

# “WHAT IS ORTHODOX MARXISM?”

Bend it like Lukács: The unorthodox  
roadmap to orthodox Marxism

Alexandros Minotakis\*

## 1. Introduction

It’s 2023 and orthodox Marxism is in crisis.

It’s 1989 and orthodox Marxism is in crisis.

It’s 1968 and orthodox Marxism is in crisis.

It’s 1923 and orthodox Marxism is in crisis.

Against the common misconception of orthodox Marxism as a uniform, constant presence that spans from late 19th century and dominates radical politics, the notion of “orthodox Marxism in crisis” is a recurrent theme in Marxist discourse. In early 1919, Lukács understands that the old orthodoxy, the one established by the Second International, is dead and a new one can be born. While the Russian revolution provided the founda-

---

\* Postdoctoral researcher in Digital Policy at the University College Dublin, Ireland. E-mail address: [alexandros.minotakis@ucdconnect.ie](mailto:alexandros.minotakis@ucdconnect.ie). ORCID: 0009-0001-9294-4564.

tions for it, that is not enough. A new theoretical-philosophical framework is needed to clarify and deepen the rift between the Second and Third Internationals. This new conception of orthodox Marxism will be erected upon the following passage, drawn from the preface of *History and Class Consciousness (HCC)*:

our underlying premise here is the belief that in Marx's theory and method the *true method* by which to understand society and history has finally been discovered. This method is historical through and through. It is self-evident, therefore, that it must be constantly applied to itself and this is one of the focal points of these essays (Lukács 1967: xiii).

Marxism applied upon Marxism. Sounds solipsistic; we will need to take a closer look. As it will become evident, this focus on “Marxism as a method” is one of the reasons that this opening chapter of *HCC* will become notorious, drawing friends and foes alike, sparking the interest of critics of Lukács from 1924 until today.

Regarding Lukács own trajectory, this essay represents a sharp turn away from his previous work, especially his essay titled *Bolshevism as a Moral Problem* (Lukács 1977). There he wrote that those who fall under the sway of Bolshevism should be wary: “Can freedom be attained by means of oppression? Can a new world order emerge out of a struggle in which the tactics vary only technically from those of the old and despised world order” (Lukács 1977: 424). Written in 1918, *Moral Problem* is the last essay of his pre-Marxist period. There is a rift growing within Lukács in that juncture and he intends to cross to the other side: in the following months, he joins the Communist

Party in Hungary and starts writing the essays that will result in *History and Class Consciousness*.

## 2. Key points

Providing a synopsis of this chapter presents certain difficulties as Lukács presents a general outline of key concepts and arguments that shape *HCC* in its entirety. The following section will focus on the most important and fully developed points of “What is Orthodox Marxism?”. However, the overall key points of the chapter are the following:

- Orthodox Marxism must be understood a) as adherence to method, not concrete results b) as unity of theory and praxis.
- In that sense and contrary to what theoreticians of the Second International argue, Marxism is opposed to empiricism and any exaltation of isolated facts.
- The Marxist method distinguishes itself from empiricism by transcending immediacy through mediation.
- The concrete meaning of facts is revealed through mediation with the whole. Totality rises as a central concept in orthodox Marxism.
- Totality comprises of numerous interactions but the most prominent one is the “dialectical relation between subject and object in the historical process”.

- Capitalism radically transformed the relationship between subject and object by “socialising society” and dismantling barriers and legal partitions between social classes, bringing forth a new form of social cooperation.
- Within this process, the proletariat emerges as the potential identical subject-object of History. From the standpoint of the proletariat, a new kind of unity between theory and praxis is possible.

The following section will offer a more detailed analysis of the arguments deployed by Lukács.

### 3. Chapter synopsis

“What is Orthodox Marxism?” introduces readers to one of the seminal passages of Lukács’ work:

Let us assume for the sake of argument that recent research had disproved once and for all every one of Marx’s individual theses. Even if this were to be proved, every serious ‘orthodox’ Marxist would still be able to accept all such modern findings without reservation and hence dismiss all of Marx’s theses in toto – without having to renounce his orthodoxy for a single moment. Orthodox Marxism, therefore, does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx’s investigations. It is not the ‘belief’ in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a ‘sacred’ book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to *method* (Lukács 1967: 1).

