A REPLY TO ORTHODOXY BY PHIL SHARPE

Daniel Morley has written an analysis of Lukacs’s criticism of the importance of the dialectics of nature, and argues that this standpoint means the rejection of an objective understanding of the relationship between nature and society in favour of idealism and subjectivism. (1) This dogmatic viewpoint undermines the importance of intellectual freedom within Marxism, and what is being advocated is orthodoxy as the basis of a philosophical principled position. Morley seems unaware that the history of Marxism has been characterised by controversy and discussion about philosophy, and Marx himself advocated a form of naturalism – the active interaction of humanity with nature via the role of labour – as the philosophical position that he inherited from Feuerbach.(2) In contrast, Engels upheld the dialectic of nature, or the view that the various forms of the material world were based on the interaction of the dialectic of nature, humanity and thought.(3) Lenin considered that this approach was problematical because the advances within science challenged the immutable view of matter, and so he adopted the epistemological realist view that objective reality independent of consciousness is the basis of sense perception.(4) Plekhanov carried out various modifications to Engels approach, and so these continual changes within Marxist philosophy meant that the ‘original’ views of Lukacs were not surprising. Indeed, it could be argued that Lukacs had merely repeated the standpoint of the early Marx. In other words, there was no definite Marxist standpoint, and the philosophical orthodoxy of Kautsky was based on an emphasis of historical materialism and the denial of the importance of dialectical materialism in the name of the role of social science. (5) It was Stalin who introduced intellectual conformity in terms of a clumsy conflation of the approaches of Engels and Lenin in order to establish an omnipotent view that only the party can understand the role and character of philosophy.(6)

Morley suggests that Lukacs was wrong to imply that dialectical laws do not apply to nature. The point is that this was a view inherited from Hegel and Marx who understood that nature must act in accordance with its own laws prior to the interaction of the role of humans in the form of either thought or labour and practice. (7) To suggest that the world independent of human activity can have the same laws as those of human society is to imply that an absolute spirit expresses the character of the universe as well as the role of human practice. In actuality, nature and the universe have their own laws and they only become part of humanity in terms of the interaction with human society via the role of labour. For example, evolution within nature represents the adaptation of the species to its environment, and this process is different to a conception of evolution which is part of human society and represents the progress of material forces of production. It is not possible for the laws of nature to be the same as the historical content of society because nature prior to its interaction with humanity has its own ontological independence and processes of transformation. Furthermore, to argue that the character of thought is the same as that of nature is to make the idealist mistake of denying the independence of the different aspects of reality, and instead results in conflating nature with consciousness. This view generates the idealist error that thought defines reality. The integrity of materialism can only be upheld by the recognition of the differentiation of the material world from human history, and an understanding of the independence of objective reality as the basis of thought. This approach should be our starting point, but of course the very progress of human history is based on an interaction with nature. The point is that we being with the irreducible distinctiveness of matter, nature in relation to human development and thought.

In this context for Morley to suggest that the character of dialectical philosophy can only be expressed by a dialectics of nature is controversial. Lukacs was not making any innovation when suggesting that the laws of nature and society can be distinct. Instead he was possibly making the point that nature seems to be repetitive when compared to the dynamism of human history that is based on the importance of practice or labour. Lukacs intention was not to undermine the intellectual reputation of Engels, which has been the aim of contemporary commentators, and instead he was trying to develop a distinctive basis for his own interpretation of Marxist philosophy. Hence his intention was to develop a standpoint that is opposed to the idealist view that the subject creates reality, whilst not accepting the contemplative Kantian approach of justification of the thing-in-itself. His approach was to emphasise the importance of praxis. (8) Hence it is a dogmatic interpretation to argue as Morley does that Lukacs justifies the reduction of the object to the role of the subject. This was the very approach Lukacs was trying to reject, but he understood that it was necessary to provide an alternative that was also dynamic. In that sense, the role of praxis had to be connected to a subject that was capable of transforming the world: “It was left to Marx to make the concrete discovery of ‘truth as the subject’ and hence to establish the unity of theory and practice. This he achieved by focusing the known totality upon the reality of the historical process and by confining it to this. By this means he determined both the knowable totality and the totality to be known. The scientific superiority of the standpoint of class (as against that of the individual) has become clear from the foregoing. Now we can see the reason for this superiority: only the class can actively penetrate the reality of society and transform it in its entirety. For this reason, ‘criticism’ advanced from the standpoint of class is criticism from a total point of view and hence it provides a dialectical unity of theory and practice. In dialectical unity it is at once cause and effect, mirror and motor of the historical and dialectical process. The proletariat as the subject of thought in society destroys at one blow the dilemma of impotence: the dilemma created by the pure laws with their fatalism and by the ethics of pure intentions.”(9)

