács' article on Bolshevism gains significance and depth in light of his immediate sequel, *Tactics and Ethics*, where he shows a seemingly dissipated scepticism (Marcus, 1977). The question about tactics understood as "a means by which politically active groups achieve their declared aims, as a link connecting ultimate

objective with reality [...]" (TE, p. 27), becomes a discussion about human action and the means through which achieves an abstract, but yet non-Utopian, ultimate objective. The path to materialize such a goal, Lukács argues, involves "positing it above and beyond the immediate advantage" and it entails "the knowledge and transformation into action of those forces already at work within social reality" (TE, p. 28). The act of positing a realizable goal is already evinced at this stage in the materialist turn taken by Lukács and the shift from a transcendental objective to an immanent one. The material conditions for such an objective become clear when we see socialism as presenting the necessity for the destruction of precisely those conditions that would make it unattainable in the first place. Thus, class struggle becomes the objective and realisation of the ultimate goal since they go hand in hand.   For Lukács the proletariat's class struggle is not simply a class struggle governed by Realpolitik; it is a means for humanity to liberate itself and begin true human history (Ibid). Every compromise made in this struggle obscures this critical aspect and is therefore fatal to achieving this ultimate objective, despite any potential short-term advantages. As long as the current social order exists, the ruling classes can counteract any economic or political gains made through such compromises. These compensatory measures worsen the conditions for continuing the struggle, as the compromises inevitably weaken the spirit of resistance. About this, Lukács exposes one of the central aspects of his early views on the Bolshevik path to socialism. He says:

> Tactical deviations within socialism are therefore of more fundamental significance than is the case with other historical movements. The sense of world history determines the tactical criteria, and it is before history that he who does not deviate for reasons of expediency from the narrow, steep path of correct action prescribed by the philosophy of history which alone leads to the goal, undertakes responsibility for all his deeds. (TE, p. 31)

This leads Lukács to a fundamental consequence, the ethical act goes along with an adherence to the proper tactics. It is clear, for Lukács, that the question of ethics must proceed from these socially correct goals since the "ought" derived from it must be a consequence of the original posited goal. Thus, the question arises about the relationship between individual conscience and sense of responsibility and the problem

of tactically collective action (Ibid). While ethics relates to the individual, what Lukács takes to be the inevitable consequence of this relationship is that the individual's conscience and sense of responsibility are confronted with the belief that they must act as if their actions or inactions determine the world's destiny, with their chosen tactics either aiding or hindering this fate. In the realm of ethics, whatever action an individual decides to perform must be accounted for. From an ethical standpoint, no one can evade responsibility by claiming they are just an individual and that the fate of the world does not rest on them. Not only it is impossible to know for certain that an individual's actions do not matter because it is always possible that they do, but such thinking is also contradicted by the essence of ethics, conscience, and the sense of responsibility. The importance of the relationship between the individual and the collective comes out in light of this sense of what constitutes the ethical. This aspect also relates to the political sphere as it envisages an ultimate social goal posited in the collective. As a consequence, when an individual makes an ethical decision and then chooses to follow or reject a particular tactical course, they move into the realm of politics. This shift necessitates certain knowledge of the circumstances and manner of their actions from a purely ethical standpoint. This implies that the individual's seriousness and sense of responsibility set a moral standard for every action, implying that they should be aware of the consequences of their deeds. The question then arises whether, with this knowledge, they can justify these consequences, Lukács says. Therefore, morally correct action for every socialist is fundamentally linked to the correct perception of the historical-philosophical situation. This perception is feasible only through each individual's effort to become self-conscious (Ibid).

Lukács' idea of what constitutes a correct ethical perspective is not indifferent to the collective posited goal. As we have seen thus far, labour corresponds to the original act in which teleological positing occurs. It is the activity that allows us to "transcend" individuality by initiating a process of development and reproduction of the social in a collective manner. Socialism, as we have seen, does not escape (as nothing in the life of man does) this social realm and its complexities. The ethical, therefore, is intimately related to the collectivisation of a posited goal, the acquisition of the proper means to arrive at such a goal, and the individual justification, based on such knowledge, of those

proper means. Thus, the development of an ontology as a precedent for the development of an ethical project gains substance as it gives the proper foundation for the framework in which the conditions for ethical decision-making. Lukács' ethical project cannot, by force, be divorced from his views on the social and, as a consequence, politics.

Lukács' inheritance from Marxists pervades in his intention to build a solid Ethic. An element that, according to Michael Thompson (2019b), Lukács saw as core insight in Marxian thought is the idea that a rational conception of humanity inherently must consider human praxis (Thompson, 2019b, p. 419). Thompson sees that the later project of Lukács, materialised through his *Ontology*, signified a return to the core elements that allowed for a critical judgement. By thinking in terms of the totality of social reality, Lukács would be able to erect a theory of judgement and action which, at the same time, could deal with the central problems of ethics (Ibid). The theoretical approach to social reality was adopted to get a rational insight into the workings of society to identify its pathologies and the requirements for social transformation. The Marxian project of a critical social ontology was particularly attractive as it allowed Lukács to carry out a proper diagnosis of the current state of society. With this framework in mind, Thompson identifies four core ideas of such a critical project. First, there is a teleological force in human activity as praxis. Second, humans are social and relational, forming an interconnected network of structures that organize their actions and direct them toward specific collective goals and purposes. Third, these social-relational structures of practical activities form society as an objective entity with processual properties. Fourth, all social processes have goals and purposes toward which preceding features are directed. (Thompson, 2019, p. 421). Marx contrasts mechanical materialism with his view that human praxis, the externalization of human thought into the world, is *the* essential human activity. Thus, a true understanding of human nature and society arises from recognizing our world as our creation. Additionally, Marx emphasizes that praxis is inherently social, and all social life is practical. Theories become clear through the lens of human practice and understanding this practice. This way of conceiving social reality has its consequences in his view on freedom, as the ability to understand and shape the fundamental properties of our social reality. This kind of freedom is concrete, grounded in the actual social facts that make

up our world. It is characterized by the notion that individual freedom is inherently linked to social freedom. Social freedom is achieved when social relations, processes, and goals are geared towards developing free individuality. True freedom requires a practical manifestation in the world, where our lived experiences are part of practices aimed at common goals that nurture a collective social wealth, ultimately fostering individual development. Marx's concept of freedom thus becomes a social category, emphasizing the interdependence between individuals and their social environment.

Marx's critical social ontology merges descriptive and normative claims by showing that understanding human life as interdependent and practical also involves recognizing the evaluative aspects embedded within these categories. The central idea, as presented by Thompson, is that rational understanding of an object inherently includes evaluative criteria. This stems from Marx's teleological reasoning which, as we have already exposed, is rooted in labour. Labour, seen as praxis, expresses the capacity of ideas to guide human actions and produce outcomes. It is in this context that Thompson proposes a reading in which Lukács sees his ontological work as the basis for a form of judgement, as fundamental for an ethics that serves a critical and evaluative capacity. By presenting labour as the central aspect of his ontology, Lukács intended to construct a theory of judgement with its basis in the reflective capacity of the subject (Ibid, p. 446). Understanding the totality of the social system is crucial for penetrating beyond the superficial aspects of reified reality. Critical judgment focuses on the ability to view this totality. This assessment reveals the ontological shape of our social reality, providing a comprehensive picture that allows for critical evaluation. Ontology, thus, serves as the categorical structure within which synthetic-critical judgments can be made. These judgments evaluate social reality based on its constitutive relations, structures, processes, and ends, rather than applying external norms or values. Thus, goals should be judged by their intended outcomes rather than by arbitrary standards. Normative concepts are embedded within the structures of praxis that make up our social existence, rather than existing separately in an abstract realm. This reading supports Lukács' view that ethics is inherently linked to ontology, meaning that evaluative categories necessary for critically understanding our social reality are derived from the very nature of our social structures. The goal for producing any object is a key

criterion for evaluating it. The essence of social objects lies in the objective ontological modes previously discussed. Therefore, the evaluation of social facts must be linked to how we understand them. In other words, true knowledge of social facts gives us the necessary criteria for their evaluation. A similar reading is done by Reha Kadakal (2019) who highlights the normative foundation of social theory, grounded on his ontological work

In light of what has been exposed, we could frame Lukács' original ethical project in what Thompson describes as "materialist ethics". A materialist theory of ethics grounds our normative evaluations in the goals and objectives of collective human activities (Thompson, 2019, p. 454). A materialist ethics prioritizes the tangible goals and purposes organized within our social relations. As individuals assimilate the norms and regulations necessary for technological and administrative systems to operate, their ability to maintain critical awareness diminishes. In this context, the concept of a common good isn't merely a characteristic of an object or social phenomenon but is integral to its ability to achieve goals appropriate to a shared framework of relationships, fostering the development of its members.

The ethical project of Lukács is to be then understood, as his general philosophy, in the context of the philosophical framework that follows Marx and Hegel, specially in the latter's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. He himself describes that morality for Hegel is "a part of human practice which leads to a more genuine ethics" and that "the only real significance of the 'ought' is insofar as it expresses a discrepancy between the human *will* and 'anything that is' (Ontology 1, p. 10-11 [Emphasis mine]). The role of teleological positing is essential to understanding the role of his ontology as the foundation for ethics. It allows us to give a context from which evaluative judgement is possible. The possible contradiction arising from a posited goal (as was the case for Bolshevism as presented above) and the means to achieve it can only be properly addressed through the development of an Ethical view that considers the contextual significance of the social being. In other words, it is only through the ontological assessment of the social being that an ethical framework can arise as the proper perspective for the evaluation of the current state of affairs. About this, Lukács says:

History often shows, on the one hand, how means that appeared from a rational standpoint adequately adapted to certain posited goals 'suddenly' misfire completely and catastrophically, and on the other hand, how it is impossible - even from the standpoint of a genuine ethics - to draw up e priori a rationalized table of permissible and impermissible means. It is only possible to refute both these false extremes from a standpoint from which men's moral, ethical, etc., motivations appear as real moments of social being, which always become more or less effective within social complexes that are contradictory, but unitary even in their contradictions, and which always form real components of social practice, playing a decisive role in it because of this property of theirs as to whether a certain means (a certain influencing of men to decide their alternatives this way or that) is suitable or unsuitable, correct or reprehensible, for the realization of a goal. (Ontology 3, p. 132-133)

It is in the light of the assessment of the proper praxis of man that Ethics gains its relevance (Feenberg, 2014). In order to achieve the ultimate goal of humanity, i.e. human emancipation we must take an ontological look at the structure of social reality. Then, and only after such an assessment of done, we are going to stand in the proper position from which, after uncovering the complex dynamics within this realm, a non-transcendental valuation of human praxis will be carried out (Ibid). Lukács' original ethical project aims at dealing with the tension between posited goal and practice.

2.2 Labour as the Basis for Social Normativity

Thus far in this exposition, it has been established that the role of labour is central to both Lukács's ontology and his plans for writing a coherent ethical framework. It is now time to assess some of the ramifications of the importance of labour by specifying how it plays with the formation of normativity in the context of the social being. This task is particularly important for tackling the original question of this thesis. The role of intentionality and of the subject in the context of Marxist ethics must be framed in the discussion of the passage from a purely descriptive view of nature and human action to a normative one. In other words, it must be presented in the context of the transition

from an 'is' to an 'ought'. For this reason, there are three objectives to be met in the course of this section. The first one is to establish a general view of what we understand by social normativity and some of the basic features of what constitutes a normative claim. Second, to present Lukács' general view about value in the context of the transition from descriptive to normative claims. Third, assess the role of labour in establishing social normativity and affecting the aforementioned transition.

By assessing labour in the context of social normativity we intend to pay attention to its role in the formation of norms, rules, and standards that govern behavior within a society. Due to the centrality of the concept of labour in the formation and development of the social being, we could expect that it is similarly central in guiding and regulating individuals' actions and interactions within society. These norms could potentially include both explicit rules, like laws and regulations, and implicit expectations, like cultural customs. It would remain to be seen, though, whether social norms of this type could also provide behavioural guidelines that help individuals in social situations. There is a difference, relevant to this discussion, between the types of interactions to be found in society. This could mean that not all types of interactions are governed by rules of the same sort nor that the origin of all such rules is labour. It has been implicitly said, that labour does give some sort of guidance to assess the proper means to achieve a posited goal and also to act accordingly to those means. Yet, there has not been thus far a clear delimitation of the type of guidance it gives and whether it is applicable to all sorts of contexts regarding human interaction. Thus, by presenting labour as central for social normativity we will be referring in this section exclusively to the types of rules transmitted through socialization. It would remain to be seen, and this is left for the next champer, whether those rules arising from labour could be counted as shared values that guide moral behaviour. In general, we will focus on social norms that might aim at maintaining social order, reducing uncertainty in interactions, and promoting cooperation, ensuring that individuals' actions are predictable and aligned with some common collective aim. From this perspective, we might expect that some norms be substantive for the (correct or incorrect) functioning of society, facilitating or hindering social cooperation and fostering a sense of belonging or alienation among its members. Understanding social normativity within the framework of Lukács' social ontology is

crucial for comprehending the real reach and dynamics of the activity of labour in its specificity.

Following David Copp and Justin Morton (2022) we can contextualise the question about normativity. We want to understand, in general terms, what do we mean by 'normativity' and what property are we referring to when we talk about it, in the context of the social. When in this thesis we pose the question about the role of labour in normativity we present the general idea of the role of this activity in action-guiding and attitude-guiding claims. We talk about claims that do not just describe some state of affairs, but claims that provide reasons for actions or attitudes (Copp and Morton, 2022). While the aim of this section is not to give a thorough theory of normativity, we still aim to present some general features that help us identify this sort of claim in Lukács. We would make use of Lukács' scattered thoughts found in his writings about normativity to get a general framework that allows us to understand the dynamics of labour and normativity. Normative claims are not exclusive to the moral domain and tell us something about reasons for acting or thinking a certain way through language that refers to the "rights" and "wrongs" of actions. It is not the same, for example, to say "the dictatorship of the proletariat is the means to achieve socialism" as "the dictatorship of the proletariat is the right means to achieve socialism". The latter sentence, presenting not just a mere description, has a special normative, action-guiding, weight to it.

In particular, we would assess the question about normativity in Lukács from the perspective of two frameworks that could present the right questions to Lukács' ides on the topic. The reason for this is that, according to what has been thus far presented, two of the main elements of Lukács' philosophy must be accounted for in any assessment of his normative notions. While these frameworks are not meant to represent alternatives to his views, they could complement them in the context of an unexplained understanding of normativity. The features of Lukács' thought that these frameworks could help us highlight are two, namely, the possibility of justifying normativity from individual motivation, in the context of teleological positing, and the strong reliance of normative claims on collective social structures. The project of giving a sound

explanation of social normativity through a pragmatist view of social meaning remains intact as it might allow us to give a better insight into the original question of this thesis.

The first framework from which we could present relevant questions to Lukács' system is the one in which normative thought has an intrinsic link to motivation. According to motivational judgment internalism, it is necessarily true that if a person believes she ought to do something, she is motivated to do it. Extending this idea, one might propose that all normative thoughts inherently motivate the person who holds them (Ibid). This suggests that the content of normative beliefs must account for this motivational link, as not all beliefs have such a connection. Thus, normative propositions might be defined by the fact that anyone who believes them is necessarily motivated accordingly. This posits the question of whether Lukács' account can give a proper explanation of the link between motivational states and normative thoughts. If we follow Lukács' original ethical project, the idea is to ease and properly understand, and of course give some solution to, the tension between individuality and collectivity arising from the proposed collective goal and the use of the "right" means to achieve it. As a consequence of this, it would be important to understand whether this connection between collectivity and individuality can somehow be eased by an explanation of the individual's motivational state in light of the importance of teleological positing as the human activity that originates sociality.