Shockingly enough, Lukács argues that orthodox Marxism retains its validity even if all findings of Marx are disproved by

new research. Epistemologically, it is an intriguing statement: what is this theory that consists only of “method”? What is this method? Can it ever be refuted? Before proceeding to these issues, Lukács briefly addresses the subject of the goal of Marxism: to facilitate the emergence of consciousness that will push the historical process towards “its proper end [...] the historical function of theory is to make this step a practical possibility (Lukács 1967: 2). Therefore, a paradox arises: orthodox Marxism aims to be judged in the murky field of “reality”, where the unity of theory and praxis is possible· however new developments themselves cannot refute it. This is a point that will be reexamined.

Moving forward, Lukács clarifies the tenets of his approach on “Marxism as a method”. Faithful to his project to escalate the conflict with the Marxism of the Second International, he references Eduard Bernstein. Bernstein had proposed a reinvention of Marxism in order to dispose of the burden of dialectics and Hegelianism (Lukács 1967: 5). Instead, Bernstein hopes to establish a solid foundation for Marxism on “concrete facts”. At this point, Lukács launches his provocative critique on isolated facts and empiricism:

It goes without saying that all knowledge starts from the facts. The only question is: which of the data of life are relevant to knowledge and in the context of which method? [...] By contrast, in the teeth of all these isolated and isolating facts and partial systems, dialectics insists on the concrete unity of the whole [...] the actual form of these data is the appropriate starting point for the formation of scientific concepts, it thereby takes its

stand simply and dogmatically on the basis of capitalist society (Lukács 1967: 6).

His point is clear: the way that we perceive reality with our senses does not reveal us anything about the way these disparate facts co-exist and operate. Moreover, every day we receive an immense amount of data which in itself tells us nothing. What are we to make of it?<sup>1</sup> Mediation emerges as a key concept for Lukács’ thought precisely because “a situation in which the facts speak out unmistakably for or against a definite course of action has never existed, and neither can or will exist” (Lukács 1967: 24). In order to approach the “inner core” of facts, we need to connect them to the bigger picture, what Lukács refers to as *totality*. Grasping the truth of our reality lies in transcending the immediate appearances of things<sup>2</sup> – dialectics is the pathway to take if we hope to situate isolated facts and data within a concrete totality.

However, what is the nature of this totality? First of all, it is historical: the totality as shaped by the capitalist mode of production; “Marx’s dictum: ‘The relations of production of every society form a whole’ is the methodological point of departure and the key to the historical understanding of social relations”

---

1 While beyond the scope of this paper, this passage calls for reconsideration in the age of social media and information overload. While mainstream theories on data and information society revel in the sheer amount of data and information at our disposal, Lukács seems to be closer to the feeling of exasperation that floods social media users. Data by themselves, with no structure or unity, without reference to any concept of totality still trap us within the confines of (digital) capitalism.

2 This is a point that will be reiterated in the next chapters, especially with regards to class consciousness: in its immediacy, the consciousness of the proletariat remains confined to the dependence to capital.

(Lukács 1967: 9). The totality is always historical and malleable. Moreover, “the category of totality does not reduce its various elements to an undifferentiated uniformity, to identity”; however, this independence and autonomy of various elements is always over-determined by the dialectical relationships and interactions that develop within the totality of the capitalist mode of production (Lukács 1967: 13). Separate components can only be understood in motion, as “moving parts” in a complex whole of interactions that is constantly changing. An isolated commodity makes no sense, if it is cut off from the process of production, the process of circulation and its interrelationship with other commodities in the capitalist market. An act of workers’ insubordination has no meaning if it is not examined in relation to changes in the production process, to actions and interventions of the ruling class as well as to the overall state of the capitalist economy. As Lukács points out “the facts no longer appear strange when they are comprehended in their coherent reality, in the relation of all partial aspects to their inherent, but hitherto unelucidated roots in the whole: we then perceive the tendencies which strive towards the centre of reality” (Lukács 1967: 24).

