Lecture Three Georg Lukacs and the Dialectic of Totality

**(Western Marxism,** Spring, 2012 )

**One, German Idealism and Hegel’s Dialectic**

**1, About the modern rationalist philosophy**

**A, modern philosophy as the rationalist philosophy**

“the situation is quite different when rationalism claims to be the universal method by which to obtain knowledge of the whole existence. In that event, the necessary correlation with the principle of irrationality becomes crucial: it erodes and dissolves the whole system. This is the case with modern bourgeois rationalism” (p114)

**B, the three moments of the modern rationalist philosophy**

Early modern rationalist philosophy: dogmatism;

Critical philosophy: the problem of methodology (to meet the challenge of irrationality)

The philosophy of positivism: giving up any efforts to solve this problem of irrationality

**2, the social condition for German Idealism**

A, the reality: the man-made “second nature”

The self-sufficient and self-closed system of capital and commodities (humans being destroyed)

The irrationality of capitalism

B: The problem for the bourgeois thought (Critical philosophy):

How could humans be resurrected as the free subjects again?

(How could we really solve the problem of the irrational content, which is lying at the root of our life in the bourgeois society?)

**3, the development from Kant to Hegel**

A, the problem of content and totality (“thing-in-itself”)

The relationship between form and content

Quotation: about “thing-in-itself” p115

Quotation: about praxis as the way to solve the problem of totality p123

B, Hegel’s dialectic: the dialectic of matter and the dialectic of totality

Quotation: about his dialectic of matter (logic of concrete concepts)p142

Quotation: “the true were understood not only as substance, but also as subject” p142

C, dialectic as the true historical method 143

Quotation: about history as the substance p143

About the coincidence of history and genesis p143

About the dialectic of totality p145

**4, The Antinomies of the Bourgeois Thought**

the antinomies lying at the root of the bourgeois society: humanity being destroyed in society

the antinomies of the bourgeois thought: within the bourgeois society, to solve this problem only in philosophy

Still locked in the structure of reified consciousness:

Hegel’s philosophy: mythology

(quotation: about the subject of history)p146

Classical philosophy: the philosophy of contemplation

**Two, the Consciousness of the Proletariat and the Dialectic of Totality**

**1, dialectic and revolution:**

**Marxism = Marxist dialectic = the dialectic of totality = revolution**

**to revive Marxism = to revive Hegel’s dialectic of totality**

“For anyone wishing to return to the revolutionary traditions of Marxism the revival of Hegelian traditions was obligatory. *History and Class Consciousness* represents what was perhaps the most radical attempt to restore the revolutionary nature of Marxist theories by renovating and extending Hegel’s dialectics and method.” (the new preface written in 1967)

**2, mediation and dialectic**

**A, categories of mediation: from the merely immediate reality to the authentically objective reality**

**p150**“the objective reality of social existence is in its immediacy ‘the same’ for both proletariat and bourgeois. But this does not prevent the specific categories of mediation by means of which both classes raise this immediacy to the level of consciousness, by means of which the merely immediate reality becomes for both the authentically objective reality, from being fundamentally different, thanks to the different position occupied by the two classes within the ‘same’ economic process.”

**B, genesis: the forms of mediation(the structural principles, real tendencies of the objects themselves)**

**p155** “ To go beyond this immediacy can only mean the **genesis**, the ‘creation’ of the object. But this assumes that the forms of mediation in and through which it becomes possible to go beyond the immediate existence of objects as they are given, can be shown to be the structural principles and the real tendencies of the objects themselves. ”

**C, mediation: the totality of history (the unity of subject and object, the unity of essence and necessity)**

**p156 Hegel:** “the mediating factor would have to be something in which both sides were one, in which consciousness would discern each aspect in the next, its purpose and activity in its fate, its fate in its purpose and activity, its own essence in its own necessity.”

**3, the consciousness of the proletariat (from consciousness to self-consciousness)**

**A, the immediate reality:**

**the workers:**

the pure object of history; the tension between soul (qualitative content) and form (the quantitative form)

p 172 “this is the fact that while the process by which the worker is reified and becomes a commodity dehumanizes him and cripples and atrophies his ‘soul’ – as long as he does not consciously rebel against it---- it remains true that precisely his humanity and his soul are not changed into commodities.”

**The capitalists: the apparent subject of history, only the forms**

on the one hand, the object of the society;

on the other hand, the apparent subject of the society

p 165 “This is based – as we have shown—on the fact that the bourgeois always perceives the subject and object of the historical process and of social reality in a double form: in terms of his consciousness the single individual is a perceiving subject confronting the over-whelming objective necessities imposed by society of which only minute fragments can be comprehended. But in reality it is precisely the conscious activity of the individual that is to be found on the object-side of the process, while the subject (the class) can not be awakened into consciousness and this activity must always remain beyond the consciousness of the –apparent-subject, the individual. ”

**B, mediation: the change in the area of labor time**

**labor time:**

on the one hand, the quantitative determination of labor as the commodity; on the other hand, the decisive form of human

quotation, p166

“the quantitative difference in exploitation, which appears to the capitalists in the form of the quantitative determinations of the objects of their calculation, must appear to the worker as the decisive, qualitative categories of his whole physical, mental and moral existence.”

the opposition between quantity and quality in the area of labor time: dialectical opposition

P 166 “It (the transformation of quantity into quality) means the emergence of the truly objective form of existence and the destruction of those confusing categories of reflection which had deformed true objectivity into a posture of merely immediate, passive, contemplation.”

**C, Class consciousness as the mediated totality:**

**the forming of the proletariat as a class:**

the dialectical opposition between soul and form: from separated individuals(the opposition between the abstract individuality and the abstract universality) to the universal class mediated by their social labor

Condition: the development of social relations in the capitalist society

The free and separated individuals, the social relations among them mediated by the “thing”, the new consciousness, the revival of the social relations

the revival of the structure of the object:

the relationship between man and man

the relationship between men and the object of their labor

the relationship between men and themselves

result:

social relations become the reality

**self-awareness of the capitalist society:**

**p149** “the self-understanding of the proletariat is therefore simultaneously the objective understanding of the nature of society. When the proletariat furthers its own class aims, it simultaneously achieves the conscious realization of the objective aims of society, aims which would inevitably remain abstract possibilities and objective frontiers but for **this conscious intervention**.”

**Class consciousness: the concrete totality of history**

**4, Class Consciousness as Praxis (the move from consciousness to self consciousness)**

**The coincidence of history and genesis**

**(self consciousness: the change of the structure of the object)**

P199:

Self consciousness: the change of object

P204

Reality is becoming

Class consciousness is a necessary, indispensible, integral part of that process of becoming

**The proletariat: the identical object-subject of history**

**(the move from pre-history to human history)**

**Three: The problem with the dialectic of totality**

**1, Class Consciousness as the attributed (imputed) consciousness**

**A, the difference between the given consciousness of the workers (“public opinion surveys”) and the Class consciousness**

**B, the move from the reified consciousness to class consciousness**

**The problem of organization (party, class, history): populism plus the party as the vanguard**

**2, dialectic as the unity of subject and object**

**The dialectic of totality**

**The negative dialectic**