Another framework from which normativity could be accounted for in Lukács is via "practices well-suited to address problems of normative governance" (Ibid). According to this framework, human flourishing depends on cooperation within societies, which helps address various needs, values, and opportunities. Societies face the "problem of sociality," where conflicts and disagreements can hinder successful living. Thus, societies seem to be more successful when members adhere to specific moral codes. Autonomy involves pursuing needs and values, but individuals often succumb to immediate temptations and neglect future benefits or risks. Dealing with these difficulties requires norms that promote the efficient pursuit of needs and values, enhancing rationality and autonomy. Pluralist teleology presnts that normative facts are based on the content of standards that best address normative governance problems,

supporting mind-independent normative realism and reductive normative naturalism (Ibid). Thus, Lukács and pluralist teleology share a common concern with the social and normative dimensions of human flourishing. Lukács, by emphasising the role of social structures and historical materialism in shaping human consciousness and criticising the alienating effects of capitalist society, advocates for a revolutionary transformation to achieve a classless society, highlighting the ethical imperative to overcome alienation. Pluralist teleology, on the other hand, by focusing on how societies can better address normative governance problems could present the right questions to Lukács' philosophical framework in terms of normative justification.

Despite their different approaches, both Lukács and pluralist teleology engage with ethical questions about organizing society to promote human flourishing. Lukács' critique of capitalist society and call for revolutionary change parallels pluralist teleology's advocacy for norms that enhance societal functioning. Both perspectives critique existing societal conditions and propose solutions that support better social cooperation and individual well-being, which could involve a possibly valid understanding of the role of normativity in the philosopher. From this perspective of the two general frameworks presented, it is important to make sense of Lukács' views on normativity while considering how it relates to individuality and collectivity. We have already presented how relevant is for Lukács the discussion about human freedom, partially developed from the influence of Marxism in his thought.

The importance of normativity seems evident for Lukács in how he understands its relationship with teleological positing. About this, he says:

> lf we proceed now from the fact that the decisive act of the subject is his teleological positing and the realization of this, it is immediately illuminating that the categorically decisive moment in these acts involves the emergence of a practice determined by the 'ought'. The immediately determining moment of any action intended as a realization must straightaway be the 'ought', since each step in the realization is determined by whether and how it promotes the attainment of the goal. (Ontology 1, p. 65-66)

From this passage, we can see that Lukács acknowledges the emergence of the 'ought' as a necessary consequence of the teleological positing carried out by the individual and its realisation. The 'ought' appears here as a determination of the positing of a goal as it carries out with it the conditions for the proper obtention of the desired end. Regarding this, the interpretation of Murillo van der Laan (2019) highlights that, at the same time, the concept of the 'ought' and value are intimately related categories. They are also linked to what Lukács views as the first expression of freedom in the social being. The potentialities inherent in reality, Van der Laan assesses, compel the worker to choose between specific alternatives and realise the chosen alternative inevitably requires a specific behaviour from the individual who brings into existence what was previously envisioned. Thus, he goes, freedom is tied to 'ought' because achieving a goal necessitates that every step taken by the subject must be evaluated to determine how it can fulfil a particular need (Van der Laan, 2019, p. 86). For Lukács, 'ought' emerges inherently in the practice he considers the fundamental phenomenon in social existence, i.e. labour. It refers to a future direction established by the previously idealised goal in the labour process and is necessarily determined by the worker's objective, shaping her behaviour as she strives to achieve her goal, which can also alter her self-perception. However, according to Van der Laan's reading, like other categories in Ontology, 'ought' must be understood in relation to the specific context in which it appears.

The connection of the 'ought' with 'value' relates to the social practice of determining future behaviour in function to the assignation of value toward what is aimed to be materialised (Ibid). Furthermore, the realisation of value can only be attained when it activates 'ought' as the guide for the individual's practice. In Van der Laan's reading, value influences the goal and the evaluation of the objectified result, while 'ought' relates to the regulative process of objectification (Ibid, p. 88). This is evinced directly in Lukács's writings when he says that:

> The two categories [ought and value] certainly belong so intimately together because they are both moments of a common complex. But because value influences above all the positing of the goal and is the principle of judgement on the realized product, while the 'ought' rather provides the regulator of the process itself, much must distinguish the

two as categories of social being: this does not remove their correlation, but on the contrary makes it more concrete. (Ontology 3, p. 75)

Lukács' assessment of the relationship between the two concepts still brings about a fair question that requires elucidation, i.e. the question about the subjectivity or objectivity of the property of value. The answer to this question will be found in Lukács' adoption of Marx's views on what they take to be the main form of valuation, viz. use value. Even in cases where use value is closely tied to natural existence, he argues that value cannot be directly derived from an object's natural properties, yet stresses that values are not merely the result of subjective judgement (Ibid). Valuations arise from the exchange between teleology and natural causality, particularly evident in use values. Although some valuations, such as air or natural meadows, are not related to labour, they generally emerge within concrete labour relations. Value is absent in nature due to the lack of teleology but influences valuation processes manifested in use-values, creating a social form of objectivity related to utility in fulfilling needs through teleological actions (Van der Laan, p. 89).

For Lukács, values are not simply subjective judgments since they are grounded in the objective utility of use values. The correctness of these judgments is determined by the objective properties of use values and the interpretation of values requires an adequate analysis of labour and its role in the emergence of social being. Lukács' approach to values in *Ontology* seeks an alternative perspective to transcendental teleological views. The social objectivity of use-values arises from the interaction between teleology and causality in labour, addressing the essential task of the metabolism between humans and nature. Values, centred on goal-setting and the evaluation of objectified results, demand a certain behaviour from the individual, the 'ought', to successfully realise goals (Ibid). Thus, understanding value from the perspective of economy is useful, Van der Laan says, since it draws an articulation between objectivity and subjectivity in economic valuations (Ibid). Through a philosophical extension of Marx's perspective on labour and practice, Lukács offers an interpretation of values that goes beyond Marx's original stance. He emphasises two key aspects, already mentioned in Chapter 1 above: the causality that individuals must navigate to achieve successful objectifications, and the evaluation of the available alternatives along with the internalisation of these demands,

as expressed by the category of 'ought'. Through a philosophical development of Marx's perspective on labour and practice, Lukács provides a reading of values that complements Marx's position by emphasizing, on one hand, the causality individuals must confront to achieve successful objectification, and on the other, the evaluation of the alternatives available to them and the processes through which they internalize these demands (Ibid). The multiple valuations that determine the decisions of purchase and sale, in the simple exchange of commodities, can result in a crisis that acts objectively against buyers and sellers, rendering economic value "counterproductive". Compared to use values, this is a much more complex moment. The objectivity here is stressed in the synthesis of these diverse acts, which underlies the valuation and the decisions made. This is to say, it is from this synthesis that economic valuations emerge and it must be reported to verify the potential success of a particular act (Ibid). This constitutes the objective relation that underlies the valuations in the economic complex, but must be comprehended as the attempt of Lukács to grasp the processual development of the social being: economy of time, however, immediately involves a relation of value. Even simple labour, oriented just to use value, was a subjugation of nature by and for man, both in its transformation to suit his needs and in his attaining control over his own merely natural instincts and emotions, and is thus a mediating factor in the initial elaboration of his specifically human abilities (Ibid).

Lukács' assessment of Marx's philosophy, as Van der Laan notes, when referring to the emergence of value, highlights that non-economic value:

> always presuppose sociality, as an existential characteristic that is already present and in the process of development, whereas economic value has not only originally created this sociality, but permanently produces and reproduces it anew, always on an extended scale. In this process of reproduction, economic value time and again receives new patterns, and even quite new forms of categories can emerge (Ontology 2, p. 154)

In a society where the private production of commodities is generalised, the post-festum validation of the labour time spent is not determined by the actual number of hours engaged in the creation of a use value but, in general terms, by the social average of intensity in the execution of that particular kind of labour. (Van der Laan, 2019). The

indirect social character of labour, the opacity of economic values and the compulsion to reduce labour time through the imposition of a socially necessary labour time are certainly determinations of capitalism, but they cannot be generalised to other social formations.

Now we are in a better position to give an account of labour and normativity. Labour plays a crucial role in the development of social normativity because it acts as the foundational activity through which individuals engage with and transform their environment, thereby shaping social relations and norms. Through the labour process, individuals confront the material world and must make decisions about how to best achieve their goals, which implies choosing between concrete alternatives and internalising the demands posed by these choices. It is in this process that the 'ought', as action-guiding, emerges. The notion of 'ought' represents the normative dimension that originates in labour, guiding behaviour and decision-making. When individuals engage in labour, they engage in a process that forms their social and ethical relations. The goals and objectives set during labour require practical realisation, linking normative aspirations with concrete actions. Labour also fosters social cooperation and interdependence, as individuals work together to achieve common goals. This cooperation necessitates the establishment of norms and values that facilitate collective action and social cohesion. The shared experiences and challenges encountered in labour contribute to the formation of a common understanding of what is valuable and what ought to be done, further reinforcing social norms. Moreover, the objectification of labour, where idealised goals are transformed into material reality, influences not only external behaviour but also self-perception and identity. The successful realization of labour objectives validates certain behaviours and practices, embedding them within the social fabric as normative standards. From this, we see that the influence of teleological positing, as the primary example of human praxis can bring about a normative dimension.

The category of 'ought' is connected to value, as what individuals aim to objectify in their labour must be perceived as valuable to guide their actions. Value, in this context, is not an inherent property of objects but arises from the social relations and teleological

processes involved in labour. It is through the interplay of teleology and natural causality that values and norms are articulated and internalized. Labour is the original phenomenon through which social beings encounter and shape the world, giving rise to the normative structures that govern social life. It is through this process that individuals internalize societal values, norms, and expectations, thereby contributing to the ongoing process of social normativity. This dynamic process ensures that labour remains central to the development and transformation of social norms, as it continuously generates new challenges and opportunities for normative reflection and action.

An important point to highlight in this last part of this section is the divergence of Lukács' idea of the origin of social normativity with what can be counted as a "conventional" explanation of it and the difficulties it brings about as a consequence of its nature. This point is highlighted by Stahl (2019) and Smetona (2019) in their presentation of the particularities of Lukács' views on normativity. While, as we have seen, Lukács conceives labour as the ontological foundation for normatively-determined practices, conventional ideas about normativity present the 'ought' as independent of the specific alternatives presented to individuals as a consequence of teleological positing (Smetona, 2019). Social practices are seen as "embodiments of absolute commandments" that transcend humanity itself and do not derive from its practices (Ibid, p. 75). Lukács' view, as it diverges from this traditional position, presents a problem when we have to start dealing with the level of objectivity that is traditionally expected by normative accounts. Lukács' thoughts on normativity do not isolate the phenomenon from individual instances of human praxis, taking away force from the idea of the possibility of generalised objective-like social practices that give a normative framework. Critical theories, like Lukács', present an idea of normativity that locates the origin of normativity in society in the attribution of functions to the tools available for the realisation of a posited goal (Stahl, 2019, p. 373). This makes sense in a context where both normative-intentional positing through the individual anticipation of the result of an action and the determination of possible routes to achieving that goal by natural laws play a relevant role, as it occurs in the context of labour. This is made clearer when Lukács says that:

[...] When we consider not the individual isolated act of teleological positing, but rather the totality of these acts and their mutual relations with one another in a given society, we inevitably come to establish tendential similarities, convergences, types, etc. The proportion of these convergent or divergent tendencies in this totality shows the reality of the concrete space for teleological positing that we have just indicated. The real social process, from which arises not only the positing of the goal but also the discovery and application of the means, defines precisely the concretely limited space for possible questions and answers, for alternatives that can actually be realized. The determining components appear still more concretely and firmly defined in the existing totality than in the individual acts of positing when these are considered in isolation. (Ontology 3, p. 38-39)

From passages such as this Lukács seems to assume, Stahl says, that only labour can provide a non-mysterious basis for normative criteria as emerging from broadly natural processes. If we accept this, we can understand how, through the imposition of functions, tools emerge as the first social entities whose internal teleological structure becomes part of intersubjective reality (Stahl, 2019). Cooperative labour processes require achieving a shared understanding of that structure and thereby form the basis of all other kinds of social normativity. Lukàcs' explanation on this matter, as presented in the introduction, leads Stahl to highlight some questions to be answered. He presents mainly two strong objections out of which just the first will be addressed in the following sections. The scope of this thesis is to understand and analyse the role of the subject in the ethical framework presented by Lukàcs. Stahl's second objection, although presented briefly, will not be further developed.

It is unclear, Stahl says, why only tools can play this role, and why, for example, communication about goals does not also introduce language as an independent source of normative commitments. As we have presented above, Lukács does highlight the relevance of language in the process of development of labour. After all, the emergence of language represents a pivotal moment in which the individually-originated posited goals start being shared in view of common aims. Nevertheless, it remains unclear why no special structure of language, originated through this process, does not constitute an independent, or even parallel, source of normativity. Also unclear is whether Lukács

adopts a relatively standard Humean idea about normative commitment as the result of a combination of desire and knowledge, which leads to the question about the role of individuals and the set of intentional states in the context of this normative commitment (Ibid). Additionally, it remains unclear why labour gives rise to a form of normativity that is, in some non-trivial sense, essentially social. After all, Lukács' conception of labour refers to an activity that can be performed by individuals (Ibid). If the anticipatory imagination forms the normative standard for labour, it seems entirely possible to explain the resulting normativity independently of cooperative contexts and as something applicable to a solitary worker (Ibid, p. 374). Theoretically, by how Lukàcs' theory is presented, this could be possible even if there is no possible instance of this occurring in reality. In other words, labour-based normativity does not seem to have social preconditions and does not *necessarily* lead to socially shared norms. By taking labour as the origin of sociality and by describing it as an activity in which individuals enter into a special relation with the environment, there is no reason to presuppose sociality in the labour process from the outset. This issue is stated by Stahl when he says:

> What such a theory of labor-based normativity cannot explain, however, is the emergence of types of intentionality by which people create new institutional rules and, concomitantly, new needs emerge. If one assumes that all norms ultimately emerge from needs-directed interaction between people, then there is room to explain how the resulting practices become increasingly complex in their quest to satisfy the relevant needs, and perhaps even how derived needs that relate to the requirements of participation in such practices emerge. The resulting model will still be instrumentalist to a certain extent, however – as Lukács argues, language and institutions are mere means of the "generalization" of more particular forms of action. It will not be able to explain the emergence of new social action types that have goals which are completely divorced from need satisfaction. (Stahl, 2019, p. 384)

Lukács' analysis appears to Stahl as being thoroughly individualistic, even though it has been presented in the context of the emergence of sociality. The possibility of individuality playing a relevant role in the emergence of teleological positing leaves the

door open for this problem to arise. Society and labour are necessarily linked merely insofar as people create causal connections between each other's activities through the unintended consequences of their actions, which then gradually form a systemic structure (Ibid). Lukács combines the individualist reduction of labour-based normativity with a quasi-system-theoretic analysis of the social integration of individual goals into one overarching structure of production by anonymous laws. Stahl's second large objection presents the unclarity of why the structure of labour should be key to understanding society rather than merely being one element within a broader theory of social norms (Ibid). Even if the normative ought of social rules is always a result, directly or indirectly, of the interaction of human anticipation with natural-law necessity, it remains possible that social normative structures have their own logic, such that we learn very little about them by examining the structure of the labour process.

Despite these objections, Lukács' discussion, a large part of which we have already covered, offers resources for addressing them. Regarding the first issue, concerning the underlying individualism in the description of labour, we have presented in the previous section that Lukács seems to suggest that he views labour not only as the realisation of individuals' subjective intentions but also as subject to social evaluation based on how it contributes to the satisfaction of needs. One of the main points made by Lukács in this respect is presenting the moral problem of Bolshevism as the issue of following the "proper" methods of revolutionary action, whose valuation is subject to the attainment of the desired goal.

Admittedly, Lukács often seems to endorse a relatively simplistic subjectivist-utilitarian analysis of how labour can be evaluated concerning its effects (Ibid). Nonetheless, considering his emphasis on the idea that the relevant needs for such an evaluation are of a "social character," there is a broader understanding of the whole issue by giving two possible interpretations. One interpretation is that some needs are products of social practices, processes, and institutions. These needs either constitutively depend on social contexts or are causally related to social practices as possible consequences of socialisation. Nevertheless, this interpretation cannot be exhausted here since while these needs are social, they are not social needs in an ontological sense, i.e. they are

needs of individuals and they are essential to self-realisation. A way of tackling this interpretation, Stahl proposes, is to recognise that in Lukács there is a differentiation between an "original intention" of the teleological positing, meant to satisfy some need, and understanding labour in an "objectively social context" in which case it acquires a general nature that "transcends" the subject (Stahl, 2019, p. 376). While initially individuals work to satisfy their own needs, the norms governing their labour change in stages where the social environment impacts their actions, thus changing what they do in a social ontological sense, a process that took form with the division of labour. In this phase, the determination of purpose suffers a change due to sociality thus becoming more homogeneous. As a consequence, Stahl makes a reading of Lukács and his view on labour and individuality in which labour processes are ontologically and originally heterogeneous. On the one hand, they are guided by socially determined needs. On the other hand, the means to fulfil these needs are determined by natural properties and laws, not socially defined. Labour thus requires matching a standard that transcends the individual's representation of it with natural facts, thus combining elements from two ontological spheres. If successful, the individual's anticipation establishes a "homogeneous" standard governing their activities, homogenising heterogeneity through the labour process, particularly when socially defined needs form the standard for choosing means (Ibid, p. 377).