At this point, you may remember that we mentioned “unity between theory and practice” as one of the goals of Marxist methodology. In that sense, dialectics is not simply about grasping totality as a static construct – in fact throughout *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács leads a consistent polemic against contemplative philosophy, pointing out that understanding and transforming reality are actions that cannot be effec-

tively separated. Lukács not only emphasizes the need for a philosophy that strives towards reality but points out that the capitalist mode of production has, for the first time, created the historical conditions for the emergence of a subject that potentially embodies the unity between theory and practice. To quote Lukács at length:

Bourgeois society carried out the process of socialising society [...] In its universe there is a formal equality for all men; the economic relations that directly determined the metabolic exchange between men and nature progressively disappear. Man becomes, in the true sense of the word, a social being. Society becomes the reality for man [...] With the emergence of historical materialism there arose the theory of the ‘conditions for the liberation of the proletariat’ and the doctrine of reality understood as the total process of social evolution. This was only possible because for the proletariat the total knowledge of its class-situation was a vital necessity, a matter of life and death; because its class situation becomes comprehensible only if the whole of society can be understood; and because this understanding is the inescapable precondition of its actions. Thus the unity of theory and practice is only the reverse side of the social and historical position of the proletariat. From its own point of view self-knowledge coincides with knowledge of the whole so that the proletariat is at one and the same time the subject and object of its own knowledge (Lukács 1967: 20–21).

The “emergence of historical materialism” has only become possible through the rise of capitalist mode of production and the proletarianization of large segments of the population. The proletariat does not simply provide a standpoint to contemplate upon exploitation· it is in a unique standpoint



where the boundaries between “understanding” and “transforming” reality become porous. For the proletariat, understanding itself is tantamount to changing itself in the process as well as the totality of social relations within capitalism. In that sense, for Lukács the proletariat emerges as the “identical subject-object”, a historical “novelty” where knowledge/self-knowledge and social action seem to converge and, in the end, coincide. This is a point that runs throughout *HCC* and will be discussed in the following chapters in a more detailed manner.

At this point, it is worth highlighting that the above passage has also been significant regarding the *historical limits* of Marxism. Firstly, the Marxist method is historically situated, “owing” its existence to the rise of the capitalist mode of production: in that sense, Marxism has no claim to a “universal-eternal truth”. Moreover, Marxism is tied to the proletariat both for its existence as well as its delimitation. As the proletariat transforms itself alongside social relations, the Marxist method is rendered obsolete. This is a fundamental point that necessarily emerges when Marxism is applied upon itself.

#### **4. Is there such a thing as a Dialectics of Nature?**

So far, we have tried to follow Lukács argument in parallel to how it unfolds in the first chapter of *HCC*. However, what has been omitted from this synopsis is a sub-plot that is entangled with our main story, while never addressed in a proper manner.

This sub-plot regards the question of “Dialectics of Nature”: can the notions of totality, contradiction, interaction be transferred to the study of natural phenomena? Although Lukács does not develop his view in a systematic manner, his critique of Engels on this matter is another reason why this chapter has become notorious in Marxist discourse. I will attempt to reconstruct Lukács’s point by drawing from different passages that appear throughout this chapter in a rather disparate manner.

According to Lukács, Engels correctly points out that dialectics reject a “one-sided and rigid causality”, replacing it with an emphasis on interaction and continuous “transition from one definition into the other”. However, in discussing the relationship between subject and object as a component of Marxist dialectics, Lukács takes an unexpected detour to criticize Engels and his work on the “Dialectics of Nature”:

Dialectics, [Engels] argues, is a continuous process of transition from one definition into the other. In consequence a one-sided and rigid causality must be replaced by interaction. But he does not even mention the most vital interaction, namely the dialectical relation between subject and object in the historical process, let alone give it the prominence it deserves [...] For it implies a failure to recognize that in all metaphysics the object remains untouched and unaltered so that thought remains contemplative and fails to become practical; while for the dialectical method the central problem is to change reality (Lukács 1967: 3).

