

**Dialectic Democratic Theory**  
**Developing a Proper Democratic Theory by Combining the Theories of**  
**Lukács and Habermas**

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Submitted to  
Central European University  
Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

(2013)

## Abstract

*Lukácsian Marxian critique of democracy and Habermas's critique of Lukács continue to co-exist without any effort being put into reconciling two conflicting discourses. While the Lukácsian Marxist agenda of de-reification implies the expansion of freedom, the realization of the latter ideal is controversially postponed for the future communist society. On the other hand, Habermas neglects the possibility of such radical socio-economic changes that wouldn't be necessarily harmful for the project of deliberative democracy. I am arguing that, despite the fact that the two doctrines are markedly different from each other, if they will be analyzed not as monolithic wholes, but as containing distinct, potentially independent concepts, there is a way to reconcile their claims. To solve the problem, I add the communicative rationality to the three central concepts of the Lukácsian dialectics and develop a new theory. The result will be the repetition neither of the already existing versions of Marxism nor the democratic theories critical of Marxist claims.*

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Table of Contents.....	ii
Table of Figures .....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Lukácsian Dialectics and the Critique of the Capitalist Democracy.....	7
1.1 <i>Lukacs and the Problem of an Ideal Subject-Object of History</i> .....	7
1.2 <i>The Core Claims of the Lukácsian Dialectics</i> .....	8
1.3 <i>The Critique of the “Bourgeois” Notions of Freedom and Democracy</i> .....	11
1.4 <i>The Limitations of the Lukácsian Marxism</i> .....	18
Chapter 2: Habermas’s Critique of the Dialectical Praxis and the Shortcomings of this Critique.....	20
2.1 <i>The Critique of the Purposive Rational Action</i> .....	20
2.2 <i>The Disintegration of the System and the Lifeworld</i> .....	22
2.3 <i>Habermas’s Vision of Deliberative Democracy</i> .....	24
2.4 <i>The Limitations of the Habermasian Theory from the Lukácsian Perspective</i> .....	27
Chapter 3: Deriving a Proper Democratic Theory – Dialectical Democratic Theory.....	30
3.1 <i>Combining the theories of Lukács and Habermas: Dialectic Democratic Theory</i> .....	30
3.1.1 <i>Uniting Lukácsian dialectics with the Habermasian Notion of Communicative Action</i> .....	30
3.1.2 <i>Dialectic Democratic Theory as a Philosophical Doctrine</i> .....	33
3.2 <i>Contrasting the Dialectic Democratic Theory with Similar Theories</i> .....	36
3.3 <i>The Possibility of Testing the Two Concepts of the Dialectic Democratic Theory in Political Science</i> .....	41
3.4 <i>The Feasibility of De-Reification</i> .....	46
Conclusion.....	48
References .....	52

## Table of Figures

Figure 1: The Conceptual Scheme of the Lukácsian Praxis .....	28
Table 1: Dialectic Democratic Theory vis-à-vis Two Marxist and Two Deliberative Democratic Theories.....	37

## Introduction

There are different interpretations of Marx. Georg Lukács offers a Hegelian interpretation of the Marxist philosophy. He argues that orthodox Marxism isn't a belief in Marx's initial investigations, but it "refers exclusively to *method*." (Lukács 1971, 1) By declaring Marxist dialectics as an approach Lukács puts himself in a position to start the critique of other "methods" or approaches that he thinks are nothing but the products of reification. Lukács appeals to the Marxist critique of civil society and democratic freedoms and makes it a central focus of his theory. Habermas (1985) whose democratic theory involves the internal critique of the Marxist tradition (by "internal critique" I mean Habermas's adoption of the Marxian-Lukácsian idea of reification) also discusses Lukács' concept of dialectic materialism in the first book of his seminal work *The Theory of Communicative Action*. He argues that the disintegration between the realm of purposive action (that is capable of the radical socioeconomic transformation) and the realm of communicative action is terminal and irreversible and Lukács couldn't see this permanent separation. (1971, 343) Instead, Habermas introduces the concept of deliberative democracy and abandons any pretensions of the radical socio-economic transformation of the system. (Habermas 1996, 305)

There has been no systematic scholarly effort to juxtapose and analyze Lukács' and Habermas's notions of democracy and to develop a democratic theory that would address the major concerns of both philosophers. Those scholars who continue to apply Lukácsian dialectics to the modern historical conjuncture do so by merely applying the Lukácsian terms to the modern problems without making any corrections to the initial ontology. In such a

manner, Habermasian critique remains largely unnoticed and perhaps, even shunned by the adherents of the Lukácsian version of Marxism.

In recent years, a renewed interest in Lukács was demonstrated by the volume edited by Michael Thompson (2011) which included contributions from the authors representing fields ranging from the literary criticism to philosophy. Thompson lambastes postmodernists and post-structuralists as well as neo-liberals and the adepts of identity politics and argues that Lukács' theory of dialectics is as relevant today as ever. According to Thompson, two crucial concerns of Lukács' theory are the following: "the problem of social/ personal fragmentation and the desire for human wholeness on the one hand and the methodological commitment to an objectivist-materialist understanding of the nature of man and his sociality." (2011, 7)

Thompson (2011) in the essay contributed to the abovementioned volume gives brilliant criticisms of the core claims of the Frankfurt school and the critical theory. His line of argument corresponds with what I am proposing here, even though my assessment of Habermasian theory is somewhat more positive than his. What he is arguing is twofold: First, the transformative projects of the world should contain the proposal of changing the content rather than the form of moral concepts, and second, these changes have to be materialized in the real world. (2011, 245) In these respects, I share his main insight that Habermas loses the sight of totality and thus, gives up any pretensions of initiating a fundamental socio-economic transformation.

However, Thompson still doesn't touch the question of goal-oriented purposive rationality and the critique of it with the help of communicative reason. In this sense, he still remains confined with the framework of Lukácsian materialistic dialectics.