When Lukács discusses social needs that must be satisfied, the social aspect should refer to the source of the normative significance of individual needs, determining also the content of such needs. In other words, what counts as fulfilling a need should be viewed also as socially established. Although Lukács never explicitly endorses this claim we suppose that the social constitution of needs extends to their content and the way this content is reflected in labour-guiding intentions is necessary to make sense of further claims in the ontology. A similar reading is presented by Mezsaros (2019) who presents that Lukács' 'ought' is grounded in a "longing for objectivity" (Mezsaros, 2019, p. 41). Modern times, Lukács thought, have the need to deal with "bad objectivity" and emphasise the relationship between social structures and individual agency. He argues that social progress requires individuals to make conscious decisions between alternatives, influenced by economic factors but ultimately determined by

human choices. Lukács' work, Mezsaros argues, although seeks for objective force to guide human action, it also acknowledges that the conflict between "what is" and "what ought to be" cannot be completely resolved (Ibid). What must be highlighted is that individuals, through understanding and making conscious choices, can realise their potential and change their lives, which involves a theoretical understanding that current social conditions are just forms of underlying real processes. Therefore, awakening independent, self-aware personalities, made possible by economic progress, is crucial. Thus, Mezsaros continues, the intentions guiding labour should not be understood as independent of their objective aim. This suggests that if products and means acquire a historical character through the process of 'homogenisation' then the way intentions relate to their satisfactory conditions will be determined by categories instituted in social practice, regardless of the individual's representation of these conditions (Ibid).

To give strength to Lukács' insistence on the primacy of labour, Stahl suggests adopting a strategy that refers to needs and the specific position of labour in the exchange between nature and society. Lukács claims that all social normativity derives from the labour process becomes less counterintuitive if we view social coordination through labour and needs as fundamental. Recognising needs as relevant in labour forms the basis for social practices that determine intentional content, making labour a foundation for understanding social institutions. This strategy could be carried out by adopting some sort of inferentialism in the context of social practice theories of meaning. Norm interpretation would result as the consequence of the individual's recognition of authority in other members of society regarding the conditions of satisfaction of linguistic utterances. Such recognition of needs could potentially establish standards of intentional performance and give strength to the emergence of social normativity (Ibid). The normativity of labour would be socially determined and it would extend to recognising needs as relevant, forming the foundation for other forms of social coordination through ascribed authority. It would suggest, in other words, that labour's normativity forms the basis for other types of social norms. In the context of this thesis, such a framework will be used to determine more precisely what is the role of the subject in Lukács' ethical project. Since ethics is linked to normativity, and normativity to labour, it remains relevant to use such an inferentialist framework to give a partial

answer to the question presented by Stahl. Normativity is not the main scope of this thesis, but it constitutes a point of inflexion from which we can give an explanation of the subject and the ethics of Lukács.

2.3 Lukács' Concept of the Subject: Towards Collectivity

Obtaining a straightforward description of the subject from Lukács' writings is not easy. Most of its difficulty lies in the fact that there are no definitional passages from which to extract a proper, undebatable, understanding of the concept. Nevertheless, the exposition of his ontology, in addition to his views on teleological positing, can give us some insight into a characterisation of his notion of the subject. The task will require us to take a look into the secondary bibliography referring to the topic and assess associated notions like the one of consciousness and the individual. By no means do we imply an equivalence among these concepts, nor that these concepts are exhaustive to the subjective phenomenon. The idea is to attend to the vocabulary used by Lukács himself in the description of states that could, in one way or another, count as individual-subjective experiences. Thus, the aim of this section is double. First, it aims to present a coherent account of Lukács' general thought on the subject by additionally analysing the related concept of individuality. As a first approach, we will present the general notion of the subject as found in Hegel as some of the core aspects of the issue are borrowed from his philosophy. Parallelly, we will make a quick assessment of Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* as it develops the idea of reification and the subject-object distinction that ought to be analysed more extensively as it has been thus far. This would give us the foundation to develop a systematic grasp of the individual, in assessing whether there is a contrast to collective, experience and its characteristics. By doing this we will be in a better position to assess Lukács' ideas on the subject and its position within his philosophical framework. The second aim of this section is to determine the relationship between Lukács' concept of the subject and his idea of collectivity. This implies taking a look at the constant relationship and development of the individual and society as a whole and revisiting, as it was briefly mentioned in the previous Chapter, the dialectics between subject and object.

Without giving a thorough description of the role of the subject in Hegel's philosophy, it remains relevant to address some of his ideas on the subject as Lukács' philosophy inherits many of the elements found in the Hegelian framework. An approach to this can be found in the work of Rocío Zambrana (2017) who presents the conceptualisation of the subject in Hegel's logic in the context of its position in German idealism. In order to understand the notion of subject, she explains, we should move beyond the metaphysical/non-metaphysical debate in understanding Hegel's general philosophy. This means reading Hegel's idealism not just as a departure from Kant's critical project where thought and being are identical (metaphysical view), nor as a completion of that project focusing on the epistemological nature of the *Spirit* [Geist] (non-metaphysical view) as a concept for elaborating the sociality of reason (Zambrana, 2017, p. 292-293).

Hegel's commitment to intelligibility, Zambrana argues, is distinctively post-Kantian, and moves from Kant's first-person perspective to an understanding of intelligibility as the rationality of historically specific practices and institutions, the *Spirit* (Ibid). This approach emphasises history in understanding intelligibility, but it also involves an ahistorical account of it, showing that it is a matter of the rationality of things themselves. Hegel, she continues, argues that substance should be understood as being subject through his unique interpretation of negativity [Negativität], i.e. the process of change and development. In the preface to his Phenomenology, Hegel outlines his idea of reason through a logic of actualization, describing reason as 'purposive activity' in an Aristotelian sense of 'self-movement' giving origin to what is 'subject' (Ibid). The purposive activity of reason is defined by its power to instigate change. The power of a thing to act, its activity, is its subjectivity (Ibid, p. 294). Characterising subjectivity as "pure simple negativity", Zambrana argues that Hegel emphasises a thing's ability to unfold through the conditions that produced it and that this process of actualization demonstrates that a thing's rationality is reflected in its capacity for self-determined change. Actuality, thus, should be seen as a concrete form of rationality. Since a thing's intelligibility is shaped by the conditions that produce it, its rationality is essentially its subjectivity. Thus, a subject is not a solitary individual but rather the process of actualization itself. "Becoming-other" and "returning-to-self" represent a process where

being is mediated, making it a matter of self-reflection and concept (Ibid). According to Zambrana, for Hegel subjectivity should be understood as *Spirit*. This means that how we understand what something is and what it should be depends on the historical and material conditions that shape it. To grasp this, we need to understand Hegel's idea of 'negativity'. Going beyond the works of Spinoza and Kant, Hegel focuses on understanding how form and content come together in their dynamism. Hegel's theory integrates these aspects, showing that subjectivity is not just an empty idea but a real, active process of self-determination and change.

The final point made by Zambrana is that for Hegel the concept of reason is not an ontological principle nor an epistemic faculty but rather is the *form of rationality* inherent in things themselves (Ibid, p. 300). She says that in Hegel's exposition in *Doctrine of Essence*, he demonstrates that objects are shaped by a network of conditions that manifest a rational structure. Thus, the universality of objects in their particularity is contingent on those specific conditions. Hegel's idea of reason, therefore, demands a nuanced understanding of universality, as concrete and universal. According to Hegel, abstract universality is opposed to particularity and singularity, as it relies on external content. In contrast, concrete universality is defined through its own negativity and development. Universality, as immediate negation, becomes particularity, and as the negation of negation, it becomes singularity. The universal thus emerges as a totality of the concept, and the concrete concept is understood as having unfolded through conditions that both exceed and produce it. The universal is concrete because it maintains its identity through its differentiation. Hegel argues that the concrete concept is not just a static entity but involves dynamic self-determination. Judgment, according to Hegel, is not merely an act of combination but involves differentiation. The concept is clarified through the judgment of the concept, which deals with normativity not as an external standard but as an inherent aspect of the concept itself (Ibid). This normative judgment assesses whether a particular matter aligns with its own concept, leading to apodictic judgments that determine necessity or actuality. Thus, Hegel's notion of concrete universality shifts the focus from abstract representation to the actual self-determination and self-mediation of the concept. Zambrana's reading sees Hegel's approach as moving beyond Kant's epistemological framework and providing an integrated account of objectivity and rationality. Hegel's idealism develops around this

interpretation of subjectivity as he sees things, events, ideas, and institutions as expressions of subjectivity since the rationality they exhibit stems from their own development. More specifically, the universality inherent in singular entities results from their emergence through particular conditions that give rise to them.

From the exposition of Hegel's general view on subjectivity, as presented by Zambrana, we are better equipped to give sense to Lukács' own position as this view also permeates in Marx's. Without going deep into his characterisation of the subject it is useful to highlight some elements that could be extracted from Hegel's influence. Marx understands the subject as a socially embedded and active agent, shaped by socio-economic conditions and class relations. Humans, are defined by their ability to carry out the activity of labour, create, and transform their environment, and engage in productive activities within a community context. He sees, generally, the working class as a revolutionary subject capable of overthrowing capitalism through class struggle and developing class consciousness. This is to be understood in the context of Lukács' presentation of the phenomenon of reification, described by him as, paraphrasing Marx's words, the presentation to the worker of the sum total of the worker's labour as a social relation (HCC, 1972, p. 86). In other words, the social character of a worker's labour is stamped in the product of that labour becoming "something objective independent of him, something that controls him by virtue of an autonomy alien to man" (Ibid, p. 87). Understanding the subject, for Marx as much as for Lukács, involves understanding the process of reification and the dynamics between the conceptualised notion of subject and object derived from the contextual historical conditions. Additionally, and as a consequence, it involves a call to transformative praxis where awareness of social conditions leads to collective action for the achievement of a classless society. It would be useful to remember that, as repeatedly mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, Lukács departs from the transcendental aspects of Hegel's philosophy by adopting Marx's materialism instead. Thus, we could expect that the phenomenon of subjective experience and subjectivity in general change accordingly. The presentation of the subject-object distinction appears in Lukács as a necessary discussion derived from the dual aspect of the phenomenon of reification. On the one side, the objective aspect of it involves the discovery, by part of individuals, of a set of laws and relations that govern commodities, as external objects, and that can be used by

workers for their own advantage. On the other, the subjective aspect involves the detachment of the worker's activity and its insertion into these aforementioned laws thus becoming an article of consumption (Ibid).

On this point, and always keeping in mind the context of the discussion on reification, we could refer to Lukács' mention of the difference between Hegel's and Marx's views on the role of labour as a "metabolism between society and man" and its socialising effect and the position of the individual in it (Ontology 3, p. 86). According to Lukács, Hegel emphasizes the instruments of labour as the enduring element in this activity, contrasting them with the transient nature of the needs they satisfy, while Marx focuses on the totality of the activity in terms of the relations that compose it. It is clarifying to see this difference by quoting Lukács directly when he says:

> [...] Hegel stresses the instruments of labour as the objectively enduring moment in labour, in opposition to the transient character of the momentary need whose satisfaction they make possible. Yet the opposition between the two expressions that strikes one at first sight is only an apparent one. Hegel, in analysing the act of labour itself, stressed the tool as a moment that is of lasting effect for social development, a mediating category of decisive importance, as the result of which the individual act of labour goes beyond its individuality and is itself erected into a moment of social continuity. Hegel thus provides a first indication of how the act of labour can become a moment of social reproduction. Marx, on the other hand, considers the economic process in its developed and dynamic totality, and in this totality man must appear as both beginning and end, as initiator and as end-product of the overall process; even if he often seems to vanish in the streams of this process, and in his individual character always does vanish, yet despite this appearance, which of course also has its own foundation, he still composes the real essence of the process. (Ontology 3, p. 86)

The objectivity of economic value, Lukács continues, is rooted in labour, which acts as a metabolism between society and man. However, the true reality of economic value extends far beyond this basic connection. Even the most primitive form of labour, which creates utility value by meeting needs, initiates a process that leads to the development of humanity. Economic value thus represents a qualitative advancement over the inherent value found in the simple activity of producing use-values. According to Konstantinos Kavoulakos (2019), while Lukács adopted Marxism, he retained some

neo-Kantian elements, which informed his vision of historical materialism as an open, dynamic process centred on conscious and collective praxis. Lukács' concept of reification, he argues, remains relevant to contemporary critical theory and its capacity for critiquing modern capitalism. This dialectical progression involves a dual and contradictory movement: on one hand, the utility aspect of value becomes more universal, mastering all aspects of human life, while on the other hand, it becomes increasingly abstract. By highlighting this aspect we inevitably go back to some of the core aspects of the dynamics of labour, pervasive in Lukács' philosophy. To understand it better we would refer to an important important point highlighted by Infranca and Vedda (2019) regarding the emergence of humanity. They highlight that Lukács, by presenting labour as the origin of value through the instrumentalisation of objects with the objective of reaching a posited goal, sees that collective labour enhances the ability to sustain life fostering a growing sense of *belonging* to a broader, increasingly complex species. As a consequence, we can see in Lukác that when individuals recognize themselves as members of the human race to the extent that their personal experiences become part of a common heritage, the *concept* of the individual emerges as an indivisible being composed of inseparable elements. This goes along with Lukács' own understanding of the "integration of the species", as mentioned in his *Ontology* (Ontology 2, p. 153). Individuals in any society, Lukács argues, are inherently integrated since the production and reproduction of human life is a social process. This process of realization and the development of the individual's "individuality" led to an analysis centred on labour. In this process, singularity and membership in the human race become inseparable aspects of humanity (Infranca et al., 2019). Practically speaking, for Lukács every human being is a community, existing in a relation with themselves, others, and their species. Such a perspective, derived from Lukács' *Ontology*, shows that conceptually the individual is born through labour as belonging to a species. This view introduces a conception of subjectivity originating from labour (Ibid).

From this last point, we can refer to two core ideas of the concept of subject in Lukács where the second dovetails the first. First, the concept of the subject is intrinsically related to the notion of teleological positing and the capacity of transformation through the realisation of a goal. Second, Lukács' notion of the subject does not exclusively

singularise individuals, as the capacity for teleological positing is not individualised but it can extend to society as a whole. As a social phenomenon, labour is *the* instantiation of teleological positing giving rise to dynamics in which the individual, as a subject, develops itself in its constant and intrinsic relation with society. From this exposition, we can say that Lukács does not see subject and object as separate individualised entities. Instead, by highlighting transformation through teleological positing, he emphasizes their interconnectedness, arguing that "man" (individually and in society) and the external world are mutually constitutive. This relationship takes place when the subject's consciousness forms and develops through its interaction with the external world through labour. Through teleological positing, Lukács presents a structural process in which goals are set, executed, and evaluated in function of their efficiency (Smetona, 2019). Thus, labour is the mediating activity between the subject and object in which humans transform the material world while shaping their own consciousness and social relations in a dialectical transformation. The process of reification, proper of capitalist society, turns human activities and relationships into commodities, leading to alienation. In this state, individuals experience a sense of separation from the products of their labour, from others, and from their own human potential, perceiving the object as alien and independent from themselves, thus losing sight of the constant relationship between each other.