A few pages later, Lukács clarifies that he does not object to the application of scientific knowledge to natural phenomena. However, he is cautious of “the ideal of scientific knowledge [...]

applied to society” because at this point it is turned into an “ideological weapon of the bourgeoisie”; the latter seeks to deploy a framing of society ruled by “eternal laws of nature and reason” (Lukács 1967: 11). Lukács’s conclusion here is quite clear: the ruling class wants to present exploitation as a merely natural phenomenon. However, the unfolding of his argument rests upon premises that raise questions. If “the ideal of scientific knowledge” is suitable for nature but ideological when applied to society because it rests upon the notion of “eternal laws”, then either a) nature is ahistorical or b) scientific knowledge treats nature as eternal.

Lukács does not clarify this point further, turning his attention to his main argument. He will return to this issue, however, in the infamous 6<sup>th</sup> footnote of *HCC*. After quoting Marx on economic categories, Lukács goes on to state that the Marxian method is strictly

limited here to the realms of history and society. The misunderstandings that arise from Engels’ account of dialectics can in the main be put down to the fact that Engels – following Hegel’s mistaken lead – extended the method to apply also to nature. However, the crucial determinants of dialectics – the interaction of subject and object, the unity of theory and practice, the historical changes in the reality underlying the categories as the root cause of changes in thought, etc. – are absent from our knowledge of nature. Unfortunately, it is not possible to undertake a detailed analysis of these questions here (Lukács 1967: 24).

Lukács acknowledges that he has made a brief point that touches upon a complicated subject matter. However, his foot-

note has major implications, as it breaks down the unity of dialectics, implying either the need for a different type of dialectics (suitable for nature) or that dialectics is entirely unsuitable for the study of nature (and once again the notion of an ahistorical-eternally static nature seems to return).

In the next section, I will turn to some significant critiques of Lukács’ concept of “orthodox Marxism” as well as of his argument on the dialectics of nature.

## 5. Critique of “What is Orthodox Marxism?”

Unsurprisingly, the main points of this chapter raised significant criticism against Lukács during the 1920s and beyond. Before examining some of the harshest polemics leveled against the notion of “Marxism as a method” or Lukács’ critique of the *Dialectics of Nature*, we turn our attention to his contemporary Karl Korsch, a prominent figure of Marxist philosophy who is often considered an ally of Lukács, a brother-in-arms in the camp of heterodox Marxism.

Perry Anderson’s account (1989) has strengthened this viewpoint, pointing to the work of Lukács and Korsch as crucial contributions to the establishment of “Western Marxism”. Anderson (1989: 29–30) also notes the similarities between the two authors’ political trajectories as they both came into conflict with official party line by the late 1920s: Korsch was expelled from the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), while Lukács

chose to renounce his theses in order to remain within the Hungarian Party. However, if we examine the specific ways that each came to question the party line on Marxism, important differences surface. As we have seen, Lukács hoped to redefine “orthodox Marxism”, thus providing a philosophical standpoint able to clarify the schism between Second and Third International. In Lukács’s view, the existence and importance of “Marxist philosophy” is undeniable. On the other hand, in his seminal work *Marxism and Philosophy* (published along with HCC in 1923), Korsch emphasizes the common elements between the two currents of Marxism while noting that “bourgeois professors of philosophy reassured each other that Marxism had no philosophical content of its own – and thought they were saying something important against it. Orthodox Marxists also reassured each other that their Marxism by its very nature had nothing to do with philosophy” (Korsch 2008: 33). In 1930, defending his work against critique, Korsch explains the ways that he and Lukács converged and diverged on the question of orthodoxy: “I cannot again state that I am in basic agreement with Lukács’s views, as I once did [...] Nevertheless, I still believe to this day that Lukács and I are objectively on the same side in our critical attitude towards the old Social Democratic Marxist orthodoxy and the new Communist orthodoxy” (Korsch 2008: 102).<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Their divergence becomes apparent also when discussing Lenin’s work and thought. For Lukács, Lenin embodies the basis for a philosophical renewal of Marxism, for a new understanding of the importance of the subjective factor. For Korsch, in turn, Lenin has a utilitarian approach to philosophy: “Lenin decides philosophical questions only on the basis of non-philosophical considerations and results. He does not judge them on the basis of their theoretical and philosophical content *as well*” (Korsch 2008: 128).