Konstantinos Kavoulakos (2011) who contributed to the same volume also raises the questions regarding the formalism of the critical theory of the Frankfurt school. Like

Thompson, he also points to some Habermasian reservations about the Lukácsian solution and tries to address them in a strictly Lukácsian way. Kavoulakos also revokes the first book of *The Theory of Communicative Action* where Habermas criticizes Lukács for allegedly returning to objective idealism. Kavoulakos argues that this is a mistaken view of Lukács who never envisaged the concept of the idealist subject-object of history as metaphysical. He asserts that the Lukácsian concept of the proletariat refers to the particular historical process not to the particular social class. (2011, 163) Of course, this is a legitimate interpretation of Lukács, but it doesn't solve the problem of democracy: In other words, it doesn't answer the question whether the standpoint of the proletariat is absolute or it still should be negotiated in the Lifeworld. In this respect, it's immaterial whether the proletariat is an ideal subject-object of history or it will always leave the gap in the process (like, in the Žižekian theory) that is forever insuperable; if the role of the proletariat is given (it doesn't matter if it's given in present, or in the past/in history), then it has no need to let actors negotiate the meaning of the truth. Kavoulakos chooses to discuss not the concepts of purposive rationality and communicative rationality, but he tries to determine if the purposive goal-oriented action leads to the historicist, rather than to metaphysical social ontology. This line of thought, while legitimate in some sense, doesn't fully address Habermasian critique of Lukács and leaves the problem of purposive rationality unaddressed.

However, those theorists who criticize Lukács' concept of reification from the Habermasian perspective also don't go beyond the original Habermasian critique. For example, Axel Honneth (2008) belongs to this camp. He contends that in the human world "recognition comes before cognition" and tries to look for the evidence of this claim in the field of developmental psychology (2008, 40-41). Anita Chari (2010) attacks Honneth's theory of recognition (which is a normative version of the Habermasian theory) from the Lukácsian perspective and argues that at the end of the day, Honneth's rejections of the

notions of reification and totality “reinforces a problematic separation between the ‘economic’ and the ‘political’, which renders the theory unable to grasp the breadth of emancipator political struggles today, limiting politics to the logic of recognition without taking into account the dimensions of political movements that struggle for transformation of the existing structure of socio-economic relations.” (2010, 602) Again, the criticisms of Chari and Honneth are relevant, but both of them radicalize their claims and reproduce the same initial problem that we encounter in the analyses of Lukács and Habermas. The problem lies in the irreducibility of the two concepts to each other. If one reduces recognition (or communicative rationality) to purposive rationality, democratic freedoms are compromised and on the other hand, dismissing dialectic praxis in favor of recognition or communicative action reinforces the separation between the realm of politics and the realm of economics and as Chari rightly noted above, renders any positive socio-economic change impossible.

In light of this, I am arguing that a proper democratic theory is the one that unites Habermas’s notion of communicative rationality with Lukács’ notions of totality, dialectic praxis and reification.

In order to determine the exact relationship between the Lukácsian dialectics and the Habermasian critique of purposive rationality (and the theory of deliberative democracy), it’s absolutely necessary to break down both theories into particular concepts. Abovementioned theorists and scholars were hasty in discarding the theories only on the grounds that they found fault with one of the core notions. Lukácsian Marxism isn’t a monolithic doctrine and hence, the refutation of one of its core claims doesn’t necessarily mean that all the other claims are false. The reason why Lukács’ philosophy was treated as if it was a monolithic whole is that its core claims were not sufficiently separated from each other. This can be partially explained by Lukács’ own style of writing which is very different from what



philosophers are used to in the Anglo-American, so called Analytic tradition. The same holds true for the writing style of Habermas and the complexity of his theory.

The task I am going to undertake here is all the more important if one takes into account the pervasiveness of the post-Marxist discourse among leftist political and civic groups. Popular movements like the Occupy Wall Street are actively engaged with the popular leftist philosophers, for instance, with Slovenian Marxist academic Slavoj Žižek. (Huffington Post 2011) While among the circles of policy-makers arguably liberal political philosophy gained much more traction, among the leftist and left-libertarian social movements the prevalence of the post-Marxist discourse (along with anarchist doctrines) is all too evident. The task of academia is to critically engage with these discourses and offer an internal critique of their claims; especially, if one considers the seriousness and profundity of the post-Marxist philosophic doctrines and the caliber of philosophers involved in such debates (Habermas, Žižek and Laclau being just three prominent examples).

My project will proceed in five steps. First, I will explicate the core claims of the Lukácsian theory and I will discuss the way how Lukács approached democratic freedoms. At the second stage, I will present Habermas's notions of communicative rationality and deliberative democracy and criticize Lukács' notion of praxis. At the same time, I will also point out the reasons why Habermas prematurely dismissed Lukácsian dialectics and what aspects of the materialistic dialectics are worth to retain. At the third stage, I will finally formulate basic concepts of my theory and describe it as one philosophical doctrine. I will describe the nature of the fusion of the two theories and the concept of dialectic democratic theory. At the next stage, I will contrast my theory with those philosophical doctrines that come close to its core claims and also, I will discuss two main empirical implications of the project: First, the possible empirical justifications of the theory and second, the questions of

empirical feasibility of dialectic democratic theory. Finally, I will conclude with outlining the broad implications of the project and discussing the future research agenda.

# Chapter 1: Lukácsian Dialectics and the Critique of the Capitalist Democracy

## 1.1 Lukacs and the Problem of an Ideal Subject-Object of History

Before I move to outlining the major ideas of the Lukácsian dialectics, it's worthy to note that there is one marked difference between the Lukácsian dialectics and the dialectics of early Marx. Although, Lukács thinks that Marx never held the view of nature-human being dialectic and it was Engels who propounded this false belief, the examination of Marx's (1844) belatedly discovered *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* gives us an opposite picture. In fact, Marx (at least in the early phase of his intellectual career) believed in the nature/human being dialectic – the idea which Lukács attributes to false Hegelian influence on Engels. (Lukács 1971, 24) In contrast to this view, Lukács argues that “it is of the first importance to realize that the method is limited here to the realms of history and society.” (Ibid.)