This standpoint does not justify the view that the subject autonomously transforms society without regards for the objective and material conditions of society. The comment does not deny the importance of the role of structural constraints that influence human activity. However the suggestion is that the proletariat has the capacity to transform these material conditions by its development of class consciousness. Only when the proletariat is able to understand society as a totality will it be able to develop the unity of theory and practice that will bring about the process of transformation. This means that the development of class consciousness is crucial in order to generate the possibilities for the subject to realise the capacity for the process of change. Lukacs is aware that the prospect of developing this level of class consciousness is uncertain and problematical, and what is required is that the proletariat begins to articulate the demands that are necessary in order to bring about the required changes to society. Hence the proletariat must generate the awareness that creates the practice that can bring about revolutionary change. But what is most problematical is that this process is conceived in terms of the party as the personification of revolutionary class consciousness: “By realising that the party is the historical embodiment and the active incarnation of class consciousness, we see that it is also the incarnation of the ethics of the fighting proletariat. This must determine its politics. Its politics may not always accord with the empirical reality of the moment; at such times its slogans may be ignored. But the ineluctable course of history will give it its due. Even more, the moral strength conferred by the correct class consciousness will bear fruit in terms of practical politics.”(10)

Thus the problem is not idealism but instead the justification of the elitist view that the party is the objectification of the will of class consciousness. The class has no organisational and political independence from the class and instead the spontaneous dynamism of the activity of the class is defined and expressed by the conscious will of the party. The class does not teach the party any lessons, instead the spontaneity of the class is a lesser aspect of the class struggle when compared to the strategic vision and tactics of the party. Their relationship should be one of unity, but this is in terms of the domination of the party and ultimately the working class should accept its political instructions. This approach is not the justification of Stalinism, as Morley claims, but instead a standard interpretation of the relationship of party and class in the period of the first four Congresses of the Comintern. What is apparent is that Lukacs articulates the confidence that the unity of party and class can overcome the structures that reproduce the capitalist system and instead create revolutionary transformation. This standpoint is not idealist because Lukacs does not defend the role of an autonomous subject able to unconditionally transform society; instead he outlines how the working class in the objective material context of the historical limitations of capitalism can develop the capacity, in terms of theory and practice, to bring about revolutionary change. However he cannot sustain this view constantly in terms of the abilities of the working class and instead has to outline a dependency of the proletariat on the role of the party. This understanding unintentionally results in a division of labour in which the working class represents practice and the party expresses the importance of theory.

Morley is not able to outline a consistent critique of this justification of elitism because he has not rejected the approach of Leninism concerning the role of the revolutionary party. Instead of providing an alternative argument he maintains that the reason for Lukacs’s accommodation to Stalinism is his idealist view of the subject which upholds the voluntarism of Stalinism. (11) This viewpoint may be part of the reason for his accommodation to Stalinism, but the starting point for Lukacs’s approach is his intention to defend the Leninist understanding of the relationship of party to class. The point is that only when the party is able to represent the class consciousness of the proletariat does the prospect of victory become realistic. Hence what Lukacs is unwilling to elaborate are the reasons why the proletariat is apparently un-capable of being able to articulate its own class consciousness. But other commentators have outlined why Marx and Engels considered the process of self-emancipation to be a realistic prospect for the working class. It is possible for workers to grasp the significance of historical necessity: “In other words, what the proletariat will be compelled to do out of historical necessity becomes meaningful and possible if some proletarians develop a level of consciousness beyond that which is instrumentally useful in their immediate circumstances and instead take a course of action designed systematically to address the problems of which they have become conscious. The knowledge and consciousness of the working class contributes to the formation of the objective possibilities in society and to the class struggle of the proletariat. Thus what the individual proletarian thinks or does is relevant dialectically in the sense of the universality of historical necessity and the particular individual determinants of conscious action.”(12)