### 5.1 Critique of the separation of method and results

Of course, not all critiques are this comradely. Abram Deborin lashes at Lukács regarding the separation of method and results derived from the notion of “orthodox Marxism as method”. As he notes (Deborin 1924), “any theory comprises an aggregate of separate propositions. It therefore follows, that if we reject all the separate propositions of a given theory, then it is obvious that we reject along with them the theory as a whole”. For Deborin, the separation between method and results makes no sense as “method has no self-contained significance [...] in the dialectic method and content are inseparably linked [...] On the contrary, method is more fully confirmed to the extent that it more fully ‘corresponds’ to the results and content of the reality under investigation”. For Deborin, the issue of method should only be examined in relation to the production of accurate results; issues of historicity and totality have no place in this discussion; this is a clear-cut, “traditional” epistemological understanding of this relationship. Unexpectedly, Korsch notes, in a similar vein, that “it is therefore completely against the spirit of the dialectic, and especially of the materialist dialectic, to counterpose the dialectical materialist ‘method’ to the substantive results achieved by applying it to philosophy and the sciences” (Korsch 2008: 134). However, what is the nature of the “correct results” that Marx drew from his method? How is Marxism “vindicated”? This relationship is trickier than it sounds and we will get back to this, but first let us turn to the issue of the dialectics of nature once again.

## 5.2 *On the Dialectics of Nature*

Lukács was harshly condemned for his critique of Engels as well as his statement that the Marxian method should be “limited here to the realms of history and society”. Deborin (who termed Lukács an “orthodox Hegelian”) notes that the Hungarian philosopher must be a dualist: “an idealist insofar as nature is concerned, but a dialectical materialist with regard to social and historical reality” (Deborin 1924). In this regard, Deborin wants to pay Lukács back on his own coin, positing nature as a being that is historically situated and accusing Lukács of conceiving “nature as some kind of frozen being”; moreover, Deborin reminds his readers of Marx’s statement “that, essentially speaking, there is only one science – the science of history, which is subdivided into the history of nature and the history of people. Of course, this by no means excludes the circumstance that the history of nature is governed by laws which are completely different from the history of people” (Deborin 1924). In a contemporary reading of Lukács, Morley (2008) traces back the correspondence between the forms of thought to those of the natural world to the ancient Greeks (and their concept of the dialectic) to conclude that: “The idea that dialectical laws have no reference to the objective world is therefore external to the history of dialectics itself”. In defending Engels, he adds that “Engels [...] is based on the Marxist principle that nature precedes, determines and conditions mankind. Therefore according to the Marxist approach the only way for mankind to free itself is to uncover all of the hidden principles of nature and master them as a whole” (Morley 2008). In that sense, Lukács is ulti-

mately accused on two charges: he underplays the importance of mastery of man over nature (which rests on the application of dialectics in natural science) and he seems to underestimate the importance of the unity between man and nature – thus, his text can be seen as the “original sin” that tainted Western Marxists, leading them to ignore issues regarding the natural environment and climate change for many decades.

In his speech upon receiving the 2020 Deutscher Memorial Prize, John Bellamy Foster pointed to post-Lukácsian Marxism as the main culprit with regards to the complete rejection of the dialectics of nature; hence, of producing a rupture between Western Marxism and the natural sciences that, ultimately, hampered the development of a Marxist ecology. Regarding Lukács himself, Foster states, however, that he “did not categorically reject the dialectics of nature in *History and Class Consciousness*, subscribing rather to the notion [...] that there exists a ‘merely objective dialectics’ of nature, capable of being perceived by the ‘detached observer’ [...] In this way, Lukács [...] conceived of a hierarchy of dialectics”. Foster’s critique seems to grasp the issue in a more precise manner. In the next section, I will attempt to address these critiques.