At the same time, for Lukács, the key Marxian contention still remains valid that the revolutionary role of the proletariat is already inscribed in history. What one has to do is to discover it and make “class-in-itself” into “class-for-itself”, which eventually will amount to the unification of subject and object. (Lukács 1971, 159)

Now, this is the vision that is contentious in many respects (and some may argue that even metaphysical); unfortunately, many commentators and critics of Marxism focused solely on this aspect of dialectic theory and equated the critique of it to the critique of the dialectic ontology itself. Despite the fact that it's not entirely clear what Lukács meant by this concept, some commentators assumed that it has a strictly metaphysical meaning. Contrary to such conclusions, I argue that dialectics doesn't necessarily imply this final (I would say, eschatological) resolution of the age-old dichotomies, but it's rather a particular way of

viewing things that has its own, unique characteristics and assumptions. Dialectic method can be utilized without the assumption of the ideal subject-object of history. It can be argued that notwithstanding the existence of a dialectic play between subject and object, they can never be fully reconciled. This still would be a dialectic ontology, but without the controversial final resolution. By revising dialectic in such a way, its coherence won't be lost. For instance, this is the position that is offered by Žižek's reading of Marx through the lenses of Hegel and Lacan in his seminal work *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. (Žižek 1989, 222)

However, the fact that I introduce the non-complete, less pretentious version of dialectics still does not mean that one must yet put under question the discovery of the proletariat as a revolutionary subject within the history. The subject may still be discovered into object and argued that it will bring object onto another level without being fully transcended by it. As I noted above, this would be a Lukácsian dialectics but without an ideal subject-object. And for this type of dialectic ontology, the critique of the antinomies of bourgeois thought would still be valid.

## **1.2 The Core Claims of the Lukácsian Dialectics**

The starting point of dialectic reasoning is that in reality subject and object don't exist without each other and the one is necessarily "infected" by the other. Moreover, not only they can't exist without each other, but subject can't fully conceive the object without being engaged into praxis. At the same time, praxis shouldn't be partial, but total. In order for subject to perceive object in totality and reunite with it, it has to totalize the reality and then engage into practical activity. This is the only way subject and object can be reconciled. There is no other resolution. Totality is needed to ensure that things are comprehended into the proper context. The things don't exist without each other; they are necessarily intertwined and have a determinate influence on the parts and the whole. Cultural, social, economic

relations exist in mutual determination and inter-dependence. “The primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science,” writes Lukács in *The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg*. (Ibid., 27)

The third core concept of the Lukácsian dialectics is reification (German: *Verdinglichung*). Marx uses the term to denote the concealment of the social relations under exchange relations, but for Lukács, this very process permeates the whole social and humanitarian discourse of the society. (Lukács 1971, 95) Even though Lukács sometimes employs the concept when he argues about the necessity of totalization, reification and de-totalization may not refer to one and the same phenomenon. Totalization can be advocated without the critique of reification. It’s crucial to understand that whenever Lukács uses the terms interchangeably, he implies exactly that type of totality which involves de-reification as a necessary precondition. An example of the totality without the agenda of de-reification is what we normally call totalitarianism and totalitarian regime.

Reification stems from the relations of production, but it expands to every sphere of human activity, including science and humanities. Lukács argues against the compartmentalization of social sciences and humanities (economics, law, political science, environmental science, etc.) and describes it as a tool into the hands of capital to prevent subjects (in this case, the proletariat) from seeing the world as historically/socially conditioned. (Lukács 1971, 103-106) Prime manifestation of the reification process operating on the wider intellectual and scientific plane is the science of economics. Here, capitalist relations are designated as a timeless model of human relations in general. (Ibid.) At the next level, the reification process is expanded to encompass such spheres of human activity as state (public institutions) and juridical system. Lukács persuasively argues that by reifying and compartmentalizing different spheres of human activities (and most importantly, the

economic sphere), capitalism hides the real power relations (economic and political) and produces the structure of the society that will serve its needs. (Lukács 1971, 95-98)

One of the most acute examples of reification is the process of ideological neutralization of human intellectual activities. For instance, in a journalistic trade the reporter is notoriously required to have a “lack of convictions” and to acquire an “objective” stance toward the ongoing events. Another example is the objectivization of sexual relations as described by Kant – it’s when marriage becomes “the union of two people of different sexes with a view to the mutual possession of each other’s sexual attributes or the duration of their lives.” (Ibid., 100)

To summarize, reification in Lukács has a double meaning: First, it bars humans from experiencing freedom as it is in totality (for example, the fruits of their labor don’t belong to workers themselves) and second, it ossifies the human relations in general into “objective”, non-social relations. These reified structures don’t operate independently, but in the last instance, they comprise a system which is abstracted from human voluntarism and which subjects human will to its own laws of operation. The crisis episodes that occur in history expose this very fragility and the necessary bifurcation of human relations. (Ibid., 101)

Political endeavors to grapple with the necessarily dualistic character of human relations are miserably failing precisely because they don’t take into account the totality of social relations, reified character of social and economic institutions, and the possibility of overcoming the duality in praxis. Democracy also becomes a failed project without taking into consideration the necessarily reified character of human relations. Lukács addresses the problem of democracy by criticizing the justifications of the notion of freedom in ethics. In this manner, Lukács doesn’t take democracy primarily as a sociological concept, by arguing, for instance, how democratic parliamentarianism or freedom of speech and expression are the

forms of reification (as he did in the case of the critique of the compartmentalization of sciences and the increased specialization of knowledge). Of course, it's implied that sociologically the institutions that sustain and promote non-dialectical notions of freedom are embodiments of the process of reification, but as reification is the process that extends to the whole society and ultimately affects the human consciousness, Lukács chooses to discuss the flaws of democracy on a philosophical, rather than on a sociological level.

### **1.3 The Critique of the “Bourgeois” Notions of Freedom and Democracy**

He embarks on a critique of the non-dialectic understandings of freedom in the second section of the *Reification and the Consciousness of Proletariat*, called *The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought*. He starts from asserting that modern philosophy is originated from the reified structure of consciousness. (Ibid., 110-111) Then he proceeds to distinguish between two forms of the ethical conception of freedom. The first is solely based on the ethics completely detached from the objective reality (like the Kantian categorical imperative), and the other is the idea of praxis that goes beyond the Kantian separation between the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds, but still remains confined within the formalistic ethical framework. It's this latter concept that he discusses at some length, but initially he starts with the criticism of the Kantian notion. (Ibid., 110-124)

Purely ethical notions of freedom stem from the ambition of the modern critical philosophy which sought to derive such a notion of rational knowledge that would encompass the whole objective reality. Before the advent of the modern critical philosophy, the objects were thought to exist independently from us and even we, as human beings, were subjected to their will (the idea of the omnipotent God, for example). Kant called the “Copernican Revolution” the break in the history of philosophy when humans started to think themselves as creators of the knowledge of the universe (and not the other way round). As Kant put it

succinctly, “hitherto, it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects...Therefore let us for once attempt to see whether we cannot reach a solution to the tasks of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our knowledge.” This Kantian attempt led to the construction of two distinct worlds: The noumenal (the world of the “thing-in-itself”) world that was unintelligible to humans and the phenomenal world that could be understood with the help of science and rationality. As there was no way to seriously engage with the human ontology and at the same time disregard the existence of irrationality, critical philosophy was left with the perennial gap. (Ibid., 110-118)

The Kantian notion of freedom became inexorably stuck into the context of this opposition between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom. It was purely formal and rested only on itself, without any recourse to the opposite realm of necessity. The interpretation of freedom as merely an ethical imperative existing in the individual consciousness didn’t comply with the idea that facts are not simply there, but rather “created” in the process and are parts of the seamless whole. It propounded the notion of freedom that was detached from those actual societal conditions that made freedom virtually possible; in the last instance, purely ethical notion of freedom became untenable because it couldn’t exist independently of the reality and without borrowing necessary content to be properly defined.