Lukács emphasizes that the subject-object relationship is historically and socially situated, with human consciousness and the material world shaped by historical and social conditions, requiring an examination of the specific socio-economic context, particularly the conditions of production and labour, to understand the aforementioned relation. Social being, having ontological priority over individual consciousness, shapes and gives form to individual subjectivity. This includes the totality of social relations and material conditions, making the subject's consciousness a product of its social existence and necessitating an understanding of the broader social context to fully grasp its nature as a subject. Of this view is the author Richard Westerman (2018) who does not see Lukács's theory as an effort to solve the subject-object problem as outlined by classical German philosophy, i.e. as an effort to *connect* the subject with the object. Westerman's reading of Lukács is particularly insightful as it presents a coherence between his political project and his Ethical aspirations to present a source of

normativity. Westerman sees Lukács as treating subject and object as inherently linked parts of the total experience (Westerman, 2018, p. 163). Thus, Lukács' analysis starts with the reevaluation of the whole understanding of the subject-object problem posed by the previous German philosophy. He deals with this discussion showing that the separation of subject and object is just one specific way they interact in the context of totality. This interpretation of the issue gains force by considering Lukács' ideas on the appreciation of art in which the meaning of a work changes depending on whether it is seen as a whole or as part of one's own life (Ibid). These different stances reveal the same object differently, producing variable meanings. Yet, as mentioned in the previous section, his longing for an objective source of normativity does not let him fall into relativism. In his analysis of capitalist society, Lukács uses the "spectator of art" model to explain its seeming unchangeability. He describes how the same set of properties can result in different meanings depending on the perspective, whether seen from outside as fixed or from within as flexible and dynamic (Ibid). This standpoint determines how reality is perceived: either as a world, we are involved in or as an objective system we observe from outside. Thus, Lukács argues that subject and object are correlated parts of the same intentional whole, overcoming the problem by treating the separation as just one possible configuration of consciousness. This critique suggests that the subjective position should be seen as part of the objective forms, not as something separate, but as the point around which objectivity is organized (Ibid). Lukács's solution presents that subject and object remain distinct but are parts of a system of reality that relates them in various ways. They can be reconciled by understanding their relationship as part of a larger structured whole. In the words of Lukács:

> What is relevant to our problem here is the statement that the subject of knowledge, the ego-principle, is known as to its content and, hence, can be taken as a starting-point and as a guide to method. In the most general terms we see here the origin of the philosophical tendency to press forward to a conception of the subject which can be thought of as the creator of the totality of content. And likewise in general, purely programmatic terms we see the origin of the search for a level of objectivity, a positing of the objects, where the duality of subject and object (the duality of thought and being is only a special case of this), is transcended, i.e. where subject and object coincide, where they are identical. (HCC, p. 122-123)

Lukács's critique of classical German philosophy shows how it understood reality from a subject's perspective. His critique, Westerman argues, reveals how the rational categories of knowledge externalize the individual subject, creating a purely formal viewpoint. This framing combines subject and object within a structure that determines their relationship, echoing the forms of social reality (Ibid). The commodity structure in capitalism, for instance, reduces individuals to passive observers, reflecting their formal role in the social system. Lukács's concept of the standpoint is not about knowing more or less of society but about the intentional stance expected of subjects in constructing meaningful social objects. Reification, under the commodity structure, limits individuals' input, making society appear as a machine. This reduction is mirrored in marginal utility theory, where subjectivity is determined by abstract exchange, not labour. Lukács's concept of the standpoint relates to the practical construction of social reality, where the subject's position determines how society appears. The proletariat's contradictory standpoint disrupts the coherent self-enclosure of reified society, glimpsing its falsity. Thus, Lukács locates both subject and object within a structure that defines their relationship, integrating subjectivity into the social system.

Ultimately, Lukács's view shows how the rationalization of social relations splits the subject into public and private, rational and irrational, abstract and emotional (Westerman, 2018). This split reflects the commodity form's exclusion of aspects that cannot be incorporated into abstract social relations.

This characteristic of the construction of the subject by the totality of relations Westerman calls it as an "interpellation". The use of this vocabulary is relevant because makes direct reference to downplaying the role of the subject to a position within the whole. Thus, Westerman interpretation of Lukács' subject sees subjectivity as a structurally defined intentional stance within conscious social reality, where the relationship between the first-person perspective and objective reality is governed by a historically variable principle structuring the whole (Ibid, p. 176). This interpretation has some consequences in Lukács. First, his phenomenological approach allows him to include the first-person perspective within consciousness. For Lukács, social forms would cohere as a whole because they appear from a certain perspective, making the

subject an essential part of the social totality, acknowledging that our lived reality is experienced from the perspective of individual consciousness. Thus, he recognizes that social reality is accessed only from the perspective of subjects. It is not a detached objectivity to be theorized about without subjects, but a subject-object totality. Second, Lukács presents the possibility of agency as an integral component of social forms at the time that his framework offers a comprehensive account of both how agency can be denied and how it can be incorporated within social forms. This is so because forms are not fixed and independent but rely on subjective interaction.

Understanding cultural practices phenomenologically, as intentional acts that make objects meaningful, clarifies why Lukács refers to such practices as 'consciousness'. He analyzes practices semantically to explain how they produce meaningful social objects. The problem with reification, as presented by Lukács and analysed by Westerman, is that it separates form from content so completely that form seems fixed and unchangeable. Lukács aims to restore fluidity to the forms of practice, integrating participation in the construction of social reality into its structure. Ontologically, agency presupposes the fluidity of ontic forms, making their reproduction a deliberate process. Thus, Westerman presents Lukács's conception of subjectivity as a standpoint within an ontic reality, a position from which this reality coheres and makes sense. He integrates the subject as an intentional stance within social reality, a standpoint defined and inherently linked to consciousness, shaping how reality is perceived and interacted with. Lukács's phenomenological approach incorporates the first-person perspective as a viewpoint from which forms appear meaningful. Westerman also explains that Lukács demonstrates the possibility of agency within social forms, even when interpellated by the system. He argues that agency can be incorporated into the structures of society through varying degrees of spontaneous activity, dependent on the social form in question (Ibid). The separation of form and content in capitalist society is a structural error that needs correction. Forms are not fixed but require constant reproduction through subjective interaction. By understanding these practices phenomenologically, Lukács suggests that the reification of social forms can be overcome by restoring fluidity to them. This allows for the integration of subjective agency into the construction of social reality, where participation becomes an inherent structural

component (Ibid). Thus, agency presupposes the fluidity of ontic forms, requiring deliberate processes for their reproduction.

Lukács's view of social forms and agency is further illustrated by what we can count as the tension between collectivity and individuality. Westerman interpretation does not just give an account of the constitution of the subject and its position in the social totality. It additionally gives an account of the moral dilemma presented in the first section of this chapter, i.e. the dilemma that arises from the use of certain means to achieve a revolutionary goal and the relationship between individual consciousness and the means adopted by collective revolutionary action. In Westerman's interpretation the revolutionary party, as he sees it in Lukács's theory, should be seen as an active social form that allows for self-determination and free self-organization (Ibid). This bottom-up organization prevents reification by avoiding excessive centralization, ensuring that the proletariat remains an active participant in shaping its own social existence. Hence, Lukács's revolutionary party is a space where the proletariat can achieve determinate social being through the collective determination of its forms, contrasting with the fixed, self-enclosed structures of reified society. The aforementioned, then, is partially released in light of the individual's self-realisation through the materialisation of a goal through collective activity. Even though the question about the morality of individual action remains, the discussion about the position of the individual in the execution of means clarifies through the identification between the subject and society.

The explanation of the relationship between subject and collectivity should be understood in the original context of Lukács' original Ethical project. Thus, we can frame this relationship not just by saying that a certain class, i.e. the proletariat, *can* count as a subject of transformation in society, but that it *should* (Ibid). The source of this demand, to make it explicit, is precisely the demand for the proper use of the tools aimed at achieving a specific goal: real freedom through class elimination. The tools to achieve this are the ones available under the individual's recognition of the current state of affairs, the one in which capitalism and the modes of production alienate the individual from its nature. The demand for revolution is intrinsic to the phenomenology of social reality and is generated by historical social structures and addressed to specific

groups in specific situations. The call to change society is created within the social structures to be transformed.

Chapter 3: From Social Normativity to Ethics

3.1 Normativity in Ethics

We have seen thus far that we can derive normative judgements from Lukács' philosophy. Normativity arises from the activity of labour. As the original phenomenon that allows for the materialisation of conscious teleological positing, labour starts the process of the assessment of the conditions and tools needed, as well as their efficacy, for accomplishing a posited goal. Additionally, in discussing labour as a source of normativity, we also discussed that the nature of the normative phenomenon involves action-guiding judgements. Thus, normative judgements are the type of judgement that presents how we should act in order to achieve the posited objective under the given material conditions. They are action-guiding in the sense that they present the 'proper' path to follow in light of what is to be accomplished. Thus far, we have presented several aspects of Lukács' philosophy that lead to a reading in which the foundation of Ethics is visible. The appearance of normativity within such a framework is a consequence of the ontological aspects presented by Lukács and the materialistic turn evinced in his philosophy. There are, for what we have seen, enough elements to properly discuss the role of the subject and normativity. What remains to be seen is to specify the mechanisms through which such a normative foundation could occur, and whether such mechanisms allow us to extend the idea that moral normativity can also be counted as springing from the theory. We should keep in mind that the objections put forward by Stahl remain to be discussed in depth. As a consequence, this Chapter has the double function of giving the proper analysis to Stahl's worries on the rule-creating process of labour and setting the framework to narrow down the discussion to moral normativity. With these two objectives in mind, we will start by delimiting the discussion about morality. In this section, the task is to narrow down our understanding of normativity *simpliciter* and assess how and if *moral* normativity differs from other types. Parallelly, we will open the discussion, to be developed in the next section, for a further analysis in which we establish whether labour could serve as the source for *moral* normativity and not just its social counterpart. To achieve the second task it is

useful to take a look at the distinction, common in Ethical discussion, between categorical and hypothetical imperatives as it will help us characterise morality as a phenomenon in its prescriptive nature. Parallelly the distinction will shed light to the extent of the normative power held by claims in the context of morality.

The works of Immanuel Kant (1786) on the discussion about morality have permeated the Ethical debate since their appearance. Among these influential ideas is the distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives as principles of rationality that establish how individuals should act (Rohlf, 2024). This distinction is relevant for the understanding of the moral phenomenon itself as for the assessment of the type of judgements that can be counted as 'moral'. It is meant to capture some of the essential, although not uncontested, features of the moral phenomenon, viz. its objective and normative force. Although for the purposes of this thesis, we will not dwell on the long-standing discussion of what morality is or involves, it remains relevant to state some of what could be counted as the basic characteristics of morality, one of them being that morality tells us what to do or how to behave. For this section, the focus on Kant's distinction has the motivation of describing this normative aspect of morality through the lenses of the philosopher whose emphasis on its prescriptive aspect has been almost unmatched. Although we will not ascribe to Kant's philosophy in this thesis, the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives will be instrumental in characterising the moral phenomenon and its related claims. This scope is meant to be used as a tool, as well as to introduce ethical jargon, that helps us understand Lukács' characterisation of normativity. Kant conceives that the aim of moral philosophy is to determine the "laws of the human being's will insofar as it is affected by nature" and which are "in accordance with what oughts to happen" (*Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals*, 4: 388). Thus, Kant's understanding of the moral phenomenon lies in the acknowledgement that moral claims, as well as moral judgements, possess a normative component that tells us how to act. From this perspective, one of the main aspects of morality is its *practical* component, i.e. it refers to human action in the context of the interplay between a subjective will and the external world. From this, we can identify at least two necessary, although not sufficient, elements that describe the moral phenomenon. The first is its reference to

human action, which is why it is referred to as "practical", in terms of delimiting behaviour and agency. The second is the normative aspect which, at least in the sense discussed here, is not a mere description of human action, but it prescribes it by telling us how to act. Although not definitional, these characteristics are general and abstract enough for the purposes of our investigation and they will be developed through the exposition of the aforementioned distinction.

While Kant presents rationality as the ultimate foundation of moral action and such a framework is not, at least explicitly developed, found in Lukács's framework, the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives still gives us a glimpse of how to understand the moral phenomenon. One fundamental aspect of this distinction is its commitment to the acknowledgement of the normative force of morality. In contrast with claims and judgements of other types, moral claims such as "killing is wrong" seem to possess a special, normative, content that is not merely descriptive. The particularity of moral claims lies in that when we say "killing is wrong" we are not just describing a state of affairs It brings about the further claim, which is what makes it moral, that states that *because* it is wrong we *should not* do it. Thus, without this latter statement, singularised in the presentation of a reason for action, such a claim would be purely descriptive. The strength of moral claims is captured by Kant in the presentation of what he calls an "imperative for action", i.e. an action-guiding command that is expressed by an 'ought' and that indicates the relation between an objective law of reason and a subjective will (*Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:413). Kant describes the imperative by saying:

> The representation of an objective principle, insofar as it is necessitating for a will, is called a command (of reason), and the formula of the command is called an imperative. (*Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:413)

Moral claims possess an objectivity, Kant argues, that must be accounted for to capture their normative strength. If an action X is deemed morally wrong, it is so without regard to the agent's desires. From this understanding of the force of morality, Kant distinguishes between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. He describes the first type of imperative as representing "the practical necessity of a possible action as a

means to achieving something else that one wills", while the second is the type that represents "action as objectively necessary of itself, without reference to another end."(Ibid). Since the representation of action could be assessed as "good" or "bad", Kant argues, there must be a formula that tells us under what principle the "goodness" or "badness" of such action is derived. Thus, if the goodness of an action derives from its importance of the obtention of something else, then the formula corresponds to a hypothetical imperative. Hypothetical imperatives, generally described, are conditional commands that tell you what you should do to achieve a specific goal. They are structured as "If you want X, then you should do Y." The obligation to follow these imperatives depends on whether you have the relevant desire or goal. From this perspective, they could be considered teleologically oriented since the direction of the command aims at a predetermined objective. In these cases, the end goal gives a *reason* to follow a certain course of action in contrast with another. A classic example of a hypothetical imperative takes the form of a conditional and they are not considered by Kant as essentially moral. On the other hand, if the action is represented as good in itself, without reference to some other goal, then the formula corresponds to a categorical imperative (Ibid). Kant associates the moral phenomenon exclusively with the second type. The independence of this type of imperative to human desires, Kant says, is characteristic of the purely moral, an idea that has been held by many within the philosophical discussion. Moral rules appear to have a special status that makes them self-sustaining. To say that something is morally wrong should not in principle be further explained by referring to the agent's desires or goals. These rules are universal and categorical and do not aim at further goals or desires, i.e. they are inherently moral due to their unconditionality to human will.

From what has been presented thus far we can establish that Lukács could hardly be categorised as a Kantian. His deviation from Hegelian philosophy, and consequently of an idealist philosophical framework, led him to adopt a materialist position that takes out of the spotlight any transcendental conceptualisation of rationality either as a source of human progression or morality. Nevertheless, the basic structure and distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives can give us the jargon and philosophical background to position Lukács' views within the moral discussion. Before

doing that, though, we still require setting up a proper background. While Kant views as eminently moral the formulations of the categorical imperative, such an understanding of the moral discussion has not remained uncontested. One of the detractors of the real power of this distinction has been Philippa Foot (1972) who questions the legitimacy of the imperative in its categorical form. We will reproduce here her powerful argument against the distinction as it helps us put into perspective the type of normative force present in Lukács' system. Foot proceeds by questioning the idea that a purely moral formulation must be exempted from prosecution of a goal or objective. Kant refers to any non-moral imperative as hypothetical, including among those that he denominates as "rules of prudence". The heterogeneity of hypothetical imperatives makes them largely varied and diverse, including rules of behaviour that do not refer exclusively to an *actual* preexisting desire but also extend them to rules that have as a background individual or common projects as well as to long-term commitments (Foot, 1972). The basic Kantian idea, questioned by Foot, is the lack of a necessity to back up the normative force (the use of "should") of the categorical imperative through considerations about the desires or projects of the agent. From this perspective, the fact that moral claims possess some sort of "special dignity" associated with them, that they just need to be backed up by the moral rule itself and thus are exempted from justification on desires, involves that there must be an "extra" feature that makes them subject to such exemption.