## 6. Reconstructing the debate

*The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth – i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question*

Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*

*for the dialectical method the central problem is to change reality*

Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*

Marxism does not hold a claim on truth based on its internal logic; instead, it makes its point by attempting to change reality, thus proving that reality was already “receptive” for such a change. Contrary to what Deborin claims, Lukács does not want to discredit all the concrete findings of Marx. At the same time, Lukács realizes that their “accuracy” cannot simply be measured by an experiment or any other research method. In the final analysis, full corroboration for Marxism cannot be achieved by any other measure than its own transcendence through the advent of a communist-classless society. This does not mean that Marxism stands above social reality or that it should not be judged and modified when its theses are refuted

by historical developments.<sup>4</sup> It simply means that this test is much more complex than Deborin and traditional epistemology assumes.

However, another issue with Lukács still persists: how can a theory be constantly wrong and still claim some form of validity, even as a method. At this point, it is crucial to note that Lukács does not promote any notion of methodological rigidity. In criticizing said rigidity in the subsequent chapters of *HCC*, he notes that “the very most that can be achieved in this way is to set up a formal typology of the manifestations of history and society using historical facts as illustrations. This means that only a chance connection links the theoretical system to the objective historical reality that the theory is intended to comprehend [...]” (Lukács 1967: 154). Although in this passage Lukács is criticizing Neo-Kantian separation between a formal method and results that are grasped in their immediacy, an analogy can be drawn to Marxism and Marxist methodology in relation to history. As “content/results” are variable, the same goes method as it is historically situated; maybe it would be more suitable to speak of method as a specific form of content rather than a tool.<sup>5</sup>

This can be clarified if we further examine two notions that are central to what Lukács considers “orthodox Marxist

---

4 The Russian revolution, in itself, was a major “update” and “modification” on Marxism.

5 Lotz (2020: 30) describes this effort to find a “middle path between historicism and naturalism” that “is based on what Lukács calls a ‘methodological’ understanding of Marx, insofar as Marx provides us with exactly such an outlook. For, on the one hand, the categorical system of commodity form, money, capital, interest, etc. is not something that can, as a form, change every day, but, on the other hand, it can only be understood if we interpret these categories as historical categories”.

methodology”: interaction and totality. Regarding interaction, he notes that “there is [...] an interaction when a stationary billiard ball is struck by a moving one: the first one moves, the second one is deflected from its original path. The interaction we have in mind must be more than the interaction of *otherwise unchanging objects*” (Lukács 1967: 13). To emphasize this, he quotes Marx’s statement that “a cotton-spinning jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. Only in certain circumstances does it become capital”. History comes into play once again and the same is true when we examine the concept of totality. Totality does not refer to the whole of social relations abstractly. As Lotz notes “by ‘totality’ Lukács refers exclusively to the categorial determination of social reality, and not, as one might think, to the totality of the entire historical process or the totality of all social mediations. Comprehending a totality requires a reconstruction of the categorial relations as determinations of social reality” (Lotz 2020: 35). In other words, referencing totality without any concrete categorial determinations is a cliché that cannot explain anything more than the fact that the parts of society relate to the whole. These categorial relations must be historically situated, grasped in motion and necessarily related to class struggle as forms of social being and consciousness. Reification will emerge in subsequent essays of *HCC* as the phenomenon preventing this critical perspective (and, hence, revolutionary praxis) in capitalist society.

Let us now turn to the thorny issue of the dialectics of nature. First of all, it is important to note that Lukács *does not reject the existence of dialectics of nature*. John Rees, in his intro-

duction to Lukács’s lost work later titled *Tailism and the Dialectic: A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*, points out that his critics overlooked an important passage from the chapter on “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” (Lukács 2000: 21). On that passage, he stresses the necessity of separating the merely objective dialectics of nature from those of society. For in the dialectics of society the subject is included in the reciprocal relation in which theory and practice become dialectical with reference to one another [...] Moreover, if the dialectical method is to be consolidated concretely it is essential that the different types of dialectics should be set out in concrete fashion (Lukács 1967: 207).