Lukács criticizes purely ethical notions of freedom in connection with Hegel’s critique of Kant. The central idea of this criticism is that the split that is introduced by the Kantian doctrine couldn’t be maintained without necessary intermingling of the materials of different realms. In other words, in order to define “freedom”, one needs to borrow concepts from the empirical world. (Lukács 1973, 125) For instance, freedom has to be defined empirically – at least, we have to know who are entitled to exercise freedom. And there is no clear, forever-fixed boundary between who is in the community and who isn’t. This is the lessons that we also learn from Karl Schmitt’s (1985) and Giorgio Agamben’s (2005) analysis of the “state of



exception.” In the last instance, it’s the sovereign who determines who is included and who isn’t (and of course, sovereign can be the King, or the democratically elected parliament, or some other entity). Communitarian philosopher Michael Walzer (1983) also refers to the same problem when he speaks about the spheres of justice, but he sees it from the cultural perspective, rather than from the perspective of power relations.

In the contemporary intellectual discourse, there are still doctrines that in the spirit of Kant purport to establish the notion of freedom solely within the realm of ethics without any recourse to reality. A modern-day example of such theory is human rights discourse that pervades the agenda of international NGOs. The fundamental problem with such a notion is that it always needs a political vantage point – in Marxist Lukácsian terms, it always requires content. The proponents of human rights discourse claim that it’s universal, but in fact, of course, it’s not – “human rights” means different things in different contexts, hence, there are different interpretations of the concept. There is no common agreement about the extent of inclusion of social rights in human rights discourse and even about the full inclusion of certain groups of people (I am particularly referring to homosexuals and gay marriage issue). Amartya Sen (2000), for example, recognized this problem and in *Development as Freedom* he argues that public discussions in the democratic public sphere will have a “constructive aspect”, that is, it will help to better conceptualize and comprehend economic needs. With respects to this aspect of the democratic freedoms, he writes the following: “Public debates and discussions, permitted by political freedoms and civil rights, can also play a major part in the formation of values. Indeed, even the identification of needs cannot but be influenced by the nature of public participation and dialogue.” (Sen 1999, 158) Moreover, it’s not also universally agreed in what circumstances human rights can be restricted in the name of emergency. The reality is that it’s impossible to argue that there is a universal ethical principle that is shared by everyone without any modifications.

No matter how surprising it may sound for a modern reader, classical philosophers recognized this problem and sought to overcome it. They tried to find a point from which it would be possible to construct a positive philosophy of subject and object. That would be the point where subject and object coincided and didn't produce the bifurcation that dragged them back to the Kantian intractable duality. Lukács stresses that instead of reproducing Kantian duality, "they required that every datum should be understood as the product of the identical subject-object, and every duality should be seen as a special case derived from this pristine reality." (Lukács 1971, 122-123)

It was Fichte who tried to overcome this problem. While Kant in the *Critique of Practical Reason* merely showed that barriers that couldn't be overcome in theory, where amenable to practical solution, Fichte went even further and claimed that activity/praxis lay at the center of human ontology. With respects to the conundrum, he wrote the following: "For this reason, it is not such a trivial matter as it appears to some people, whether philosophy should begin from a fact or from an action (i.e. from pure activity which presupposes no object but itself creates it, so that *action* immediately becomes *deed*). For if it starts with the fact it places inside the world of existence and of finitude and will find it hard to discover the way that leads from there to the infinite and the suprasensual; if it begins from action it will stand at the point where the two worlds meet and from which they can both be seen at a glance." (Lukács 1971, 123)

Now, Lukács finds problems with this form of praxis (hereafter, I will call it "praxis as participation") as well. Before discussing Lukácsian critique, it has to be noted that praxis as participation isn't identical to Habermas's notion of communicative praxis. Praxis as participation isn't oriented on reaching understanding, but it's rather an ethical praxis undertaken by the subject and directed toward the object. At least, this is how Lukács interprets it, without going into details of Fichte's philosophy. It can be understood as

referring to the very act of participation. In other words, it is a form of praxis (as participation) done for the sake of participation, no matter what kind of political program it involves. Interpreting this part of the Lukácsian philosophy is extremely important in order to understand in what ways Lukács' idea of praxis differs from the other concepts of praxis that also find problems with the Kantian philosophy but don't seek to resolve them in the Marxian way.

Lukács (1971) criticizes praxis as participation in the *Reification and the Consciousness of Proletariat*. On page 124 he provides some fundamental arguments why the ethically/formally derived notion of praxis (in our words, participation) has to be rejected. I will below interpret those arguments briefly.

Praxis as participation will remain a formality if it won't be directed towards changing the very conditions that will enable human beings to perceive their life in totality. Normative theory that focuses on the importance of participation as an ethical ideal comes into conflict with the dialectic philosophy precisely at this very point – it disregards the socio-economic aspect of the problem by reducing it to the mere problem of individual ethics.