If a hypothetical use of "should" gives rise to a hypothetical imperative, and a non-hypothetical use of "should" results in a categorical imperative, then "should" statements based on rules of etiquette, Foot argues, would be considered categorical imperatives. However, defenders of the categorical imperative in ethics would reject this, generally arguing that such "should" statements represent hypothetical imperatives, suggesting that they are using the term in a different sense. Therefore, it must be clarified what they mean when they assert that a statement like rules of non-moral behaviour is hypothetical. The general idea that she presents is that one might question why anyone should care about what should be done from an etiquette standpoint, and such considerations are seen as irrelevant unless a reason is provided (Ibid). So, while people might justify their actions by citing etiquette, we don't inherently view this as a

compelling reason to act. Then the question arises, why cannot we do the same with moral claims? Etiquette does not automatically provide reasons for action, and a person could rightly deny that they have a reason to do "what's expected." This touches on the core issue, as moral considerations, by contrast, are believed by many philosophers to inherently provide reasons for action, the basic notion questioned by Foot. This gives rise to the need to identify what makes the moral "should" fundamentally different from other normative "shoulds", such as the ones presented above about social norms. While some have tried to argue that ignoring the moral "should" involves irrationality, we can still consider that a person who rejects morality, because they see no reason to follow its rules, may be guilty of wrongdoing, but not of inconsistency, and their actions may not necessarily be irrational. Irrational actions involve undermining one's own *purposes*, Foot argues, which immorality does not necessarily entail (Ibid). It is clear that the normative nature of moral judgment does not guarantee its reason-giving power. Moral judgments are normative, but so are judgments of manners or general social rules. While it is true that we perceive more strongly the power of moral rules, the question remains: What is special about moral rules?

The conclusion that Foot draws is that moral judgments have no stronger claim to being categorical than statements regarding etiquette or some other form of social norm. While people may follow either moral rules or etiquette without questioning why, they are equally capable of asking for reasons and reasonably refusing to follow either if no adequate reasons are provided (Ibid). Even though current times are different from the time in which Foot put forward this argument, it remains relevant in light of the necessary theoretical discussion about the real normative power of morality. That morality involves eminently rule-following and that it must not refer to any other source of reason is not a commonplace idea as it was in Foot's times. Nevertheless, it does not exempt a philosophical examination of the type of prescription put forward by it. Perhaps there actually is a special normative aspect to morality but this does not mean that it is completely devoid of reference to external non-moral reasons. Kant and his followers frequently contrast acting out of respect for the moral law with acting from ulterior, particularly self-interested, motives. Nevertheless, the discussion about moral claims ought not to be reduced to either a state of complete abandonment of human

emotion and desire to be moral or to a state of complete immoral hedonism. Reasons for action are complex and equally complex is establishing the relationship between those actions and the reasons that motivate them. From this perspective, it seems reasonable to categorise as moral those claims that still make reference to a certain desire, objective or goal, either individual or collective, at the time that it maintains its normative force.

This type of analysis goes in line with David Copp's (2007) analysis of different types of normativity. In an exploration of the nature of moral normativity, Copp presents three possible alternatives, that do not exclude one another, to capture that "special" feature of moral normativity. In a similar assessment to the one carried out by Foot, Copp presents that what he calls "motivational" and "authoritative" normativity cannot be representative of the moral phenomenon (Copp, 2007). While there is an initial appeal to say that morality has the faculty of motivating agents to act in a certain way the question it is possible for someone to believe they have a moral obligation yet lack the motivation to act on it, which challenges the concept of motivational normativity in morality (Copp, 2007, p. 269). Similarly, he explores the idea, more similar to the Kantian framework, that morality possesses a special force where reasons for action are compelling or binding on a rational agent simply because they are recognized as reasons. In this sense, if something is normatively authoritative, a rational person would be motivated to act on it merely by understanding and recognizing the reason.

Copp argues against morality being authoritative because moral reasons do not necessarily have this compelling force (Ibid, p. 280). He believes that while moral reasons might be considered as reasons for action, they are not inherently authoritative in the way that, for example, reasons based on rational self-interest might be. A person might recognize a moral reason, such as the moral wrongness of an action, yet not be motivated to act according to that reason. This lack of automatic motivational force means that moral reasons do not hold the kind of authoritative normativity that some other reasons might. Thus, his interpretation of normativity in morality leans toward understanding this phenomenon as exhibiting what he calls "generic" normativity. This is meant to capture the aforementioned idea that moral claims are not merely descriptive but they say something not just about how things *are* but about how things *should be*. This implies the action-guiding element we referred to before. Thus, a simple and

generic way of understanding moral normativity that suits our purposes of situating Lukács' within the discussion of moral normativity, by also considering his non-Kantian background, is to say that moral normativity has the generic property of not being merely descriptive but somehow action-guiding. We leave open, for now, the specific source of this action-guiding property of morality. Implicit in this generic characterisation is the idea that for a claim of any type, including those of morality, to be normative there must exist a criterion the adherence to which marks its normativity and as a consequence its "wrongness" or "rightfulness". Whether be norms of rationality or norms derived from another source, a sign of normativity is the rule for the proper employment of concepts to be translated into action.

With this background, we find ourselves better positioned to frame what could count as moral in the case of Lukács. As said before, there are strong reasons to disregard Lukács' position as Kantian due to his detachment from idealism. With the explicit development of the activity of labour and teleological positing, we could count as moral those claims that derive from Lukács' account that make reference to a posited goal. After all, an essential aspect of human nature and human progress, as seen in Lukács, depends on the faculty of consciously setting objectives. The framework presented by Lukács, in addition to what has been discussed in this section, gives no reason to make a stark difference between moral and non-moral normativity. The moral phenomenon does not ought to be defined as self-sustaining to maintain its prescriptive strength. As a consequence, we do not need to position morality in a special place within Lukács' system. As a phenomenon derived from sociality morality could very well be given a place among other types of social norms.

3.2 Towards a Society-Centred Account?

Thus far, our exposition has presented and assessed some of the core elements of Lukács' philosophy in light of his unfinished project of erecting an Ethics. We have seen that the ideas presented in his *Ontology*, his later work, are the result of a concern evinced in his earlier thought about the achievement of the material conditions for

human flourishing and freedom. The protracted development of the thought about the validity and justification for revolutionary action led Lukács to the need to ontologically ground his incomplete ethical project. By assigning a pivotal role to the activity of labour, as the original act of teleological performance, Lukács positions society at the centre of his system. Society, not being considered as an isolated element of analysis, determines and is determined by teleological positing and, consequently, by the ulterior instrumentalisation of external elements conducive to the achievement of a desired goal. Through praxis, the social being, characterised by its active engagement in the dynamics of labour, relates to its environment dialectically shaping its own existence and the one of its surroundings. We have also seen, as a consequence of this, that the development of both ethical and political projects must go hand in hand as they spurt from this concept of praxis. The activity of positing a goal, an essential aspect of human nature, is the genesis of human action which leads to the emergence of societal interactions that dialectically shape the material conditions of human existence.

Up to this point, our investigation has led us to see the basic foundation for the idea of the emergence of normativity from Lukács' philosophical framework. The constitution of a goal and its materialisation set the conditions for the valuation of the needed means and the basic standards for correctness in the prosecution of an objective. Unlike traditional views that see norms as independent of individual actions, Lukács roots normativity in the labour process. He argues that labour, through its social and teleological structure, forms the foundation of social norms. Lukács' approach suggests that the normativity arising from labour is fundamental to understanding social institutions and ethics. With the aim of understanding the role of subjectivity in Lukács' Marxist ethics, we narrowed down the discussion about normativity and assessed whether there is a special way in which moral normativity, as distinguished from normativity *simpliciter*, could arise from the presented framework. This led us to arrive at the conclusion that the thoughts presented by Lukács take us to an understanding of moral normativity that can be counted among other types of social norms. There is no evidence in Lukács' writings that leads us to believe that he assigns a special normative force to morality than the one that can be found in other forms of normative claims. As a consequence, explaining the possible mechanisms for the emergence of normativity in

any type of social norm could give us an insight into the role of the emergence of moral normative claims and the role of the individual in it.

It is important to acknowledge that at this point, and from now on, we are entering the realm of speculation. Since Lukács' ethical work remained unfinished there is no in-text specification of the mechanisms explaining moral normativity. Parallelly, we lack the specific information about the shape and content of Lukács' ethical views so we are left with what we can derive either from tangential excerpts indicating such ideas or thoughts taken from his politics. As mentioned above, the main problem of our focus will now be the specification of some of these mechanisms and the rising of individual intentional states and their role in the teleological positing. Due to the nature of this thesis and the vastness of the topic some questions and specificity of the normative mechanisms will be left unanswered. The task of proposing a complete and systematic ethical system and the origin of normativity, from Lukács' framework, would take much more than what can be done here. Nevertheless, even if superficial, some possible mechanisms of the emergence of normativity will be presented through the works of two thinkers who have proposed what we would refer to as "society-centred" normative frameworks. These are the works of David Copp (1995, 2007) and Robert Brandom (1994) who see explicit or implicit normative practices and rules as being shaped and enforced by collective or societal behaviour and practices. By presenting these theories we expect to give a glimpse into how a framework derived from Lukács' thought would be. At the same time, we expect to capture some of the fundamental aspects of his thought, especially the pivotal role of society in shaping human practices and norms. The reason for choosing these specific philosophical frameworks lies in the centrality they give to society and societal dynamics in originating normative claims. Both explain, in their own particular way, the emergence and enforcement of rules of behaviour not from one specific normative principle but from a variety of principles at times irreducible to others. Additionally, the special emphasis both authors give to normativity and its roots in social practices, one discussing it from the perspective of language and the other from metaethics, can give us an interesting insight into the possible mechanism that Lukács' system could take. There are four points of convergence in these authors that, in light of Lukács' system, could be useful for a

superficial "reconstruction" of his views on moral normativity. First, both systems focus on the question of the emergence and strength of normativity. Second, they emphasise the mechanism for the justification of the normative systems. Third, they believe that the origin of those justifications, and accordingly of the normative systems, lies in social interactions. And fourth, they do not see a unique source of normativity thus allowing for a plurality of networks that allow inferential connections that ground normative systems. This last point is relevant because, as we will develop further in the next section, Lukács emphasis on labour as the source of normative force does not undermine a possible plurality of dynamics, originating from this activity, that could originate diverse types of normative claims. Each of the theories to be presented is philosophically deep and extensive. Consequently, a complete presentation of them is also beyond the limitations of this thesis. Nevertheless, and with the aim of answering the main research question, we intend to do them justice by presenting their central aspects.

David Copp (2009) presents what he calls a "pluralist" and teleological theory of normativity as a theory of normative judgment (Copp, 2009). The basic idea of Copp's pluralist-teleological theory consists in that finding multiple sources for the different types of normative judgements (such as the ones about morality, rational requirements, and justification of beliefs) can make sense of the normative phenomenon in its multi-layeredness (Ibid). His intention is to acknowledge the existence of multiple normative systems thus considering the plurality of the existence of different types of reasons. We err in believing, Copp argues, that there is a unique source of normativity as there is a large range of reasons that give origin to a multiplicity of normative systems. The reasons we might have to act in a way that sticks to rules of etiquette, for example, are distinct from the ones that govern our moral actions. Thus, in the context of finding and understanding reasons for action, there is an acknowledgement of a diversity of systems, with their own rules, that serve as rational justification for practical action. To give a normative reason to act is to give a normative requirement that justifies the action that is being performed (Ibid). Copp's pluralism generalizes the view about the plurality of reasons and proposes that all normative statuses, including kinds of goods and requirements, are generated by normative systems. He argues that we can

establish truth conditions for normative judgments by specifying relevant properties of the corresponding normative system (Ibid). The teleological aspect of his theory focuses on the idea that morality, as well as other types of normative systems, is a device to solve social problems arising from certain features of the human condition, like material conditions or conditions generated by sociality itself. Systems like the ones of law, etiquette, or morality, have a problem-solving function.

Normative judgments, thus, are related to specific problems of "normative governance", i.e. a capacity that involves recognising and understanding social norms along with a capacity "for complex practical reasoning that seeks to comply with them" (Copp, 2009, p. 25). The truth conditions for normative judgments, for Copp, depend on the properties of the system of norms best suited to solve the relevant problem. Thus, an examination of the truth conditions of a moral system will have special properties that render certain actions, under specific circumstances, morally laudable or reproachable. Copp recognizes moral judgments as normative but at the same time, his theory allows for the possibility of rational immorality, which negates the equivalence between being moral and being rational.

Following the thought that there are various kinds of reasons, Copp challenges the idea that a reason is simply a consideration that it would be irrational to ignore when deciding what to do. Although reasons of etiquette exist, there still can be rational to disregard them (Ibid). He proposes that a "practical reason" is a reason that any rational person would appropriately *consider* in making a decision, provided they believed they had this reason, and thus, it would be irrational to ignore.

Copp identifies a way to understand certain kinds of reasons which he calls a "relational view". This view holds that something is a reason only in relation to a specific normative system, meaning that reasons are reasons-of-a-kind. If we consider a system of morality, then the reasons to be considered within that system would be moral reasons. In this context, one should always think of reasons as related to the system they adhere to instead of thinking about reasons *simpliciter*.

A normative system can be understood by first considering that there are numerous abstract systems of "norms" or "standards". In this context, a standard is content that

can be expressed by a literal utterance of an imperatival sentence, just as a proposition can be expressed by a literal utterance of a declarative sentence (Copp, 2009, p. 25). For example, the standard expressed by "Do not steal" corresponds to the proposition that torture is wrong. Thus, standards, in a parallel way in which propositions are an abstract system of intelligible declarations, can be viewed as an abstract system of norms. A normative system is a system of standards that plays a significant role in people's lives and he described them as:

> "a system that could help us to cope with a problem of normative governance were it to be endorsed or subscribed to in a relevant way." (Copp, 2009, p. 25)

From his understanding of normative systems Copp holds that all normative statuses are generated by normative systems. Each system might require specific actions, deem certain things as choice-worthy, or demand the cultivation of certain psychological traits. According to his pluralism, the truth conditions for normative judgments of a particular kind are determined by the relevant properties of the corresponding system of norms. For instance, a pluralist might argue that public display of affection is considered rude within a specific social context only if, and because, the system of etiquette in that context contains or implies a standard against public display of affection.

An important aspect of Copp's theory has to do with its teleological dimension. He suggests that the human ability to effectively deal with problems that arise due to their inherent nature and material conditions is effectively expressed by relying on a commitment to systems of norms and standards. By adhering to these systems, people are able to manage relevant material challenges which is the foundation of all normativity (Ibid). The purpose of morality is to alleviate the problem of sociality and, in his pluralist teleology, when a sufficient number of people within the system's scope subscribe to and follow these rules, they help society address these problems. Moral standards, then, are those to which we adhere in a specific moral way. Copp says, regarding moral standards:

> A person's moral standards are those she "subscribes to as moral standards." In principle, any standard, regardless of its content [...] could be "subscribed to morally." In a sense, then, there is no distinction between moral standards per se and standards of

other kinds. There is a distinction, however, among the standards accepted by people, between their moral standards and their standards of other kinds. (Copp, 1995, p. 75)

According to Copp, the moral adhesion to certain standards, which makes them moral, are meant to deal with specific types of human problems derived from sociality. The problem of sociality arises because humans are inherently social beings who depend on cooperation with others to achieve their values and meet their needs. This cooperation is often threatened by a set of challenges that must be met before those needs and values can be met (Copp, 2009). Morality, as a system of norms, functions to mitigate these threats by encouraging behaviours that promote peaceful and cooperative interactions within society. This system of norms includes standards that discourage interference with others and encourage a willingness to cooperate, which helps to maintain social stability and facilitate the achievement of individual and collective values. In the context of the whole theory, this is just one example of a normative system that helps address problems of normative governance. Other systems also play crucial roles in helping individuals and societies cope with different challenges. As a consequence, there is no intrinsic normative nor special value assigned to a moral-normative system. Morality specifically addresses the problem of sociality by promoting norms that facilitate cooperation and social harmony, enabling individuals to achieve what they value in a social context. Morality is a crucial normative system because it helps manage the inherent difficulties of social life, ensuring that people can live together peacefully and cooperatively (Ibid).