Thus the alternative approach of Marx and Engels is that the working class can come to recognise a sense of class interests that transcend the immediate acceptance of capitalism. The very relationship of the working class to ‘what could be’ promotes the possibility of the development of a revolutionary class consciousness based on the mediating role of historical necessity. Hence the role of the party is not necessarily indispensable to this process. Indeed it could be argued that the actual role of the party is to promote the very ability of the working class to achieve its self-emancipation. Instead of this understanding the Leninist interpretation, which seems to have been faithfully upheld by Lukacs, was to justify the view that only the party can represent the most principled forms of class consciousness of the proletariat. To Lenin, and Lukacs, only the party can ‘mediate’ and overcome the limitations of immediate interests and instead outline a conception of what could be. What this view does not explain is why would the working class support the party in this instance? In other words the idealist limitation of the omnipotence of the autonomous subject is expressed by the emphasis on the role of the party as the representation of the proletariat. It is substitutionism which results in idealism. However, this possibility can be overcome if we seriously attempt to comprehend the proletariat as the subject of revolutionary change within capitalism. Lukacs has partially addressed this issue in terms of the arguments that favour the proletariat understanding and acting to transform the totality of capitalism. Unfortunately this standpoint is not consistently outlined because the party is defined as the primary expression of the will of the proletariat. It would be possible to resolve this tension if a different and more modest role for the party was adopted. Morley does not accept this possibility because in the last analysis he accepts the Leninist approach of the relationship of party and class. This means he cannot consider how to overcome the dilemmas in the approach of Lukacs. Instead he has to crudely blame Stalinism and so cannot understand the tensions in Lukacs’s conception of class consciousness.

Morley goes onto discuss Marx’s understanding of commodity fetishism. His intention is to outline how Lukacs has an idealist interpretation of this concept. The basis of Morley’s position is that of orthodoxy. He is trying to prove that there is only one definitive understanding of reification and that Lukacs has misunderstood Marx’s position. Morley argues that the process of commodity production is fragmented and so the producers do not have control over their objects, and instead it seems that things control our labour: “Therefore the theoretical result of commodity production, according to Marx, is that mankind’s theoretical knowledge, his conscious being, cannot be directly connected to the world of objects through labour. Theories of society based on these premises therefore present society’s laws as if they are independent of man in such a way that we cannot as a whole society adapt our practical labouring activity to the theories results.”(13) Hence he argues that for Lukacs the focus is not on the role of material practice, and instead what is important is alienated consciousness of the subject who is unable to comprehend objects as products of our creation: “Lukacs considers alienated or reified consciousness as flawed because it treats the objects of our labour as ‘law-governed’ and constituting an objective reality.”(14) The implication is that Lukacs’s view considers the central task is to transform consciousness if practice is to establish a non-alienated relationship to the object. The objective is effectively defined as alienating rather than the character of productive activity, and so the objective has to be brought under the control of the subject.

However if we actually analyse Lukacs’s approach we can establish that is compatible with the materialist approach of Marx. He outlines how the objective is alienating because the very process of objectification is outside the control of the producers because of the character of the relations of production within capitalism. Hence in a subjective manner humans attempt to overcome this alienating relationship and establish control over the process of objectification: “What is of central importance here is that because of this situation a man’s own activity, his own labour becomes something objective and independent of him, something that controls him by virtue of an autonomy alien to man. There is both an objective and subjective side to this phenomenon. Objectively, a world of objects and relations between things springs into being (the world of commodities and their movement on the market). The laws governing these objects are indeed gradually discovered by man, but even so they confront him as invisible forces that generate their own power. ….Subjectively – where the market economy has been fully developed – a man’s activity becomes estranged from himself, it turns into a commodity which, subject to the non-human objectivity of the natural laws of society, must go its own way independently of man just like any consumer article.”(15)