Lukács does not reject the notion of dialectics of nature but seeks to establish the qualitative differences in subject-object interaction between society and nature. In *Tailism and the Dialectic*, he underlines the distinction between nature and knowledge on nature, stressing with regards to the latter that there is no “immediate relationship of humans to nature in the present stage of social development” which leads to the acknowledgment that “our knowledge of nature is socially mediated, because its material foundation is socially mediated” (Lukács 2000: 106). Society “arose *from* nature”; before society, dialectics was “effective as a principle of development of nature” (Lukács 2000: 100). However, as humans experience nature mediated through society, new forms of knowledge necessarily emerge, a new kind of dialectics that involves industry as a mediation between humanity and nature. This type of dialectic involves a historical subject and, therefore, is effectively different from the

objective dialectics of nature that “are in reality independent of humans and were there before the emergence of people” (Lukács 2000: 107). A dualism persists but it is a historical one: between nature as objectivity and nature as historically shaping and being shaped by humanity. In this, more detailed and extensive account, Lukács steers clear of an ahistorical conceptualization of nature. Sherpa correctly notes that “according to Lukács, nature is not above society as an overarching entity with an objective place of its own. Rather, nature should be placed in a particular historical phase of society, i.e. in capitalism” (Sherpa 2022: 8).

## 7. Conclusion

The obsession of bourgeois thought with “pure facts and data” is deeply rooted in the capitalist mode of production as well as in the embedded interests of the capitalist class in presenting its rule as eternal. Sewart, in commenting on Lukács, argues that “his analysis of the embrace of positivism by bourgeois social thought is rooted in Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism. The objective consequences of fetishism, according to Marx, are manifest as ‘invisible laws’ of economic forces that operate apart from human purpose in the structure of society” (Sewart 1978: 324). Perhaps Marxism and critical theory have spent too much time lately denouncing postmodernism and relativity. Reading “What is Orthodox Marxism?” might offer an

opportunity to shift our focus towards “scientism” and “positivism” as constant elements of bourgeois ideology.

*HCC* also reminds us, moreover, that empiricism is not simply a strand of philosophy but a rather significant part of the “common sense” of the working class and popular strata in bourgeois society. When we are told to “look at the facts” or that we should not complain about our situation because “it is what it is”, Lukács (still) has something rather important to say about that. Finally, it is worth noting that Lukács makes his point on orthodox Marxism in a provocative manner. Our aim here was not to defend this chapter word for word but to stress that Lukács makes a convincing case for a self-reflexive Marxist reading of Marxism. From this vantage point, Marxism has the potential to retain its revolutionary nature while also continuously updating itself.

## References

- ANDERSON, A. *Considerations on Western Marxism*. London: Verso, 1989.
- DEBORIN, A. M. “G. Lukács and His Criticism of Marxism”, *World Socialist Web*, 1924. Available at <https://www.wsws.org/en/special/library/essays/1924/deborin-lukacs-engels.html>.
- KORSCH, K. *Marxism and Philosophy*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008.

- LOTZ C. “Categorical Forms as Intelligibility of Social Objects: Reification and Objectivity in Lukács”. In: G. Smulewicz-Zucker (ed.). *Confronting Reification: Revitalizing Georg Lukács’s Thought in Late Capitalism*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020, p. 25–47.
- LUKÁCS, G. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1967.
- . “Bolshevism as a Moral Problem”, *Social Research* 44 (3), p. 416–424, 1977.
- . *Tailism and the Dialectic: A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*. London: Verso, 2000.
- MORLEY, D. “Georg Lukács, the ‘Dialectics of Nature’ and the ‘free creation of history’”, *In Defence of Marxism*, 2008. Available at <https://www.marxist.com/georg-lukacs.htm>.
- SEWART, J. “Verstehen and Dialectic: Epistemology and Methodology in Weber and Lukács”, *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 5 (3–4), p. 320–366, 1978.
- SHERPA, C. “Revisiting the Debates on Man-Nature Relation in Marxist Tradition”, *Economic and Political Weekly (Engage)* 57 (18), p. 1–9, 2022. Available at [https://www.epw.in/sites/default/files/engage\\_pdf/2022/04/29/160555.pdf](https://www.epw.in/sites/default/files/engage_pdf/2022/04/29/160555.pdf).