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THE HUMAN BEING AS SUBJECTIVE FACTOR*

(An ontological approach to Human being)

"To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself."

Marx

1. *Descriptive and normative modes of analysis*

The approach to the human being, by which is meant the most complex fact and process of reality, can be many folded. As a subject, it can be regarded from natural, physiological or socialhistorical viewpoints, approached from angles of social consciousness, or viewed from ethical, religious or philosophical aspects.

Within the philosophical approach, two analytical modes can be differentiated: one describing the alienation, deprivation and emptiness of human being, while the other — having separated the subject from history — formulates postulates concerning it in an abstract way, starting from the notion of human being. The recognition and segregation of descriptive and normative analysis indicates an important task for research.

2. *Description of Human being in contemporary French Philosophy*

Looking at some examples more closely, a dominance of descriptive analysis can be seen in philosophical writings. This process started with structuralism whose representatives generally give man a very unimportant role in history. Let us just recall a few examples which express the general tendency represented by certain philosophical trends in connection with the human being.

Claude Lévi-Strauss in his important — and as regards structuralism — basic work *La pensée sauvage* maintains that "l'histoire n'est pas liée à l'homme"¹ and also that it is a myth that man plays a "rôle d'agent historique"² an assertion also made by J.-P. Sartre. Consequently, man does not play a part in history, the essence of which is described with the help of natural laws in preference to the process taking place as a result of human action. The same thesis of Lévi-Strauss can be found again within marxism in the 70s when Louis Althusser in his paper *Réponse à John Lewis* puts forward his proposition of "theoretical anti-humanism". Opposing the huma-

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¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss: *La pensée sauvage*, Plon, 1962. Paris. p. 347.

² Idem, p: 337.

nist and historical tendencies of Marxism, and first of all Antonio Gramsci, Althusser started that history cannot be the result and outcome of a "développement individuel" but only that of class struggle which is nothing else but the "engine of history". This could be termed the case of the engine without a driver. A lot of discussion followed his statement in *Remarque sur une catégorie: "procès sans Sujet ni Fin(s)*, namely that "l'histoire n'a pas au sens philosophique du mot, de sujet, mais un moteur: la lutte des classes."³ Similar thoughts occur — though from entirely different bases — in post-modern philosophy in the work of J.-Fr. Lyotard in the 80s. In his *La condition postmoderne* he explains that as we near the end of the 20th century an epoch is drawing to a close, one in which the dominant intellectual trends have been on the one hand the dialectics of Hegelian philosophy of Spirit and the other, the Marxian view of historical subjects as main postulates. Today we are witnessing a crisis of power and knowledge nourished from these intellectual trends. The end of the epoch is due to the fact that the great ideals as set forth by Hegel and even more by Karl Marx have not materialized. Because of the insufficiency of historical subject the revolution imagined by him could not be carried out. On the possibilities of revolution Lyotard writes that "Quant à la révolution, au sens marxiste, ça me paraît exclu... Il me paraît parfaitement clair que le grand récit issu à la fois de l'idéalisme allemand et de la révolution française, récit de la réalisation du savoir et de l'émancipation de l'humanité, repris par Marx et mixé avec la théorie économique, n'aura pas lieu. C'est ce que nous apprenons en cette fin de siècle, parce que nous savons que quand il a prétendu avoir lieu, c'était une catastrophe... Les travailleurs eux-mêmes, qui sont les sujets de ce récit, pensent, si l'on juge par leur conduite, que ça n'a pas lieu."⁴ Even if man were a subject, in the present situation the emancipation of his one subjectivity is impossible.

The examples we have shown are taken at random. Still they illustrate that in the description of authors belonging to a variety of intellectual tendencies, the subject does not in effect fulfill the function it could fulfill in history. This may have widely differing historical reasons in various countries.

May it be that one of the most important historical function of the human being — namely that of history creator — is really inactual? Should man not be the one to form history despite the fact that at the moment he is unable to fulfill his vocation? What sort of *way out* may occur from his present situation? These questions should be answered at least on the level of philosophical postulates.