However the role of the subjective is limited by the importance of the objective activity of the character of the creation of objects which means that the subjective is not able to overcome and undermine the generation of reification merely by means of its dynamism. The point is that the subject as the subject is not able to promote the possibility of the overcoming of commodification. To believe that the subject can achieve this process of transformation represents the idealism which has been present in the work of Hegel who believed that the subject as spirit can overcome alienation. Instead Lukacs believes it is only when the subject acquires objective characteristics can it truly and genuinely transcend the alienating conditions of commodity production. However, there is a dilemma for Lukacs, and all Marxists, the very process of labour seems to express this process of alienating objectification rather than represent the potential for human emancipation: “On the one hand, the objectification of their labour power into something opposed to their total personality (a process already accomplished with the sale of that labour power as a commodity) is now made into the permanent ineluctable reality of their daily life. Here too, the personality can do no more than look on helplessly while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system. On the other hand, the mechanical disintegration of the process of production into its components also destroys the bonds that had bound individuals to a community in the days when production was still ‘organic’. In this respect, too, mechanisation makes of them isolated abstract atoms whose work no longer brings them together directly and organically; it becomes mediated to an increasing extent exclusively by the abstract laws of the mechanism which imprisons them.”(16) Consequently it would seem that the alienating quality of the capitalist production process means that emancipation by the subject of labour is impossible. This is the dilemma posed by Lukacs, and which is implicit in Marx’s Capital.

In other words Lukacs rejects any idealist interpretation of commodity fetishism that would suggest this condition can be overcome by the autonomy of the subject. Instead only the connection of the subject to material practices can represent the possibility of developing the prospect of emancipation. However, this possibility is very difficult because Lukacs has outlined in vivid terms how labour is reduced to particulars of the factory process and becomes the instrument of mass production and capital accumulation. The beginning of an alternative is that the working class recognises that the condition of alienation is not in its class interests and instead is connected to the subordination of labour within the relations of production. Lukacs is careful not to suggest that this situation means the working class can overcome the alienation inherent within the process of objectification, merely that there is the beginning of an understanding that an alienated condition cannot correspond to the interests of the working class. Hence this recognition suggests the importance of practice in order to overcome alienation. Lukacs is adamant that nothing has changed in the objective situation; instead all that has altered is the vantage point by which the working class assesses its situation. Hence the working class has not yet become a subject of action and transformation. The evaluation of reality has been altered, but the content and character of the objective remains as it was, or the alienating aspect of objectification is not changed by the recognition of alienation. Hence, Lukacs is suggesting that the autonomy of the subject in terms of comprehension of alienation is not sufficient to change this situation. The thing in-itself as the objective has not been transformed by this awareness of alienation: “The belief that the transformation of the immediately given into a truly understood (and not merely an immediately perceived) and for that reason really objective reality…..is no more than an evaluation of a reality that ‘remains unchanged’, all this is as much to say that objective reality has the character of a thing-in-itself.”(17)The act of consciousness is necessary for understanding, but it is not sufficient for transformation of the situation. Alienation is still an expression of the objective situation, but there is awareness of it.

However the immediacy of social existence undermine any illusions that work as it is in its present condition is the subject, or expression of the content of transformation: “In every aspect of daily life in which the individual worker imagines himself to be the subject of his own life he finds that this is an illusion that is destroyed by the immediacy of his existence.”(18) Instead the worker recognises him/herself as the producers of commodities in the interests of capital. This awareness is practical to the extent that the worker knows what has to be realised, which is the undermining and end of the commodified character of labour: “In contrast with this, when the worker knows himself as a commodity his knowledge is practical. That is to say, this knowledge brings about an objective structural change in the object of knowledge.”(18) Nothing has changed in terms of developments within the relations of production, but the worker has acquired practical knowledge in that he/she knows what to do to bring about emancipation from alienation, which is to provide an alternative to commodification. Hence the worker is able to develop this knowledge in order to recognise him/herself as part of a class that is an expression of the role of the social division of labour. The very act of commodity production requires the importance of collective labour, which is recognised by workers who understand the structural implications of commodification. But this awareness has not yet led to changes of an economic or political character. Instead the worker is emerging from an isolated condition and understanding the significance of mass production. The implication is that this knowledge of commodification implies the necessity of its transformation.