As a consequence, Copp believes that moral subscription connects a person to their society, implying that when someone subscribes to a moral code, they wish for it to hold significance within their society (Copp, 1995). The justification of a moral code depends on whether people would be epistemically justified in subscribing to it in relation to a particular society, assuming they had sufficient evidence of its status. According to Copp, the personal characteristics that might explain why individuals accept a particular code or give them non-epistemic reasons for subscribing to it, are not relevant in determining whether the code is justified. Instead, the relevant factors are the characteristics of the code itself (which make such a code deal with problems of sociality), the society, and the nature of morally subscribing to a code. His

society-centred theory, then, presents that if a society would be rational in selecting a particular code as its social moral code, then the status of that code is determined by the characteristics of the code and the society. The status of a moral code depends on the society's choice and the general moral subscription of its members, rather than on the specific attributes or commitments of any individual within the society. If a code is rationally chosen by a society to serve as its social moral code, this choice confers a normative status on the code, which can be seen as a form of justification or warrant for the code (Ibid). Regarding this last point, we can see Copp's teleological perspective of morality as a functionalist. The normative force of a moral system is given by the adoption of the system by the community and derives from the function of the system to deal with problems.

When relevantly justified, a moral code must have a status that would epistemically justify people in subscribing to it within a given society, provided they had adequate evidence of its status. The code must be particularly well-suited to the society, making it especially appropriate for the members to morally subscribe to it. Thus, Copp does not need to refer to an external force for the justification and normativity of moral reasons, they are what he calls "self-grounded" (Copp, 2009). By this, he acknowledges the inherent nature of the systems they relate to. Self-grounded reasons are embedded within the structure or function of the moral system itself. These reasons are internally justified by the roles they play within the moral system, without needing external validation. These reasons are connected to the needs and values of human societies. In Copp's view, a self-grounded reason is one that is justified by its role in addressing societal needs or advancing societal values, without requiring further justification beyond its function (Ibid). This aspect is what gives normative authority without relying on something outside the moral system itself. By focusing on the internal coherence and justification of moral norms, self-grounded reasons provide a way to understand the authority of moral codes within a society-centered theory of morality. As said before, norms that deal with intrinsic human problems do not exclusively have a moral character and do not exclusively deal with problems derived from sociality. Other problems, such as those of a managerial type, could be met by, for example, a normative system of laws (Ibid). Morality serves to overcome the limitations presented by human

nature and circumstances, allowing individuals to achieve their goals within a wide range of possible values.

From the presentation of Copp's view on society-centred morality, there are three elements to be highlighted in view of their possible use in the context of Lukács. First, the normative force arises from a teleological (or functional) understanding of morality itself. Second, the plurality of normative systems is derived from society's needs and meant to achieve different functions. Third, the centrality of human practices and context in determining the way in which certain norms achieve their function. This gives us a teleological framework for the mechanisms of normativity to arise. In what follows, we will present Robert Brandom's complex ideas on meaning and knowledge from an inferentialist perspective.

Before presenting Brandom's framework a short introduction would be necessary in light of the vastness and complexity of his work. Bernhard Weiss and Jeremy Wanderer (2010) see Brandom's normative pragmatics as focusing not on the actual uses of language but on the propriety of these uses, including the appropriate circumstances for making claims and the consequent alterations to commitments and entitlements. According to them, Brandom's pragmatics is also social, since it is concerned with active participation in social practices rather than isolated instances of verbal action. Sociality, in this context, involves the interaction between perspectives that acknowledge and attribute normative status (Ibid). They highlight Brandom's insight that the normative and social aspects of pragmatics are interdependent, presenting that normativity is best understood through participation in social practice. Weiss and Wanderer highlight Brandom's intention to reconcile the Enlightenment ideal of authority being recognized through acknowledgement with the Wittgensteinian notion that norms require a possible distinction between what is acknowledged and what is binding. The social division of labour between attributing and acknowledging normative status helps to resolve this tension (Ibid). Brandom's view is that to describe a practice, such as a language, is to engage in a normative act because practices are constituted by the attitudes of those who participate in them. Thus, to attribute an attitude is to make a normative statement. This leads to the idea that all attributions of mental content are normative, whether they pertain to beliefs, desires, or other states of mind. From this

context, the presentation of Brandom's framework in the context of Lukács' philosophy can give us a solid background for the assessment of the relevance of language in setting up normative content. It is true, though, that the role assigned to language is rather secondary in contrast to the one of labour. Nevertheless, it is still possible to give it proper weight and relevance in the formation of normativity even at the risk of treating the normative phenomenon as a product made possible by language. It is not clear, in Lukács, at to what extent morality depends on both language and the dynamics of labour. Nevertheless, the presentation of the dynamics of normativity as being strongly dependent on language, such as Brandom's, does not seem *prima facie* to disregard Lukács' thought. In light of Brandom's idea that language is intrinsically normative, as we will see, presenting it as a possible scope from which Lukács' philosophy can gain substance seems feasible. Brandom emphasizes the importance of normative attitudes in explaining both how humans relate to the non-human world and how discursive norms arise from non-discursive origins.

In his work, Brandom pays attention to the normativity linked to norms of inference. Material proprieties of inference, he says, are understood as norms that are implicit within social practices, which qualify as discursive because they involve treating certain performances or actions as assertions (Brandom, 1994). These practices that are inferentially articulated confer propositional content on statuses, attitudes, and performances that are appropriately involved in them. In his view, for an expression to have a specific conceptual content means that its *use,* and hence the pragmatist aspect of his work, is governed by a corresponding set of norms, which explains the semantically primitive notion of material proprieties of inference within the context of linguistic practice (Ibid). The types of practical norms referred to by Brandom do not necessarily ought to be explicit. He borrows Kant's perspective on rules as the form of the normative to establish that there really is not a strict separation between the normative and the non-normative. From this perspective, concepts function as rules that express both natural and moral necessity. This is so because there must be, in Brandom's framework, a correspondence between intentional states and the object to which those states refer. Brandom highlights that for Kant, the real distinction lies between entities that can implicitly acknowledge rules through obedience and those that can explicitly acknowledge them through the use of concepts, the capacity which makes us "rational".

He emphasized that only discursive creatures, like humans, can take themselves and others to be bound by norms, making explicit normative attitudes possible (Ibid).

Brandom discusses in his work the deontic (rule-reflecting duties) scorekeeping pragmatics, i.e., the tracking and managing of normative statuses in social interactions and discursive practices, where the idiom used to describe discursive commitment is normative (Ibid). He suggests that propositional contents are understood through their role in specifying the proprieties of claiming, judging, and inferring within the game of giving and asking for reasons. Thus, stating or expressing a fact is understood in normative terms, where the notion of a true claim is explained by appealing to the practice of fact-stating. This is the result of understanding notions like commitment and entitlement, which articulate implicit proprieties of practice, being more fundamental than nonnormative properties. In this context, some vocabulary, conferred by implicitly normative discursive practice, plays the expressive role of making explicit specifically normative attitudes, such as the attribution or acknowledgement of commitments. Normative vocabulary, then, serves to express endorsement of practical reasoning patterns, leading from beliefs to intentions. Social practices are implicitly normative in a way that mere behavioural regularities are not because they involve rule-governed behaviour that participants understand and follow, even without explicit articulation of the rules (Ibid). These norms are embedded in the practices themselves, guiding how individuals interact, communicate, and reason within their community. About this, Brandom says:

> The social practices one interprets them as engaging in are sufficient by themselves to institute inferentially articulated deontic statuses and so to confer genuinely conceptual contents. Describing the model of inferentially articulated deontic scorekeeping social practices is specifying in detail what one must take the members of a community to be doing in order for it to be talking -giving and asking for reasons, making their words and performances mean something by their taking them to mean something- that one is thereby taking them to be doing. (Brandom, 1994, p. 630)

Brandom argues that while norms are not objects in the causal order and cannot be found through natural science, they are still real and not mysterious. In his view, norms are instituted by social practices and are tied to the normative attitudes people adopt,

such as taking or treating a performance as correct or incorrect. Such norms are rooted in the proprieties governing implicit rules that dictate how commitments should be acknowledged and attributed. This is what creates a normative framework where commitments and proprieties are determined by correct scorekeeping rather than actual practices.

The proprieties of a normative framework, i.e. the positions or conditions that individuals or actions can hold within a social practice, determine whether a performance is correct or incorrect according to a rule (Brandom, 1994, p. 628). This applies even when the practice being evaluated is itself a deontic scorekeeping practice, where the correctness of acquiring or altering deontic attitudes, such as commitments and entitlements, is assessed. Brandom's approach is to understand these normative statuses in terms of normative attitudes, an aspect of his theory which will not delve into due to the scope of this investigation, specifically the proprieties of judging something as correct or incorrect. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that for Brandom adopting the stance of deontic scorekeeping, where one attributes inferentially articulated deontic statuses, is central to discursive practices. Such practices treat participants as producers and consumers of propositionally contentful speech acts. These speech acts are considered meaningful when they are linked to core speech acts like assertions, which make explicit the adoption of normative statuses. Brandom also distinguished between the implicit attribution of discursive commitments in scorekeeping and the explicit acknowledgement of such commitments in assertional performances. He explains that even non-linguistic creatures could be interpreted as engaging in a simplified form of scorekeeping by attributing practical reasoning to their behaviour. However, only full-fledged linguistic practitioners can institute deontic statuses and confer conceptual content. The model of inferentially articulated deontic scorekeeping specifies what must be taken as occurring within a community for its activities to be interpreted as genuinely linguistic and intentional, thus attributing original intentionality and propositional content to that community.

When interpreting a community as exhibiting original intentionality, the interpreter assumes that the members of this community adopt what Brandom calls a "discursive scorekeeping stance" toward one another. This means that members are seen as

participating in a social practice where they keep track of each other's commitments and entitlements, and these practices are understood as normatively structured. (Ibid)

The conceptual norms are objective and binding on all members of the community, regardless of their individual attitudes or perspectives. This objectivity is relevant because it ensures that the concepts and the commitments associated with them are shared among community members, even if their personal interpretations or attitudes differ. Thus, normative aspects of a community's practices extend beyond what is captured by their actual, observable behaviour alone. This "surplus" of normative structure over mere behaviour is what allows for the community's conceptual norms to be shared and objective. It also addresses the problem of how certain applications of concepts can be privileged or considered correct over others, even in situations that have not yet arisen. The norms that govern these practices are not just abstract or formal; they are grounded in the practical, empirical interactions of the community with the world. This connection to the real world makes the norms robust and meaningful, as they involve actual objects and states of affairs, not just other norms. The actual practices of a community, including how they interact with the world, determine what is being talked about within the community. These practices also determine the correctness of the claims and inferences made by community members, even if the members themselves do not fully grasp all the details. The community's concepts and the proprieties of their application are shaped by the actual properties and facts of the things they talk about. Thus, the correctness of the commitments held by the community members is determined by how things actually are in the world. Moreover, Brandom argues, that when an interpreter attributes these discursive practices to a community, they do so using their own language and conceptual framework. This means that the interpreter's own norms and concepts influence how they assess the community's practices and the correctness of their claims.

Addressing the communication between individuals with differing repertoires of commitments within the inferential framework of concepts involves recognizing the challenges of varying inferential roles. Brandom acknowledges that different individuals can produce the same sentence with different inferential significances due to their

unique sets of commitments. To account for how people with different commitments can still communicate effectively, he emphasizes a few key points.

His response to this challenge involves two main strategies: the "social-perspectival" move and the "normative-interpretive" move (Brandom, 1994, p. 636). The social-perspectival move acknowledges that individuals may have varying inferential significances for the same utterances depending on their personal perspectives or doxastic states, like their beliefs and attitudes. In other words, what a statement means can change depending on the individual's specific set of commitments and background knowledge. Despite these varying perspectives, the conceptual content remains constant and independent of these individual perspectives. Thus, the framework for how concepts should be used is stable, even if people's interpretations and inferences about these concepts can differ. The normative-interpretive move goes deeper into the understanding of concepts by distinguishing between the properties governing correct use and the dispositions to apply concepts. While the first refers to the rules and norms that define how concepts should be used correctly within a community, the second involves an individual's actual practices, including their specific inferences and uses of concepts in various contexts. Brandom argues that to "grasp" a concept, an individual does not need to adhere to every correct inference involving that concept perfectly. Instead, having a sufficient grasp involves making enough of the right moves or engaging correctly with the normative practices governing the concept. The extent of what counts as "enough" can be flexible, accommodating variations in individual practices.

By interpreting members of a community as engaging in discursive practices, Brandom suggests that they are adhering to shared, objective conceptual norms. These norms are not dictated by any single individual's dispositions but are understood as existing independently of those dispositions. This allows for individual differences in how concepts are applied or understood, while still maintaining that all members operate within the same normative framework.

By interpreting the practices and attitudes of communities in the way that Brandom does, there are three different levels in which norms operate within the system. The first level involves the articulation of norms through inferences, as expressed in activities

such as talking, thinking, and using concepts. Norms, Brandom argues, help explain how people are committed to certain ideas or entitled to make certain claims as they engage in discussions. Such entitlements and commitments are shaped by the norms behind them. This is a way of reinterpreting communication and thought processes in terms of norms that govern what people can say or think. Second, as mentioned before, Brandom explains that norms are put into practice through "scorekeeping" activities, where people track each other's commitments and entitlements. This means that when people interact, they keep track of who is committed to what, and these practices create norms that define what those commitments and entitlements are. Norms are seen as emerging from the way people *attribute* and *acknowledge* commitments in their interactions. The third level in which they operate focuses on how an interpreter, someone understanding the norms of a community, attributes these deontic attitudes to the community members. This involves interpreting the community as engaged in normative practices that implicitly involve keeping score of these commitments and entitlements (Ibid). The interpreter's task is to explain what it means to view a community as participating in these discursive practices, which give rise to commitments and entitlements with specific content.

Due to a possible gap between the norms attributed by an interpreter to a community and the actual behaviour of that community, multiple interpretations of the same behaviour are possible, leading to different sets of norms that could be attributed. Because of this, the interpreter has some freedom in how they choose to interpret the community's practices.

We have presented that Brandom's theory is concerned with how meaning and understanding are constituted through practices of discourse. He emphasizes that meaning is not just about the content of statements but about the role those statements play within a network of inferences, commitments, and entitlements. This network is governed by discursive norms that participants in a linguistic community implicitly or explicitly follow. As a consequence, it is important to mention that Brandom's theory refers explicitly and exclusively to discursive normativity, i.e. it refers to the norms that govern the use of language and reasoning within social practices. In Brandom's framework, this involves how individuals engage in discursive practices (like making

assertions, giving reasons, and asking questions) and how these practices are guided by rules and norms that determine what counts as a correct or incorrect move in a conversation or argument. The fact that Brandom explicitly acknowledges that his theory does not refer to prescriptive normativity does not necessarily imply a problem for us. As mentioned above, his theory, as well as Copp's theory, can give us some clues about the possible working of Lukács normative dynamics. Considering that our intention is not to extend Brandom's philosophy and that in Lukács there is no reason to separate the types of normative claims by their normative force, we can see in the general framework presented by Brandom a possible guideline to the working of prescriptive normativity in Lukács.

The two society-centred theories presented differ in their intention and approach to the mechanisms of origin and development of normative systems. Nevertheless, such divergence in the final aim of their exposition allows us to cover different aspects to take into consideration when assessing Lukács's view. In order to answer the two questions presented in this thesis, it would be useful to posit the main question, the one about the subject and consciousness, to the presented frameworks. It is hard to see a point of convergence in the implicit views about consciousness or subjectivity held by Copp and Brandom, mostly due to neither of these views explicitly developing an account of these concepts. While we must acknowledge that there is not a direct treatment of the concept of subject and consciousness in both authors, there is an implicit view of intentionality, as the capacity to represent things, properties, or states of affairs, even if not particularly developed. One of the reasons that the treatment of this concept could be useful in the concept of Lukács is that, in his differentiation between object and subject, only the latter, as having consciousness, is able to possess intentional states. Thus, we can assess an indirect account of the possible role of the subject as a possessor of intentional estates by highlighting the role of those states in the context of the origin and development of normative systems.

 We can assess, in the case of Copp's theory, two relevant points from which we can infer the relevance of individual intentionality. These two points have to do with the formation of intentional states and their content. The first point to highlight is that moral normativity and the human faculty to act based on the representation derived from

moral principles give space for the emergence of intentional states in accordance with such systems. As a necessary condition for moral agency, intentionality, either individual or collective, is influenced by the normative systems in which individuals are embedded. Normative systems represent an objective and independent source of "rules", detached from human volition and beliefs. Thus, normative truths, and consequently moral truths, possess an independent status that need to be grasped and reflected upon which constitutes an inherently intentional process.