3. *The normativity of the ontological approach to human being*

This question was touched upon by George Lukács almost parallel to the development of structuralism. In his late philosophical masterpiece, *Toward the Ontology of Social Being* (published in German in the mid-70s; no English translation has yet been made though some parts of it are available in English) he approaches the problem of man placed into a social being from two aspects: as Ideal moment and as Subjective factor.

3(a) *The importance of the Ideal Moment*

Lukács's starting point is of great significance in the history of philosophy. What he wants to assert is a standpoint of *tertium datur* as opposed to Stalin's vulgar materialism and to modern irrationalism, to the various tendencies of idealism, such as

³ Louis Althusser: *Réponse à John Lewis*, Maspéro, 1973. Paris. p. 39.

⁴ Jean-Francois Lyotard: *Le jeu de l'informatique et du savoir*, dialectiques, 1980: n. 29, p. 9.

existentialism, neopositivism etc. In his case this means a return to Marx who already in his *Thesen über Feuerbach* separates his views from traditional, contemplative materialism and from the various trends of subjective idealism alike.⁵

What — then — does this viewpoint of *tertium datur* mean concerning the ideal moment in Lukács?

Lukács — taking into consideration the failure of Stalinian conception and the dead-end of modern idealism — forwards the necessity of a *unified* view of the human being based fundamentally on the idea of historical being and he does this in a way highly original in the history of philosophy. In contrast to various modern philosophical trends which concretize and divide the different aspects of the human being, Lukács strives to create a *new synthesis* of the spiritual and material in the social being. He points out that in the model of human activity, namely in work, ideal and material moments, teleology and causality exist in an inseparable unity. He said: From the ontological point of view, it is not about two separate acts — one ideal and one material — but the possibility that each act, to be isolated from each other only conceptually, is bound to the existence of the other by ontological necessity. In the most proper activity of man, a dialectic unity of ideal and real elements can be observed. In this manner, according to Lukács's conception, the ideal moment is highly evaluated. He supplies us with expressive examples concerning the everyday importance of the ideal moment which reveals 'the muteness' of the *an sich Sein*. A stick, for example, is suitable in itself to be used as a spit, yet its own being would never reveal this suitability. Another example: in the case of the most primitive human appliance of fire, it directly is obvious that neither the fire possesses a capacity for cooking or baking, nor does the meat or the vegetable have a direct tendency for being cooked or roasted. The *für Sich* being of social beings consequently has to be sought in the suitability or insuitability of the ideal moment. Man is capable of reaching his dependance from nature and society solely by concrete activity forming society based on the ideal moment.

This is how this question is linked with the problem of *ideology*, which serves in Lukács's opinion "as a means to make the social practice of men conscious and apt to act". Ideologies promote choice in social life, based on the ideal moment, and further men in undertaking social conflicts. Thus, ideology and socio-political activity are closely related in Lukács. Despite his failure to elaborate on the political sphere, on the question of social structure, of state and civil society, this emphasis on the ideal moment — on the normative level — helps the human being to be seen more clearly and in greater totality.

3(b) *The role of the subjective factor in history*

Man — in Lukács's view — is an 'answering being', unable to free himself of the questions history poses him and characterized as a human being by his answers to these questions. The answer always reflects the age and also the human possibilities.

In certain cases, Lukács attaches decisive importance to the historical role of the human subject until then long disregarded in Marxist philosophy. He considers the subjective factor as having critical, special importance in the recognition and pursuit of social conflicts, for in one form or another, man has always been a determining factor of great historical changes. Opposed to the official Marxist views, Lukács

⁵ Karl Marx: *Thesen über Feuerbach* — in: Marx—Engels: *Ausgewählte Schriften*. Dietz Verlag, 1966. Berlin, II. Band, p. 371.