Unfortunately, Lukacs does not outline how knowledge of the immediate stage of this process results in revolutionary class consciousness, instead he glosses over this necessary understanding and argues that the immediacy of the situation, of knowledge of the alienating character of commodity production, will result in action to overcome this situation: “From this it follows, firstly, that man, who is the foundation and core of reified relations, can only be discovered by abolishing the immediacy of these relations. It is always necessary to begin from this immediacy and from these reified laws. Secondly, these manifestations are by no means merely modes of thought; they are the forms in which contemporary bourgeois society is objectified. Their abolition, if it is to be a true abolition, cannot simply be the result of thought alone, it must also amount to their practical abolition as the actual forms of social life. Every kind of knowledge that aspires to remain pure knowledge is doomed to end up granting recognition to these forms once again. Thirdly, this praxis cannot be divorced from knowledge. A praxis which envisages a genuine transformation of these forms can only start to be effective if it intends to think out the process immanent in these forms to its logical conclusion, to become conscious of it and to make it conscious”(20)

Hence the process of commodity production is identified as the primary aspect that has to be transformed if the working class is to realise its emancipation. In order to uphold this standpoint, the materialist conception of altering the character of objectification and instead instituting non-alienated production is vital. The strategic aspects are outlined in generalised terms in relation to knowledge of commodity production becoming transformed into a collective praxis that is able to create new conditions of productive activity. But the intricate aspects of this development are not outlined and instead it is assumed that immediacy, or knowledge of commodification, will inherently result in the required praxis to transform the alienated conditions of production. What is not explained is how awareness of the commodified character of labour will promote praxis and the attempt to change this situation. Instead he starts to make dogmatic and idealist claims that the proletariat has an inherent capacity to understand and challenge reification: “Only the class can relate to the whole of reality in a practical revolutionary way…..And the class too, can only manage it when it can see through the reified objectivity of the given world to the process that is also its own fate.”(21) This comment suggests that by its own inherent subjective capacities the proletariat can understand commodification and develop a transforming alternative. The idealist aspects of this standpoint is represented by the ‘leap’ from knowledge of the commodity to the realisation of the practice of revolutionary change. The relationship of theory to practice is not explained, and as a result the character of the proletariat as subject is justified in idealist terms. In this context, the view that the proletariat is able to understand the totality, or history, or act as the subject-object, is an expression of Lukacs’s inability to provide the connection between knowledge and practice in relation to the task of undermining commodification.

In idealist terms he outlines the conception of the revolutionary role of the working class: “Only when the consciousness of the proletariat is able to point out the road along which the dialectics of history is objectively impelled, but which it cannot travel unaided, will the consciousness of the proletariat awaken to a consciousness of the process, and only then will the proletariat become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality. If the proletariat fails to take this step the contradiction will remain unresolved and will be reproduced by the dialectical mechanics of history at a higher level, in an altered form and with increased intensity. It is in this that the objective necessity of history consists. The deed of the proletariat can never be more than to take the next step in the process. Whether it is ‘decisive’ or episodic depends on the concrete circumstances, but in this context, where we are concerned with our knowledge of the structure, it does not matter much as we are talking about an unbroken process of such disruption.”(22) Thus the character of history becomes the basis for understanding the capacity to develop revolutionary class consciousness within the proletariat. This must be considered an idealist justification because this standpoint provides the theoretical basis to gloss over the complexities of the generation of practice in relation to acquiring knowledge of the commodity character of production. Even the class struggle is defined in terms of a historical logic of inevitable victory, and the concrete periods of particular conflicts are reduced to a process of movement towards success because of the imperatives of history.