Here, it's of crucial importance to explicate the distinction between the form and content that is very much instrumental for asserting the impotence of ethical notions of praxis. The form is roughly equivalent to the formal categories of thought and action (either ethical or rational) that operate separately from the realm of content which is the realm of facts (empirics). On a sociological plane, these are the institutions that secure the realization of formal democratic freedoms but don't affect the material, socio-economic basis/content of them. Lukács contends that in reality, form cannot exist without content and in the last instance, it always draws on it. Dialectics doesn't recognize any notion of ethical right that is derived independently from reality. In the Marxian-Lukácsian terminology, the form always

has to be permeated by the content and vice versa. Analogously, democratic praxis which claims to be neutral towards any political ideology also needs proper socio-political or cultural conditions to flourish. In one way or another, every normative conception of democracy needs to make sure that the correct conditions are in place in order to guarantee democratic freedoms. Even Habermas (1996), unlike normative theorists, recognizes this need for a sociological concept of democracy and forcefully argues for complementing normative concepts with empirical ones. (322-324)

Formalistic notions of participatory democracy claim to be universalistic and neutral towards content. In such a way, they claim to be objective and apolitical. However, once we agree that there can be no formal, universalistic, objective notions of democracy as they will always need to borrow the content from the subjectively assessed reality, it becomes apparent that there is no need to hide our subjective political intentions. Since there are no objective, formalistic notions of democracy and freedom, we shouldn't pretend that our position is devoid of political preferences. Reification manifests itself in the fact that in modern democracies the powerful groups of the society claim that their notions of freedom and democracy are objective and universal and sell them in this form to the disadvantaged groups. Lukács teaches us that we shouldn't shy away from the political assessments of reality, but on the contrary we should base our political program on subjective evaluations, rather than on the allegedly universalistic notions of freedom and democracy.

So Lukács criticizes those philosophical efforts as well that take the notion of praxis seriously and see it as a tool for resolution of age-old conflict between theory and praxis, between the ethical and empirical worlds (or alternatively, between subject and object), but still doesn't see the concrete social manifestations of these dichotomies. For instance, one might be arguing for the transformative potential of praxis much in the same fashion as some democratic theorists see the essence of human life in the democratic participation, but doesn't

take into consideration the concrete measures that will be necessary to undertake a radical change. The idea here is that praxis in itself is of no value unless it's the right praxis. And the right praxis is only the one which takes the social manifestations of the fundamental antinomies seriously. Lukács is concerned with the transformation of those social conditions that make possible the bifurcation of human nature and dismantle the totality of human being/relations. For him, as for Marx, a real freedom is achieved only after the reification is vanished away.

To wrap up, Lukács initially directs attacks at the normative concept of freedom from the perspective of praxis philosophy (arguing for the elimination of the opposition between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom) and gets to the conclusion that it's impossible to hold an ethical notion of freedom that won't borrow any content from the real empirical world. At the second stage, he criticizes the notion of praxis as a guarantor of the inclusion of content into the form. The proponents of such praxis (of democratic participation, for example) argue that since we cannot have ethical notions of freedom that will be universally acceptable, the solution lies into enabling everyone to participate into the process. However, from the Lukácsian perspective, a mere participation isn't enough- it's a formality, what needs to be done is changing the social conditions that hamper the realization of freedom. Now this latter, Lukácsian concept of praxis is thoroughly different from the praxis as participation. It's strictly subjective and goal-oriented praxis, involving the assessment of the reality and acting upon it. It doesn't shy away from admitting that it's not universal in the sense that it's not based on the objective appraisal of the content. But at the same time, its ultimate goal is to achieve liberation for human beings thanks to the process of de-reification.

#### **1.4. The Limitations of the Lukácsian Marxism**

Despite sharing his critical views about the formalistic notions of praxis, I still have fundamental issues with Lukács' treatment of democracy. At the end of the day, he doesn't seem to be sympathetic towards any substantive notion of democracy and doesn't envisage any notion of freedom for the socialist project. He mercilessly criticizes Rosa Luxemburg for defending the "bourgeois" notion of freedom. Luxemburg in her trenchant critique of the Bolshevik revolution, famously declared that "freedom is always freedom for the one who thinks differently. (Lukács 1971, 290) For Lukács, the problem of freedom ultimately depends on what position Luxemburg occupies towards Mensheviks - whether she treats them as the enemies of revolution or as individuals who have divergent opinions on the questions of tactics and organization. Lukács asserts that the proletariat should keep the question of freedom open and dependent upon the exigencies of revolutionary situation. The dictatorship of the proletariat was an ultimate goal that needed to be secured against any predetermined, dogmatic imperatives. "Freedom must serve the rule of the proletariat, not the other way round", emphatically declares Lukács and accordingly, fully endorses the Leninist idea of revolutionary, avant-garde party that would undertake all necessary changes for bringing real, as opposed to bourgeois freedom. (Ibid.) He also discusses the same problem in his essay *Legality and Illegality* where he repeatedly treats every ethical imperative of freedom as part of the legal structure which is supposed to change according to the conditions that will confront the proletariat. (Ibid., 256-271)

One can see here that Lukács treats the socio-economic change as a supreme goal to which democratic freedoms can be temporarily sacrificed. As I noted above, the fragility of the ethical notions of freedom is that it has minimal grounding in reality. At the same time, Lukács rightly criticizes proceduralist praxis for the lack of content (no positive socio-

economic program) and hence, for serving the interests of certain groups without acknowledging it, but he also fails to notice that praxis undertaken by the subject isn't always goal-oriented. In other words, content isn't always material, but it also involves actions that are oriented towards reaching understanding. Humans don't simply want to change the material conditions in order to bring more freedom to *themselves*, they also seek to understand each other by the way of engaging into meaningful dialogues and disputes. Non-Lukácsian praxis philosophy (praxis as participation) couldn't criticize Marxian praxis from this perspective, because it was also oriented solely towards the object (In the similar manner, proceduralist notions of democracy assume that subjects are independent, egotistic individuals participating in democratic process just to achieve their private ends). In order to secure a democratic freedom, a different form of praxis needed to be introduced. This is the task that Habermas undertook, but unfortunately, as we will see in the next chapter, he inattentively plunged into the opposite extreme and ended up with another version of a non-dialectical democratic theory.