underlines the notion that historical change is not merely a mechanic, automatic result, a consequence arising from the conflict between the development of the forces of production and the backwardness of the relations of production, but also a result of the 'changing activity' of people. Furthermore, the ideal moment also plays a role in the practical activity of the subjective factor. "Es ist die grosse, welthistorische Lehre der Revolutionen, dass das gesellschaftliche Sein sich nicht bloss verändert, sondern immer wieder verändert wird."⁶ The historical role of the subjective factor therefore influences the judgement of economical changes in society. In Lukács's view, "die ökonomische Entwicklung zwar objektiv revolutionäre Lagen schaffen kann, jedoch bringt sie keineswegs mit ihnen simultan in zwangsläufigen Zusammenhang den faktisch und praktisch ausschlaggebenden subjektiven Faktor hervor."⁷

The formation of the subjective factor is therefore a historical task. It is hindered, at the moment, by *alienation*, a phenomenon introduced in detail in descriptive analysis, which is present on the level of the human being, in ideas and institutions all over the world. Lukács himself, in the personality-theory section of his *Ontology*, mentions the obstacles to the development of the human being. He says that personality can defeat its alienation and can become a subjective factor only if day by day it fights its own alienation and — we might add — the conditions which continuously produce alienated relations.

4. Conclusions

The descriptive and normative modes of approach actually correspond to the standpoints of 'Sein' and 'Sollen'. Strictly speaking, none of these analytical methods is expedient: the descriptive angle does not show a way-out, while the normative one suggests slightly utopic solutions, at least from present perspectives.

Despite all this, we maintain that a search for the way-out is necessary when studying the human being. One of the preconditions is a realistic and many-sided description of the human being. At the same time, a requirement is that we consider the possibilities of man as a species. It is obvious that we can obtain only expressedly abstract conclusions as a result of a normative analysis, yet the ontological approach nevertheless has a great advantage. Namely, the unified aspect, the way it observes and handles man embedded in his social being. This is in contrast to the isolation of the ideal and material moment, which undoubtedly results in a one-sided interpretation. Lukács, with his ideas of *tertium datur* provides a good example of how this pattern of the history of philosophy, hitherto stiffened into a rigid dichotomy, can be exceeded on the basis of a unified vision of social existence and social consciousness. At the same time, he also shows how a harmony of the ideal and the material is possible in a human-centric conception without always searching for the priority of one over the other.

Finally, there is a further conclusion: The subjective factor really is unable to fulfill its historical role. Yet this does not involve the non-existence of the subjective factor. It does exist, but is deformed and manipulated. The way-out can once more

⁶ Georg Lukács: *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*. Luchterhand, 1986. Darmstadt und Neuwied, Die wichtigsten Problemkomplexe, p. 453.

⁷ Idem. p. 453. See my paper: *Két filozófiai szintézis-kísérlet: Lukács és Gramsci* (Two tentatives of philosophical synthesis). *Doxa*, no. 7. 1986. pp. 111—124.

be produced on the normative level. The subject is able to fill its role only if the alienated state comes to an end and the regulative system and institutional relations of the civil society fill its place.

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AZ EMBER MINT SZUBJEKTÍV TÉNYEZŐ

(Az ember ontológiai szempontból)

A tanulmányt a szerző a XVIII. brightoni Filozófiai Világkongresszusra készítette. Bár az anyagot elfogadták, ott mégsem mutathatta be, mert nem tudott kiutazni.

A tanulmányban a szerző bemutatja, hogy az 1960-as években a francia filozófiában, a strukturalizmustól egészen az 1970-es években jelentkező posztmodern filozófiáig, az ember deskriptív, leíró elemzési módját lehet megfigyelni. Ezzel szemben az ugyancsak ez időtájt született Lukács-írásokban az ember fogalmának normatív bemutatása történik meg. Ennek talán legfőbb vonása, hogy — eszmei és anyagi mozzanatok egységét hangsúlyozva — azt mutatja be, milyennek is kell lennie az embernek, mint nem-elidegenedett lénynek. A tanulmány szerzője egyik tárgyalási móddal sem azonosítja saját felfogását, s hangsúlyozza, hogy kiutat is felmutató új szintézisre van szükség e téren.