The justification of idealism is connected to the inability to explain the process of development from awareness of the alienating character of the commodity to the generation of realisation of a praxis that is able to transform this situation. Instead of being able to outline this process of change in all its complex detail, Lukacs has to justify the view that the proletariat has the inherent capacity to understand and therefore alter the situation by action: “But it must never be forgotten: only the practical class consciousness of the proletariat possess this ability to transform things.”(23) This view justifies the idealist philosophical stance that contemplation implies the inability to change things, and the alternative activist approach of the proletariat represents its capacity to overcome the immediacy of commodification. Such a crude standpoint contradicts Lukacs’s previous sophisticated explanation of how the role of the working class is reduced to being a contemplative expression of the alienating process of production. But, he effectively undermines this complex understanding by suggesting the inherent activism of the proletariat can overcome this situation. What is not explained is how the proletariat can go from a situation of contemplation and inability to change the situation into an entity able to realise transformation of commodification by action. The contradiction in his standpoint is resolved by an idealist justification of the role of the proletariat. He admits that the specific stages of the transformation from theory to practice cannot be explained: “Thus proletarian thought is in the first place merely a theory of praxis which only gradually (and indeed often spasmodically) transforms itself into a practical theory that overturns the real world. The individual stages of this process cannot be sketched in here. They alone would be able to show how proletarian class consciousness evolves dialectically (i.e. how the proletariat becomes a class).”(24) Hence the failure to outline the specific stages of class consciousness, and related practice, means that an idealist justification of dialectics becomes the substitute approach: “The practical character of the thought of the proletariat is born and becomes real as the result of an equally dialectical process. In this thought self-criticism is more than self-criticism of its object, i.e. the self-criticism of bourgeois society. It is also a critical awareness of how much of its practical nature has really become manifest, which stage of the genuinely practicable is objectively possible and how much of what is objectively possible has been made real.”(25) Thus the dialectical process in some idealist manner has the ability to connect the critique of society expressed by the proletariat with revolutionary practice.

The stages of this development of consciousness are deliberately made obscure by Lukacs’s reluctance to elaborate them. Instead in some inherent manner, which is not properly outlined, the proletariat is able to go from the situation of immediacy and subordination to becoming the challenger for state power. The role of history and the dialectic become idealist substitutes for the failure to develop an effective strategy of revolutionary change. It is this limitation which explains the emphasis on idealism and the undermining of the materialist aspects of his analysis of the process of commodification. Lukacs could have overcome this idealist limitation by outlining in more concrete terms the precise process of transition from awareness of the domination of the commodity to the development of practical action to overcome this situation of reification. However, his flaws were not isolated and instead were part of the very legacy of the Communist International.

Instead of explaining the aspect of idealism within the approach of Lukacs in this complex manner, Morley prefers to utilise the false argument that the rejection of the dialectics of nature results in the denial of the importance of the material world and instead promotes the justification of crude idealist formulations like the subject-object. In actual terms it could be questioned how important this formulation is in the work of Lukacs. But in its most obvious sense it refers to the proletariat as a subject being able to transform reality by the role of the unity of theory and practice: “Action, praxis – which Marx demanded before all else in his Theses on Feuerbach – is in essence the penetration and transformation of reality. But reality can only be understood and penetrated as a totality, and only a subject which is itself a totality is capable of this penetration.”(26) Thus reality is defined as being identical to the aspirations of the subject as the proletariat. This explains the possibilities of revolutionary change. But it does not elaborate and establish how the complexities of the commodified character of labour can bring about the end of alienation. Instead this dogmatic philosophical reasoning glosses over the concrete aspects of transition to communism. Hence the reasons for the idealism within the work of Lukacs is not because of an apparent rejection of Engels dialectical materialism, but is instead the result of the complexities of the class struggle being reduced to various philosophical generalisations that connect to the imposition of dialectical concepts onto reality. It is possible to gloss over the difficulties involved in the development of class consciousness if the proletariat is defined in the idealist terms as a subject that has an impulse to transform reality by means of revolutionary practice.

Unintentionally Morley asks the crucial question when he comments: “So how does this reified class, which cannot ‘freely create history’ (since it is exploited and oppressed), become this identical subject-object if it being composed of alienated labourers……Under capitalism this oppressed class must succumb to what is perceived as a ‘law governed objective totality. How does a living class that is determined by the real physical world, and feels itself a victim of this world, suddenly liberate itself from objective reality and freely construct its own subjective one?”(27) The answer to this question is that Lukacs could not develop a strategy of emancipation based on consistent materialist premises, and instead began to define the role of the proletariat in idealist terms. Morley correctly outlines how the conception of an immaculate revolutionary class consciousness formally resolves the apparently unresolvable problems involved in promoting the ability of the working class to challenge its reduction to commodified labour. But does Morley outline a more satisfactory resolution of the difficulties connected to the subordinated character of labour under capitalist relations of production?