## Chapter 2: Habermas's Critique of the Dialectical Praxis and the Shortcomings of this Critique

### 2.1 The Critique of the Purposive Rational Action

Habermas starts from criticizing the basic concept of the purposive rational action. The term purposive rational (*zweckrational*) action comes from Weber. It is defined as an action that is “oriented to ends, means, and secondary results.” (Habermas 1983, 168) At the same time, it has to be stressed that practical rationality isn't identical to purposive rationality. The former concept in its original Weberian sense encompasses not only the goal-oriented action, but also, the so called “value-rationality”.<sup>1</sup> (Ibid., 172)

Habermas argues that Marxian philosophy (both young Marx's and Lukács' versions) can be characterized as being confined within the framework of the purposive rationality. Here, the subject (the proletariat) is compelled to act on behalf of its own particular interests (though, to be fair, these interests, according to Marx and Lukács, coincide broadly with the interests of the whole society) and tries to achieve the position of an ideal subject-object of history. The action that the proletariat seeks to undertake is fundamentally instrumental and purposive – the goal is to achieve liberation and to overturn the capitalist order. By contrast, communicative action does not involve the purposive rationality as a form of reasoning. It presupposes that the motivation of the actor is to achieve understanding with other actors. (Habermas 1985, 101)

Habermas (1984) in the first book of the *Theory of Communicative Action* (the *Theory*, hereafter) explains why the question of the purposive rational action is put forward. The problem resides in the fact that the instrumental action does not explain why utterances have

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<sup>1</sup> However, I am using the terms “purposive rational action” and “purposive rationality” interchangeably, as they refer to one and the same phenomenon.



binding effects. Habermas argues that in order to understand why binding effects arise, we have to take into account that each utterance's validity claim contains the need to be reasonably justified and rejected or accepted on this ground. There are three types of validity claims: Truth, rightness and truthfulness. The first contests the validity on the grounds of a factual truth, the second involves the question of normative validity and the third contests the sincerity of the author. (Habermas 1985, x)

By introducing these three dimensions of communicative rationality, Habermas goes well beyond the proceduralist concepts of democracy that only require to guarantee the validity of the participation, not the communicative substance of it. Now that communication becomes the central pillar of human ontology, it has to be secured in such a way that all its three components will be involved in the process of reaching understanding. It has to be noted that all these three modes of communication and corresponding validity claims are always at work even when only one of them becomes sharply thematized. So when the hearer assents to one of the validity claim, she implicitly acknowledges the validity of the other two. Consensus comes about when hearer acknowledges the validity of all three modes of communication: factual truth, normative validity and sincerity. (Habermas 1987, 120-121)

Marx and Lukács had no need to develop a communicative theory of rationality as they prematurely ascribed the status of universal subject-object of history to one particular social actor - namely, the proletariat. All this meant that the proletariat had no need to leave the communicative space open – it just had to carry out the task that was assigned to it by the history. The proletariat was destined to become the universalistic subject, that is, it would, sooner or later, abolish the main sources of capitalist alienation – the institutions of private property and market, and establish the community where real freedom will flourish. As it turned out, for well-known reasons, proletariat failed to play the role for which it was ordained, and now, in the absence of any material criterion that would dictate which social

actors have to be elevated to the status of the ideal subject-object of history, we are unavoidably left with the situation when any universal meaning of our political project needs to be guaranteed by communicative action.

On the other hand, Habermas doesn't believe that communicative action is the sole type of action that is carried out. There are spheres of human activity where such steering media as money and power distort the communicative rationality and turn it into the purposive, success oriented rationality. These steering media (notably power and money) form the System in which action is uncoupled from the processes of reaching understanding by the instrumentalized values. Consequently, such media replaces language as a mechanism for coordinating actions. So for Habermas it's not as much instrumental rationality itself as these steering media that have their impact on the Lifeworld. According to him, due to the process of rationalization, the reified relations acquire the logic of their own and form the System with its independent logic. (Habermas 1985, 343) There arises a competition between two principles of societal integration: One that is oriented on reaching understanding and the other, which is oriented on success (instrumental rationality). But the balance between two competing principles isn't even: Success- oriented action trumps the communicative action. As Habermas (1984) remarks in the first book of the *Theory*: "The rationalization of the lifeworld makes possible a kind of systemic integration that enters into competition with the integrating principle of reaching understanding and, under certain conditions, has a disintegrative effect on the lifeworld." (343)

## **2.2 The Disintegration of the System and the Lifeworld**

One has to consider that when we talk about the communicative rationality and purposive rationality, we not merely put forward the epistemological claims, but also ontological ones. It's noteworthy that both Lukács and Habermas put a particular emphasis

on the ontological presuppositions of their political projects and in such a way they cannot be accused of the so called epistemic and ontic fallacies. The latter concepts were introduced by the British philosopher Roy Bhaskar (the founder of the so called critical realist school) and can be utilized for our purposes. According to him, epistemic fallacy denotes the concealment of one's ontological premises and reducing the question of being to the question of knowledge (and the ways how to acquire a "right" knowledge about the reality), which subsequently leads to the ontic fallacy, that is the perception of the "objective reality", reified or hypostasized as ideas. (Bhaskar 2008, 4) Of course, Habermas is well aware of the risk of epistemic fallacy and as I noted above, he promptly introduces the concepts of the System and the Lifeworld as ontological equivalents of the epistemological concepts. In the domain of the Lifeworld, humans are oriented on reaching understating, while in the domain of the system, steering media such as money and power compels us to put our subjective goals in the first place.

Habermas (1987) directly criticizes Marx at the end of the second book of the *Theory* and blames him for failing to see the ineluctable nature of the split between the System and the Lifeworld. He argues that the System and the Lifeworld appear in Marx under the metaphors of the *realm of necessity* and the *realm of freedom*. Habermas avers that Marx falsely believed that the Lifeworld had a capacity to destroy the System, when in fact, Weber's prediction was proven right: The abolition of the private property didn't destroy the "iron cage" of instrumental rationality (the story of the Socialist Bloc). Habermas, in contract to Marx (and Lukács, for that matter), believes that every modern society has to exhibit a high degree of structural differentiation and thus, the differentiation between two governing principles of human action (Habermas 1987, p. 340).

So at the end of the day, it turns out that Habermas not only criticizes the purposive-rational action, but opts for the replacement of the one paradigm with another entirely. He

declares communicative rationality as an ultimate ideal and dismisses any positive socio-economic program as unfeasible (and perhaps, even dangerous). As he succinctly puts it in the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, “the paradigm of the knowledge of objects has to be replaced by the paradigm of mutual understanding between subjects capable of speech, and action.” (1987, 295-296) Certainly, in the absence of the ideal subject-object of history, the notion of “knowledge of objects” loses the absolute privilege it held in the dialectic materialism. As we can no longer claim that particular material conditions necessarily determine the subjective attitudes which, for its part, determine the way how we are supposed to view the world (and its future), subjectively derived objective reality loses its absolute value. So Habermas radicalizes his initial claim and makes communicative rationality a cornerstone of this theory. Now he discards any subjective, political evaluations of reality and argues that the age of utopias that involved the radical transformation of the content is over. He even calls the anarchist vision of entirely horizontal networks of associations “utopian”, “given the regulatory and organizational needs of modern societies.” (Habermas 1996, 481) In other words, he believes that radical “uncoupling” of the System and Lifeworld is permanent and no effort has to be made for “re-coupling”. I will examine briefly what does this “uncoupling” imply for the concept of democracy.