Second, the role given by Copp to rational agency and the reason-based ability for decision-making is shaped by society and it is presented through normative systems intentional states adhere to. Individual intentional content comes as the product of social practices and collective as they promote social stability and flourishing. The norms that coordinate social behaviour, that are adopted as the solution to the problems of sociality, are the standards to which intentional states could correctly or incorrectly adhere. In Copp's teleological normativity, where norms are justified by their contribution to the problems derived from sociality, intentionality agents grasp and aim for these ends. Agents are expected to align their actions with the goals that moral norms are designed to achieve, which requires a conscious, intentional grasp of those goals. Intentional content is heavily influenced by social norms and structures in their dealing with human problems d. Interaction between members of society and society itself does not just originate and kickstart intentional states but also shapes its content.

For Brandom, the role of intentionality is not about a direct relation to objects or states of affairs but about how expressions function within a network of inferences. Let us remember that Brandom presents the idea that the meaning of an expression is deeply embedded in a web of inferential relations (Brandom, 2008; 2009)These relations dictate how a statement can be used in reasoning processes, what other statements it supports, and how it can be challenged or defended. The content of a belief or a statement is its role in the inferential practices of the community, rather than a simple relation to an object (Ibid). Thus, a statement's intentional content is not just a matter of referring to something in the world but involves the speaker's role in a web of normative statuses within a community of language users. Thus, Copp and Brandom share some basic ideas about the relevance of intentionality in a system of norms.

For Brandom, intentionality is not merely about representing the world but also about guiding action through reasoning. The intentional content of a belief or statement is closely linked to the inferences it supports, which guide how we act and respond to the world. Copp shares a similar view in the realm of moral philosophy, where intentionality is closely tied to action. Moral judgments are not just about stating facts but about motivating and guiding behaviour according to certain norms. The intentionality of moral judgments thus has a prescriptive force that directs how individuals should act in given situations. Both views also share that they do not give a simple representationalist account of intentionality. While Brandom argues that intentionality is better understood in terms of the inferential roles within a normative social practice, Copp challenges the idea that moral judgments are merely representations of moral facts. The latter views moral judgments as involving commitments to norms that cannot be reduced to straightforward representations of reality. They both share the scepticism of purely representational accounts of intentionality in favour of more complex, normatively grounded approaches whose origin lies in social interactions.

The society-centred views on normativity give us enough tools to expand Lukács' ideas on labour, normativity, and consequently ethics. For this, the next section will recreate the structure of Lukács' system in order to arrive at the answer to the question posited at the beginning of this investigation.

3.3 Intentionality and the Subject in Lukács' Marxist Ethics

Throughout this investigation, we have highlighted in several instances that the central element to understanding Lukács' system is the phenomenon of labour. The original phenomenon, the real and only instance of teleological positing, represents a point of inflexion in human praxis as it materialises what is in consciousness. As a result, the subject, as the bearer of intentional states, referred to by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* as the proletariat, identifies with the object of its action, society. Once reification is overcome and individuals see their place in society not just as its forgers

but also as its consequence, the realisation of the mutual transformation through identification between subject and object occurs (Jameson, 2009). Both subject and object are mutually influenced and must be understood as part of a totality, leading to the identification of the self with its object. The dialectical process of creation and transformation culminates with this realisation. Through the revolutionary praxis, where the proletariat does not just understand the world but actively works to change it, alienation is overcome and the proletariat recognizes its role in shaping history, leading to a unified and self-conscious class.

With these aspects of Lukács' philosophy in mind, we are in a better position to give answers to the questions that motivated this investigation. By identifying the role of intentionality and the subject in the ethical project of Lukács we are opening the door to a more thorough explanation of the mechanisms behind social and ethical normativity in his system. Thus, any proper answer to questions about intentionality in Lukács' system will inevitably touch upon the topic of normativity, either in its social or moral dimension. For this reason, answering the posited questions will require a unified and all-encompassing explanation.

The role of the subject and intentionality in Lukács' ethical project is not necessarily the same. To assign a specific role to the subject or to intentional states to Lukács' ethical project without first exposing the importance of the concept of labour for that project would render any investigative project on the subject superficial. For this reason, the exposition will continue as follows and it will recall many of the elements already assessed throughout this thesis, this time in a rather argumentative manner. First, we will briefly recapitulate how labour in its dynamics is inserted in the ethical project of Lukács. Second, we will revisit how the notions of intentionality and subjectivity are to be understood in the context of the original act of labour. And finally, we will present how subjectivity and intentionality relate to the ethical project. After this exposition, we will proceed to assess how the doctrines of David Copp and Robert Brandom could capture some elements relevant to the explanation of normativity in Lukács.

The ethical project of Lukács, as presented in section 2.1., intends to reconcile the tension arising between the modes of revolutionary practice with the aims set by the subject understood as the proletariat class. The origin of the conflict lies in the

possibility that the pursuit of human freedom through emancipation could lead to the use of means that are morally reproachable. At the risk of not achieving the ultimate human aim, it seems for Lukács that some means are necessary if the collective achievement of a goal is to be pursued. This could bring, though, as a consequence, a tension between the individual moral status of the agents who act in a reproachable manner and the collective necessity. In this context, labour is presented as the original human activity that posits and presents these goals. In other words, labour is understood as the mediating activity between humanity and its material context, becoming the activity through which humanity shapes its surrounding world. Since labour is the original activity where teleological positing occurs, it is here where human beings consciously set goals and purposes and actively work to achieve them. This activity presents the standards of correctness for human action. By presenting goals humans set the corresponding range of actions that should be done to achieve them.

An important aspect of the process of teleological positing is the investigation of the means and natural connections of the world. This process, essential in teleological positing, involves rational deliberation, considering the dialectical relationship between means and ends, and taking into account the historical and social context. For Lukács, this investigation is crucial for translating abstract goals into concrete actions, because it is through it that the chosen means align with both practical realities and principles supporting those goals. Thus, the connection between labour and Lukács' ethical project is that labour constitutes the foundation for any political and ethical course of action. The end goal of achieving human freedom through a classless society and the means to achieve this are set through the activity of labour. Thus, labour kickstarts any moral or political project. By looking at his earlier work, we see this idea put into practice in the collective project of the proletariat and the valuation of the ideals held by it.

Regarding Lukács' notion of subject, since there are no strictly definitional passages of what constitutes the subject in Lukács, we derive his understanding of the subject from the Hegelian notion of subjectivity as an active process of self-determination and change. The integration of Hegel's ideas into Marx's conception of the subject as socially embedded and shaped by class relations gives as a consequence the necessary emphasis on the centrality of labour. The subject, for Lukács, cannot be properly

referred to as an individuated element in a system characterised by totality. The notion of a solitary individual vanishes in light of its contextualisation as part of a social totality where individual consciousness and material conditions are interrelated. This interrelationship is central to Lukács' theory of reification, where capitalist society turns human relations into commodities, alienating individuals from their labour and each other. Thus, Lukács' departure from traditional subject-object dualism treats subject and object not as separate entities but as interconnected within this broader social and historical totality. In this context, the subject's consciousness is shaped by and shapes the material world through the activity of labour. At the same time, this activity originates from social normativity as it is the ontological phenomenon that brings about consciousness into reality. The subject then becomes a gear in the constant process of material realisation originated in consciousness. It is part of the dialectical activity between the world and humanity. Yet, even though the subjective aspect of this dynamics is just a partial dimension of the whole, labour is the activity through which the individual consciousness materialises in the world. Without it, there would be no notion of subject nor object as the social being would not come to be at all. This leads to the importance of labour as being instrumental in getting to know the phenomenon of subjectivity itself. The separation between the organic being and the social being is definitionally separated by the presence of conscious and intentional states. As seen in the first section of Chapter 1, the ontological character of Lukács' philosophy strictly differentiates the organic from the social being by the activity of labour. This necessarily implies, as no conscious goal could be set without the existence of an intentional state representing the external world, that labour necessarily implies intentionality and consciousness. A double relationship between labour and the concepts of intentionality and subjectivity should be acknowledged. On the one hand, labour is the *conditio sine qua non* subjective and conscious activity that could materialise and be acknowledged as a distinct phenomenon from objectivity. The acknowledgement of the subjective phenomenon, as something separated from its material and social context, is the product of the objectification of the human condition and its social relations. Thus, the role of the subject *qua subject* seems to be strongly related, through the dynamics of labour to the self-realisation of the alienated estate of the human condition. On the other hand, conscious activity initiates labour because it is the initial point for teleological

positing. At the same time that labour externalises consciousness, intentional states, as a mark of the existence of subjective dimension, initiate teleological positing. This interaction between consciousness and the world originates from normativity as a phenomenon.

Labour is central to understanding the origin and development of human praxis and, as a consequence, Lukács' ethical project. Parallelly, intentional and conscious states are fundamental to having a clearer view of the internal dynamics of labour. Since Lukács never really developed specifically the idea of normativity, we cannot, with property, talk about normative "systems" within his theory. The lack of specification of the requirements for a claim to have normative power, either discursive or prescriptive, makes it difficult to assess the specific role of labour in this context and, therefore, it makes it hard to assess the specific place for subjective experience. The division of normativity into subcategories does not find ground in Lukács' writings as it is never specified what would render these subcategories diverse. This would imply, as we have presented at the beginning of Chapter 3, justifying how diverse types of normative requirements arise and specifying what elements make those normative kinds special and unique. Despite this, we were open to the possibility that there *might be* some special dignity to moral normative claims. For this, we assessed Kant's deontological vision of morality, an epitome of rule-based moral theory that assigns a special, rational, status to moral claims. In doing this, we questioned the strongly held association between moral claims and their independence from human desires or objectives. From this analysis, we concluded that if there is to be a special categorisation of the moral domain as holding a special sort of normativity, independent of human volition, it must be substantiated by a special property referred to in normative claims. Since Kant's position about the special dignity of moral claims is grounded in his understanding of rationality and his model of the categorical imperative, a philosophical position representative of transcendental idealism, to find such a grounding in Lukács would require to look somewhere else in his embracement of materialism. We concluded that Lukács' active divergence from idealism, in addition to the importance that he gives to the process of labour, dependent on the existence of intentional and conscious states, gives no reason to believe that "true moral claims" are in some way independent from

human desires or goals. Thus, morality for Lukács, could possibly involve a set of hypothetical (and not categorical) imperatives.

An understanding of Lukács' ethical project must present that human goals are instrumental for an ethical account based on his philosophical framework. From the exposition carried out, we can say the input of intentional and conscious states in Lukács' ethics is rather indirect. We must acknowledge that they are, in fact, essential and necessary for the origin of any sort of ethical project but always from the perspective of their broader role in the activity of labour. We do not believe, because of the lack of explicit information in Lukács' writings and due to the analysis carried out in this thesis, that intentionality or consciousness plays any special role in his ethics more than it would play in any normative system found in his philosophy. Being labour the cornerstone of Lukács' system, any normative claim derived from the positing of objectives and goals would inevitably be the consequence of the existence of intentional and conscious states of the individual. Even if we talk about collective projects or goals, they must be the result either of the aggregative consideration of goals or individual acts of teleological positing directed towards the same objective. Since consciousness and intentionality are the marks of subjectivity, subjectivity represents only one aspect within the context of Lukács' ethics. Whatever rules of behaviour might arise in the shape of a moral normative system, it must be the result of the presentation of objectives and goals and shape the practical path to be followed.

Normative prescriptive systems present the parameters and limits for measuring the correctness of an action. Thus, whatever goal is set by the activity of teleological positing, made possible by the activity of labour, must be constrained to the valuative conditions set by such goals. In light of Lukács' later position in *Tactics and Ethics*, the emphasis of the achievement of the collective goal over the individual ethical wrongness committed in pursuing those goals is justified. The ethical domain must be aligned with the broader goals of the proletariat and the revolutionary movement, which shows the unity between the political and the ethical. For Lukács, genuine ethical action would be one that contributes to the advancement of historical progress and the eventual realization of a classless society, i.e. to the political aim. This is because he advocates for a revolutionary ethics that is grounded in the dialectical process of history. This

means that ethical decisions should not be made in isolation but rather in consideration of the historical and material conditions of the time, i.e. by paying attention to the established goals and the analysis of the means available. Ethical behaviour is thus defined by its ability to further the revolutionary cause and not by abstract moral principles. The choice of tactics, and the means to achieve the goal, must be evaluated based on their effectiveness in achieving the desired revolutionary outcome while also considering their ethical implications. The caveat is that any ethical valuation of an action is a function, with an unclarified mechanism by Lukács, of the obtention of the desired goal. Thus, the unity of politics and ethics can be better understood when we acknowledge that the origin of both phenomena, as part of human praxis and the development of its social dimension, lies in the teleological action of positing goals. These objectives must go hand in hand because, it seems, at times aims to meet necessities found by men in its material conditions. As Lukács presents, there could be a distortion of these goals as the result of alienation and the objectification of humanity itself. Lukács refers to the differentiation between ethical and tactical concerns and says:

> It is most important at this juncture to establish a mutual dependence, precisely because the two types of action being related are essentially independent of each other. On the one hand, the question whether any given tactical decision is right or wrong is independent of the question whether or not the decision was determined by moral motives on the part of those who act in accordance with it. On the other hand, an action that springs from the purest ethical source can, from a tactical point of view, be completely mistaken. This independence of each other, however, is more apparent than real. For – as we shall see later – once the purely ethically motivated action of the individual brings him into the field of politics, even its objective (historico-philosophical) correctness or incorrectness can no longer be a matter of ethical indifference. (TE, p. 32)

This framework, though, presents an issue that will be mentioned but not addressed here. If the tactics or means to achieve the revolutionary purpose must be assessed in light of the effectiveness of the obtention of the goal and its ethical implications, it means that the ethical valuation of an action must take place independently of the obtention of that goal. Let us call the two types of assessment the "moral" and the

"political" valuation of an action. The independence of both valuations leaves us with the need of a source of valuation that can fit Lukács' scheme. If Lukács puts at the centre of his system the activity of labour as *the* activity of human praxis and the means for teleological positing and thus the source of normativity simpliciter, then it seems natural that such a source is labour itself and the goals posited through it. It seems natural that the means for evaluating means depend on labour, but there is no indication in Lukács' framework of what another source of normativity and valuation could be. As mentioned before, he does not differentiate between types of normative systems, nor gives hints of what could differentiate them. If all we are left with is labour as the original phenomenon, it remains unclear how labour could originate from two types of normative systems. Twi independent parameters would need to be assessed through the analysis of labour. By positing a goal through the activity of labour we should be able to assess the correctness and wrongness of an action ethically and politically from the same source and not independently. But this is explicitly not so. A possible solution to this problem could have been found in Lukács' unwritten Ethics. It is not impossible, of course, to address this challenge with the evidence that Lukács' work gives us, but the lack of explicit evidence renders any possible answer speculative. For the purpose of drafting a possible answer, we could make use of the theories presented in the previous sections, the ones of David Copp and Robert Brandom, to add some consistency to the whole framework.

The way in which Copp's and Brandom's frameworks could help us is by giving us a glimpse into the possible mechanisms behind Lukács' system. In the first place, Copp's view on normativity as exposed before is pluralist and teleological. The benefits of presenting a normative framework whose foundation is eminently teleological fit the labour-based ethical theory of Lukács. The source of any normative system is the goal presented through the activity of teleological positing. Thus, the general parameters for the valuation and evaluation of actions and means are to be determined as a function of this teleological position. By extending this understanding of normativity to a pluralist account, we are leaving the door open for the existence of a multiplicity of sources for normative systems. The negation of a unique, overriding, normative principle of values could play well in the context of the explicit differentiation between the aforementioned "political" and "moral" valuations. Since the challenge for Lukács is presented in the

difficulty of explaining a double source of valuation emerging from the unique activity of labour, the acknowledgement of varied sources for normative systems could give the answer that is needed. Let us keep in mind the distinction between the political and moral dimensions of valuation and extend it to the discourse on normative systems.