Morley contends that the answer to these questions is provided by Engels dialectical materialism. He maintains that: “The working class in struggling for and winning freedom, is in a sense gaining knowledge of how it is determined by nature. Without this sober approach, the proletariat will never come to power, or at the very least would not be able to remould society and labour in accordance with the objective needs of society.”(28) This standpoint also assumes that the working class has an inherently revolutionary character and so is able to overcome its subordination to capital in the context of the progress of the class struggle. Hence his formulation also avoids discussion of how and why labour can overcome its commodified character and domination by capital. Consequently, it is not surprising that Morley outlines that: “For Engels, humans are not passive, unconscious vessels for nature’s ‘eternal laws’, but conscious, active, practical beings, who through labour, can grasp, master and exploit the laws of nature for their own ends.”(29) This formulation does not explain how labour can go from a subordinated condition and overcome the domination of alienation over the process of production. He conceives of the necessity of a revolutionary perspective to end capitalism, but how can alienated labour bring about this development? This was the question that Lukacs could not answer, and Morley seems to be no different in this respect. Indeed, Morley evades discussion of this complex subject concerning the realisation of human emancipation in an alienated world, because to him the central problem with Lukacs is his apparent differentiation of the subject from its relationship to the material world. Thus Morley defines Lukacs as idealist but he has not grasped the reasons why this label has some validity.

The impulse for idealism in the early work of Lukacs is connected to his failure to develop a plausible strategy for human emancipation in an alienated world of commodification. However, Morley does not provide a strategic alternative and instead relies on formulations from Engels dialectics of nature in order to justify a dogmatic perspective that recognition of the ability of humans to influence the activity of nature implies the dynamics of revolutionary change within society. Ironically, both Morley and Lukacs rely on contrasting dialectical formulations in order to justify the conception of immaculate revolutionary class consciousness. However, we cannot rely on philosophical dogmatism as a guarantee of historical change. Instead we need to develop a strategy that acknowledges that our central task is to promote awareness of the intolerable condition of alienated labour and its subordination to capital. This does not mean that revolutionary class consciousness is the end result of this process, but at least we will be outlining that only the action of labour to end its domination by commodification can bring about human emancipation. (30) The promotion of this strategy does not automatically resolve the contradiction between the aims of Marxist theory and the limited practice of the working class in the present. But what Marxists will be doing is generating an understanding of what represents the only principled manner whereby the task of universal human emancipation can be realised. This perspective does not mean reliance on the conception of historical or philosophical guarantees of success, instead only the development of mass support in favour of a revolutionary strategy can bring about the possibility of victory in the class struggle. It is the level of awareness of the proletariat that will determine whether capitalism can be replaced by socialism. Hence our starting point is the commodified character of labour and our aim is to create a conscious rejection of this role by the working class. Only, if people make this conclusion can the domination of capitalism be overthrown.

FOOTNOTES:

(1)Daniel Morley: Georgy Lukacs and Dialectical Materialism: In Defence of Marxism, 2015 p20-27

(2)Z.A. Jordan: The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism, Macmillan, London, 1967 p58-64

(3) ibid p151-176

(4) ibid p208-238 and Alex Callinicos: Marxism and Philosophy, Oxford University Press, 1982 p114-126

(5)Callinicos p61-69

(6)Jordan op cit p253-296

(7)Henri Lefebvre: Dialectical Materialism: University of Minnesota Press, 2009 p34-47 and p67-87

(8)Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness, Merlin, London, 1971 p125-126

(9) ibid p39

(10) ibid p42

(11)Morley op cit p22

(12)Robert Lanning: Georg Lukacs and Organizing Class Consciousness, MEP publications, Minneapolis, 2009 p39-40

(13)Morley op cit p22

(14) ibid p23

(15)Lukacs op cit p86-87

(16) ibid p90

(17) ibid p150

(18) ibid p165

(19) ibid p169

(20Ibid p177

(21) ibid p193

(22) ibid p197-198

(23) ibid p205

(24) ibid p205

(25) ibid p205

(26) ibid p39

(27)Morley op cit p25

(28) ibid p26-27

(29) ibid p27

(30)Istvan Meszaros: Beyond Capital, Merlin Press, London 1995