### **2.3 Habermas’s Vision of Deliberative Democracy**

Habermas’s aversion to totalization (the possibility of “re-coupling”) and dialectical praxis (or purposive rationality) does require a careful examination. He doesn’t ignore the existence of reification. He doesn’t give up a vision of better future either. He believes that democracy can be expanded to some extent. What he does give up, though, is the possibility of any socio-economic program that would radically change the system and its content, and

break with the past. In other words, he still believes in procedural utopias but without any substantial socio-economic transformations.

Habermas's vision of deliberative democracy is characterized by two important aspects: First, Habermas is interested in the socio-economic conditions that will sustain democratic and deliberative institutions. To put differently, he is aware of the systemic constraints that will render the realization of democratic ideals difficult; Habermas himself makes this distinction between himself and Joshua Cohen explicit in his famous work *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. (Habermas 1996, 304-305) In short, Habermas offers a social theory, not a normative political theory. Second, Habermas's sociological constructivism puts under question the feasibility of unlimited deliberative processes even within the Lifeworld.

Both aspects are relevant for the final political outcome of Habermas's social theory. The first aspect is important as much as Habermas offers a mix of empirical theory of democracy with the normative theory. Habermas here gives Marxian twist to the theory of democracy in an interestingly provocative manner and offers a sociological theory which is not a repetition of either empirical or normative theories. He seeks to find the "particles and fragments of an 'existing reason' already incorporated in political practices, however distorted that may be." (Habermas 1996, 287) The reason why Habermas deems it appropriate to undertake such an effort is the fact that he clearly sees the discrepancy between two visions of society: One that is based on the legitimizing power of reason and persuasion and the other, which draws on power. Alternatively, Habermas calls it the tension between validity and facticity. (Ibid., 288) As I already noted above, Habermas makes it clear that his view of deliberative democracy doesn't extend to the spheres that are regulated by the forces of power and money, not by the communicative reason.

On the other hand, it looks paradoxical, but Habermas doesn't view law and political force as fulfilling entirely negative functions; he still believes that even though it's a sad reality that the emancipating power of communicative rationality cannot penetrate non-communicatively regulated realms steered by such media as money and power, politics may play a positive role in relieving the burden of deliberation from those social processes whose problem-solving, deliberative capacities are overloaded. In this respect, Habermas believes that "the political process solves the *same kind* of problems as the processes it replaces." (Habermas 1996, 318) The reason why Habermas believes that power still plays a positive role for the civil society is because he has a particular, constructivist view of society. According to him, most of the situations we encounter in everyday world are already pre-interpreted, so as we are unable to occupy extramundane positions – we are always within already interpreted culture. However, critical situation arise that are in need of new interpretations and we are communicatively engaged into the efforts to reach understanding on their meanings. In his words, it's the idea that "the very medium of mutual understanding abides in a peculiar half-transcendence". (Habermas 1987, 125-126) Put differently, meanings are in the condition of being half-fixed - they are never fully constituted. On the one hand, we always find ourselves in the situation where some parts of the situation are already pre-interpreted and on the other hand, confronting new and problematic situation, we try to generate new meanings. (Ibid.) The direct implication of such constructivism for politics is that Habermas recognizes that there are some cognitive limits for the actors operating even in the realm of lifeworld and therefore, actors have to use politics and law to relieve themselves of the burden of excessive deliberation.

The latter observation leads to the radical insight, that meanings are constructed not only by communicative action, but by force. And the force is always a concrete political force; it cannot be considered to be as universal as Habermasian communication. In such a

way, the need for subject and subjective evaluations of empirical reality resurfaces again. Habermas is strongly against any subjective appraisal of reality. Regarding Lukács's theory of goal-oriented subject, he writes the following: "Lukács makes a decisive error—one that is suggested by Marx, to be sure—by bringing in this 'becoming practical' on a theoretical plane and representing it as a revolutionary actualization of philosophy. In doing so, he has to credit theory with more power than even metaphysics had claimed for itself. Now philosophy has to be capable of thinking not only the totality that is hypostatized as the world order, but the world-historical process as well—the historical development of this totality through the self-conscious practice of those who are enlightened by philosophy about their active role in the self-realization of reason." (Habermas 1984, 364.) In such a way, Habermas staunchly defends his argument that no subjective appraisal of reality ("philosophy") on which one can base her political project is possible. Instead, we should take apolitical, neutral communicative rationality as our starting point.

## ***2.4 The Limitations of the Habermasian Theory from the Lukácsian Perspective***

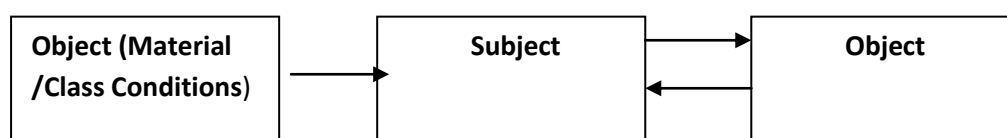
If politics isn't as bad after all and it fulfills a particular, positive task in the social processes, then why any effort to go beyond the formalist, procedural model of democracy is so strictly forbidden? Why is the goal-oriented praxis that is oriented on changing the reality so categorically neglected? Why "philosophy" (i.e. the subjective appraisal of the objective socioeconomic reality) is so derided? It turns out that what Habermas lacks here is precisely the dialectical understanding of praxis. He does neglect that fact that form and content don't exist independently of each other – they necessarily pervade each other and the one is always permeated by the other.

Dialectical praxis, purified by the critique of the purposive rationality and devoid of the foundationalist implications (i.e. idealist subject-object of history), can offer a solution here.

Rather than discarding any subjective appraisal of objective reality (in Habermas's words, of the "knowledge of objects"), it would be more appropriate to claim that subject as such still occupies an important place in the political discourse; Although, it is stripped off its hitherto ambitious implications and now, along with the purposive rationality, subjective acts are also conceived in terms of communicative reason.