Even though Lukács does not explicitly present the possibility of the plurality of normative systems, the stark separation for assessing the value of an action in its political and moral dimensions is a possible sign of their differentiation in two different systems. Although the source of valuation for the political and moral differs, this does not mean that the general mode of carrying out such evaluation should also be diverse. If we separate the political and social dimensions as systems from the differentiation of its sources of valuation we would be in a better position to recognise the types of values that originate such systems. Copp's pluralism, by emphasising the idea that there are multiple normative principles or values that guide our judgments, represents a tool for judging action in its political and moral dimensions separately. In this case, decision-making would involve assessing a variety of independent but fundamental values or norms of different kinds. Additionally, Copp's account is useful as it helps us balance such plurality of values as a source of normativity by giving them a unique, teleological, character. The content of Copp's framework also allows us to keep society at the centre of the moral domain and human praxis. The connection between the individual and society can be properly accounted for by maintaining society as a relevant source of normativity. Labour, as the originating activity of the social being, presents the parameters of normative evaluation. Since the correctness, either political or moral, of an action depends on the action's usefulness for accomplishing a desired goal, the teleological emphasis as a general mode of valuation still captures the relevance of labour in Lukács' system. Perhaps an action that is conducive to the realisation of a political goal is not conducive to the realisation of a moral objective. It is important, though, to remember that Lukács' system must be seen in the context of conceptual totality. The idea of a complete separation of political and moral objectives does not seem to be in line with Lukács' idea of the interconnectedness between man and society. There must be, it would be reasonable to say, a connection between political objectives and morality. After all, the presentation of the tension between morality and the political realisation of a classless society does not arise from a

complete separation of the two spheres. It could be the case, although it remains unspecified, that the values originating revolutionary aim and a moral normative system are the same. With this in mind, the pluralist origin of normative systems allows for a variety of values to be the source of the interrelated political and moral objectives. Since both spheres are fundamental aspects of human praxis, the balance between independence and interconnectedness must be equally acknowledged.

The usefulness of Brandom's theory of linguistic meaning can be applicable to Lukács' framework at a slightly different level than Copp's. In the first place, the emphasis of Brandom's theory on the role of language as being inherently normative renders the analysis of the role of normative systems at an indirect level. The centrality of labour as the main activity of human praxis in Lukács' philosophy does not necessarily take away the relevance of language in the development of normativity. After all, it has been presented in Chapter 1 that language, as a social phenomenon and product of labour and human interaction, is a mediator between humanity and its reality. For Lukács, language mediates the individual's relationship with the world, enabling the communication and transmission of social knowledge. It allows individuals to express their understanding of the material conditions of life and the social structures in which they are embedded. Thus, the development of language is a fundamental aspect of the phenomenon of labour. Language, as a direct consequence of labour, is eminently a purposeful activity. It plays an essential role in praxis, especially in the development of class consciousness and revolutionary action. It is through language that individuals come to understand their social conditions, articulate grievances, and formulate political demands. Additionally, it is through it that the aims and objectives of individuals and the collective are shared among people. Language serves as a tool of organisation that further allows for the materialisation of these goals and for grasping and articulating the dialectical processes of reality. The relational nature of reality, understood as a dynamic, interrelated totality in constant change, is captured and expressed by language. From this role, we see that language possesses a representational role. It is meant to capture the dynamics of reality for later on being shared with others. This does not necessarily, though, make language an intrinsically normative tool. Nevertheless, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that some normative content is found in the expressions shared through language as the dynamics shared through this tool might be

normative in nature. Thus, we could expect, at least, that the content expressed and shared in language be of normative character at some level.

With this framework in mind, we could make use of Brandom's theory to clarify some missing content in Lukács' account. As presented in the previous section, Brandom's theory gives an important role to society in the formation and communication of normativity. For Brandom, language use is inherently a social activity, and the norms that govern meaning are collectively established and enforced. Meaning is not just an individual mental representation but a public, socially shared set of practices and inferential commitments. From his perspective, understanding and participating in language requires being part of a community that recognises certain rules for what counts as valid inference, justification, and truth. This understanding of language makes an eminently normative phenomenon. What we are allowed to say, what is correct, and what counts as a good reason is determined by the community of language users. Within this framework, there are four major aspects to highlight in Brandom's theory. Each one of these will be briefly discussed in the context of its match (or mismatch) with Lukács' philosophical position.

In the first place is Brandom's inferentialist approach. Brandom's theory of meaning is inferentialist, which implies that the meaning of a term or sentence is determined by the inferences that can be drawn from it, as well as the inferences that justify or explain it. For Brandom, to understand the meaning of a word or statement is to understand how it functions within a web of reasons, how it relates to other statements and concepts, and how it can be used to infer other truths. This aspect of Brandom's philosophy seems not to be completely relatable to the framework presented by Lukács. The problem of meaning, a discussion set within the philosophy of language, is not targeted extensively by Lukács. For this reason, it would be hard to properly present these ideas in the context of Lukács. Without a coherent theory of meaning presented by Lukács, which would involve also assessing the epistemic foundations of the meaning of language, there is not even enough space for speculation.

Regarding normativity, a central part of Brandom's theory is the idea that meaning is normative. This means that when we use language, we engage in a practice governed by rules and norms. In particular, these norms involve giving and asking for reasons. A

speaker, in asserting something, is committing themselves to certain claims and opening themselves up to challenges or requests for justification. This is particularly insightful in the context of Lukács. Although it is true, as mentioned above, that Brandom's theory of normativity focuses on discursive and not prescriptive normativity, the role of language in transmitting norms and rules could perhaps play a role in Lukács' thought. By acknowledging that it is through language that rules and norms are shared, that the road towards the materialisation of a goal is carried out thanks to that, we could establish that the means used for that materialisation also constitute a relevant part of the role of language. From this perspective, the pivotal role that language plays in the context of labour implies the sharing of goals and means, in the shape of rules and norms, that emerge from social activity. Without this capacity to transmit such information, no real materialisation of common objectives would be possible. This point links tightly with another aspect of Brandom's theory, which is the relevance of social practices. Brandom emphasises the social character of meaning. For him, meaning does not arise in isolation but through social interaction and communities of language users. It is through the interplay of speakers holding each other accountable to shared norms of reasoning and justification that language and meaning emerge. In the context of Lukács and the emergence of normative systems, it is essential to highlight the central and pivotal role society has. Brandom, by giving social exchanges the importance of creating meaning and the standards of use for language, pinpoints the collective aspect of rule-enforcement that is also found in Lukács. Let us consider that the emergence of goals and objectives, a product of the activity of labour, emerges from their collectivisation and transmission. It is reasonable to expect that the methods and means to achieve them, i.e. the rules, are also dependent on such collective interactions.

We positioned Lukács' original thought as eminently teleological. What Brandom's theory can give in the context of teleologically-emerging rules, is the mechanisms of social interaction that allow for the enforcement and modification of such rules. The act of making a claim is embedded in social practices where people can agree, disagree, challenge, or refine what has been said. Brandom suggests that our understanding of meaning is tied to this ongoing social negotiation and interaction, a negotiation that could hypothetically emerge from the activity of labour if we adapt this thought to Lukács's frameworks. One of the main features that we expected to clarify by using

Brandom's theory is the harmonisation of the double origin motivation of human activity. Both naturally set needs guide individuals' actions as well as social needs. By noticing that the social role is double, i.e. in setting some specific collective goals and enforcing and modifying the norms that govern our actions, we can alleviate the tension between the individual and the collective. Labour must be understood as an activity that at an individual and collective level, in the form of social interactions, sets the the objective that gives force to a normative system. Social interactions help reinforce and modify (if necessary) those norms in view of the end goal. This leads to the last point regarding Brandom's theory, his scorekeeping metaphor.

As presented in the previous section, Brandom likens conversations to a game in which participants keep track of each other's commitments and entitlements. Each speaker, aware of what others have said, tracks which claims have been accepted, rejected, or supported by reasons. In this sense, conversation is a dynamic game where the "score" reflects the standing of claims and justifications within the group. A specific form of this scorekeeping relates to its deontic character, in which speakers' commitments are kept track. This highlights the importance of social norms and responsibility in language use. Each individual is responsible for upholding their claims and for tracking others' claims in a community of discourse.

We can summarise what has just been presented. Copp's pluralist and teleological view of normativity aligns with Lukács' labour-based ethical theory by offering a framework that acknowledges multiple sources of normative systems. This approach helps resolve the tension in Lukács' system between the political and moral dimensions of valuation, where normative systems are grounded in the teleological activity of labour. Actions are judged based on their utility in achieving specific goals, fitting well with Lukács' emphasis on labour as the foundational activity that generates societal norms. On the other hand, Brandom's theory of language complements this by highlighting the normative nature of language. For Lukács, language, which emerges from labour, is a tool for transmitting social knowledge and class consciousness. Brandom's view of language as a social practice that enforces and modifies norms aligns with Lukács' understanding of language as mediating the relationship between the individual and society. Both Copp and Brandom emphasise the importance of social interactions in

shaping and enforcing norms, suggesting that societal norms are a product of collective labour and interaction. In this context, Brandom's concept of scorekeeping, where participants track each other's commitments in discourse, mirrors how social practices regulate norms in Lukács' system. Both perspectives recognize that the balance between individual and collective motivations, as well as the modification of norms, is achieved through continuous social interaction. Copp's and Brandom's frameworks provide valuable insights into understanding how Lukács' teleological, labour-based system generates and maintains societal norms through collective human activity.

Conclusion

In this thesis, we set the double goal of answering two main questions regarding Lukács' unfinished project of founding a coherent ethical project. In the first place, we set ourselves the task of better understanding the role of individuality and the subject in his ethical framework. In the second place, and ancillary to the first objective, we present the task of understanding whether Robert Brandom's and David Copp's society-centred theories of normativity could give us a deeper insight into the undeveloped mechanics of Lukács' ethics.

To carry out this task we started by presenting, in Chapter 1, the general framework of Lukács' ontology. By taking a look at his ontological foundation we could better understand the development of any further philosophical project. In this chapter, we took a look at the concept of teleology, a concept that, present in Hegel's and Marx's philosophy, sets the foundation of his understanding of the activity of labour. Lukács' teleological framework, as the explanation of human action through finality, gives the ontological foundation to the activity of labour as the human-exclusive activity that differentiates it from any other type of being. By rejecting Hegelian's idealistic conception of teleology, Lukács adopts a materialistic understanding of the concept in a way that allows him to add purposefulness to human activity through intentional action. As the foundation of human praxis, the activity of labour originates and sets apart the social being from the organic and the inorganic. The *quid* of humanity, as an eminently social being, lies in the possibility to materialise, individually and collectively, the ends and objectives set through teleological positing. The interaction between nature and mind is carried out through the activity of labour. Additionally, we presented how labour shapes the relationship between the conscious subject and the object of their action. We argued, based on Lukács' writings, that labour creates a significant distancing between the subject and object, which leads to the development of language and a deeper understanding of both the object and oneself. This distancing enables humans to transform latent possibilities into reality and fosters the development of freedom through conscious control over one's environment. Lukács emphasizes that

labour is not just about producing material goods but also about the transformation of both the worker and their capacities.

Moreover, we explored how labour transcends mere biological processes to shape complex social realities. Lukács argues that labour initiates profound changes in both individual and social dimensions, influencing the development of human societies and their intricate structures. Labour, interconnected with language and social reproduction, drives the evolution of social phenomena by creating and transforming complex social relations. We presented the idea of a "complex of complexes", where all elements are interrelated and shaped by labour. This interconnectedness, highlighted by the concept of totality, highlights how labour and social relations collectively drive historical development and human consciousness.

In Chapter 2, once in possession of the proper framework and nomenclature, we paid special attention to the specificities of Lukács' ethical project. Though not fully realised due to his death, this project was deeply rooted in his ontological framework. His ethical considerations originated around the tension between revolutionary means and their moral implications, particularly in the context of Bolshevism. Lukács' worries about the moral dilemmas of using violence for revolutionary goals made him question whether such tactics could ultimately achieve a just society. Lukács' approach, we saw, integrates Marxist ideas, emphasising that ethics must align with social realities and goals. His materialist ethics focuses on grounding normative evaluations in the objectives of collective human activities, highlighting the interplay between individual responsibility and collective goals. Additionally, this chapter advances our ideas towards understanding his ethics as it explores how labour is the foundation for social normativity. By presenting goals through teleological positing, the correctness or wrongness of an action is determined by its power for the realisation of those goals. From this perspective, norms or rules, assessed positively or negatively, necessarily emerge from the activity that sets those objectives and analyses (as it is also part of labour the assessment of the laws of nature) their feasibility. Thus, labour influences social normativity by acting as the foundational activity that shapes social relations and norms. Through labour, individuals face material challenges, make decisions, and

internalise normative demands, thus guiding their behaviour and contributing to social norms. We saw that critics like Stahl question why only labour, and not other factors like language, can be the source of normativity. From this criticism arises the suggestion that understanding labour's role in social coordination and needs could strengthen Lukács' perspective on labour-based normativity.

Finally, with the aim of answering our question, we presented Lukács' concept of the subject. We revisited the distinction made between subject and object. Although we lack a clear and definitional passage about what the subject is, we can establish that there is not a stark separation between subject and object. This goes in line with Lukács' idea of totality where subject and object are mutually composed. He integrates individual agency into his framework, suggesting that even under reification, individuals can influence and reshape social forms through collective action. This approach frames the subject as an essential part of social reality, not separate from it, and positions revolutionary change as a means to overcome alienation and restore agency.

Finally, in Chapter 3 we specified the notion of normativity focusing on morality. We discussed the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives from Kantian ethics to frame moral normativity, while also addressing criticisms to this view presented by Philippa Foot and David Copp. The importance of this lies in understanding what sort of conception of morality better fits Lukács' framework and understanding of the phenomenon. The first part of this chapter suggests that, according to Lukács, moral norms are part of broader social norms rather than a distinct category with a "special dignity". After this, we presented Robert Brandom's and David Copp's theories about normativity. Brandom's approach is rooted in "inferentialism," which focuses on the role of social practices and language in establishing norms. He argues that normative practices are embedded in the way we use language and make inferences. According to Brandom, the normativity of our beliefs and statements comes from their role in social practices and the inferences we make within these practices. Brandom's approach is rooted in "inferentialism," which focuses on the role of social practices and language in establishing norms. He argues that normative practices are embedded in the way we use language and make inferences. According to Brandom, the normativity of

our beliefs and statements comes from their role in social practices and the inferences we make within these practices. David Copp's pluralist normativity suggests that there are multiple sources of normative reasons, reflecting various aspects of human life. His teleological normativity means that norms are based on achieving specific goals or purposes. These elements are the ones we used to explain some of the mechanics of the workings of Lukács ethics. Finally, in the last section, we presented that the roles of the subject and intentionality are significant but are understood through their connection to labour rather than as standalone concepts. Lukács views labour as the foundation for ethical and political action, linking individual and collective goals to the dynamics of labour. While Lukács' framework does not explicitly categorize normative systems, the project suggests that morality and politics are intertwined, with labour being the primary source of normative evaluation. The challenge remains in reconciling moral and political valuations within this framework. This could be possible by a task we, due to the scope of this thesis, could not engage in. We presented that Copp's and Brandom's frameworks offer insights into Lukács' ethical theory by providing mechanisms for understanding his normative system. Copp's pluralist, teleological view complements Lukács' labour-based ethics by supporting the idea that norms arise from the goals set through labour, helping reconcile the tension between political and moral valuations. Brandom's emphasis on language as inherently normative aligns with Lukács' view of language as a product of labour, mediating social interactions and norms. Both frameworks highlight the importance of social interactions in shaping and enforcing norms, with Copp's pluralism addressing diverse normative sources and Brandom's theory illuminating the role of language and social practices in normativity.

Our task of analysing Lukács' unfinished project in Ethics led us to cover many relevant aspects of his philosophical framework. Regardless of the speculation in which we engaged, it is fair to say that there are some possible paths to follow from the philosophy of Lukács to reach more clarity about the origin and mechanisms of normativity. From Lukács' perspective, the separation between the realms of politics and ethics is just apparent. Even though there are still some philosophical questions to ask about such a framework, the ontological framework presented by Lukács captures one of the fundamental aspects of any philosophical enquiry, viz. That the assessment of

our actions cannot be separated from the question about the world and its workings. There is a connectedness between individuality, society, and nature that must be acknowledged if a sound account of who we are is to be made. A possible angle from which such an all-encompassing account could be given strength would involve the assessment of other Marxist works that help us frame Lukács' ethics within a broader philosophical position. Undoubtedly Lukács' philosophy has much to offer for future investigation in the political and ethical realms.

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