At the beginning, I claimed that the Habermasian transition from "the paradigm of the knowledge of things" to the "paradigm of mutual understanding" "has to be taken seriously. Now, I am claiming that subjectively derived "knowledge of objects" should also be retained. To avoid confusions, I will refer to the Figure 1.

*Figure 1. The Conceptual Scheme of the Lukácsian Praxis*



In the orthodox Marxism, object/material conditions make the proletariat unique sociopolitical subject of history – in such a manner, the role of the proletariat is already given in history; one just has to discover it. Once, we drop the materialistic basis and replace it with the communicatively mediated Lifeworld that has no determinate influence on the subject, but is always in flux, we are left with subjects that are always in need of determination. However, this doesn't mean that subjects lose their capacity to have a subjective political position. The fact that subjective positions are communicatively rather than materialistically



defined does not at all imply that subjects are deprived of the capacity to have subjective political goals. Thus, Habermas's core claim according to which in the Lifeworld we are oriented on reaching understanding, rather than on purposive-rational actions is mistaken. In reality, one does not exclude the other.

What Habermas correctly discovers is the need for communicative action in human relations and in such a way he proves that Lukácsian concept of praxis which involves only purposive-rational action is fundamentally flawed. Praxis can no longer mean only an activity that is directed at changing the reality by force, but it is also an activity that is aimed at reaching understanding. The second discovery made by Habermas is that "the knowledge of things" loses its absolute privilege and hence, the proletariat can no longer be considered to be the bearer of the supreme truth. Rather, it's communicatively conveyed meaning that has to replace the discovery of an ideal subject-object of history in history. At the same time, instead of enriching the dialectic philosophy with these correct criticisms, Habermas entirely discards the latter and establishes a new doctrine which stipulates the impossibility of overturning the system (i.e. the possibility of the radical break) and loses the sight of any emancipatory notion of subject.

## **Chapter 3: Deriving a Proper Democratic Theory – Dialectical Democratic Theory**

In this chapter I will combine the theories of Lukács and Habermas and contrast the result with the theories that come closer to its claims. Moreover, I will discuss the possible empirical justifications of the theory and the empirical feasibility of its agenda of de-reification.

### ***3.1 Combining the theories of Lukács and Habermas: Dialectic Democratic Theory***

#### **3.1.1 Uniting Lukácsian dialectics with the Habermasian Notion of Communicative Action**

Drawing on the Figure 1 I am arguing that a new concept of praxis has to incorporate in itself the dialectic critique of society, and on the other hand, the latter has to be revised by taking into account the Habermasian critique of purposive rationality. Both of them are equally important parts of human ontology. The meanings are constructed both by political force (which is subjective and goal oriented) and communication (which is communicative and oriented on reaching understanding).

It turns out that based on my criticism of Lukács and Habermas there are two important considerations: First, politics does not exist without communication. Every regime, even the totalitarian one, sustains its legitimacy by non-coercive means. Moreover, it doesn't only mean that force is always accompanied by the persuasion and vice versa, but that force doesn't have an absolute ethical value and it always should be negotiated. In orthodox Lukácsian dialectics, there was no need of democracy as the status of the bearer of truth was already given to the proletariat. This truth was entirely subjectively, not communicatively derived. The direct corollary of such mode of reasoning was that freedom and democracy

even within the proletarian state could have been restricted in the name of emergency (and in fact, this is what Lukács had in mind when he justified the exclusion of Mensheviks from the politics of the Soviet Union). Lukács ended up with the notion of de-reification that justified the suspension of democratic freedoms in the name of the supreme truth and the promise of arriving at the communist society. The free interpretation of the truth was strictly prohibited in the due process.

Second, communication does not exist without politics and political coercion. Even in democracy final decisions have to be made and these decisions are binding (So there always is a political power). Pure communication that will be shared by everyone is an illusion. Communication is always pervaded by the subjective, egotistic, particularistic motivations, it is never neutral. As it was described above, Habermas had an attempt to develop a theory of pure communication, but he wasn't able to accomplish this task for two reasons: First, he clearly saw that communicative rationality cannot retain its purity as human beings don't have the capacity to sustain the incessant process of communicative deliberation; In the final instance, politics (power, force, goal-oriented praxis, etc.) intrudes into the Lifeworld and relieves the burden of excessive deliberation from the participants. Second, it's rather unclear why the separation of the System and the Lifeworld has to be sustained and every attempt at overcoming the gap has to be shunned. If the separation is permanent, then it will maintain itself regardless of our political attempts.

Having this in mind, we can have both a purposive action to achieve our egotistic goals and a goal to reach understanding. So the most ethical argument is to have a subjective political goal (advancing the interests of the anti-system, anti-establishment groups) and at the same time, to fight for deliberative democracy. Both aspects of praxis are subjective as there are no objective, content-free positions. Rather than to claim that such politically

neutral positions exist, it's more justified to admit one's necessarily particularistic claims but argue for the possibility of universality.

Besides communicative and goal oriented praxis, there are two more important aspects of dialectic ontology that distinguish our understanding of praxis from what I called an dialectical praxis in the first chapter on the Lukácsian dialectics. The first aspect is that praxis has to encompass human relations in totality. There might be the forms of praxis that are oriented on both reaching understanding and achieving private goals, but still lack the "totalization". On the other hand, there might be a political discourse that takes social relations in totality, but still evades the question of reification. Our notion of totalized praxis implies the realization of de-reification in the real world. In other words, it's not enough to claim that political participation/praxis seeks to overcome the age-old dichotomy of necessity and freedom, but one has to also point out in what ways a particular political action will reduce the reification of social relations. In the first place, the program of de-reification implies restoring the totality in the economic sphere – socializing means of production and more fair distribution of resources. Moreover, the new system should strive for more democracy in all spheres of human life (for example, the Soviet Union isn't the best example of de-reified society).

It shouldn't be forgotten that Lukácsian dialectics is intrinsically connected to the problematic of freedom. Its sole purpose remains framed in terms of the Enlightenment project. The goal is to achieve freedom but the socio-economic program that is chosen for this purpose "temporarily" overrides the supreme ideal. This is what dialectic democratic theory seeks to rectify. I am arguing that any act of disregard of another person's opinion is inherently contradictory to the basic ideal of Lukácsian (and Marxian) dialectic struggle. All aspects of the theory are important, but what's crucial is that they are equally indispensable

for the whole project. The exclusion of any of these terms necessarily leads to the betrayal of the initial goal, which is bringing freedom to human beings.

### **3.1.2 Dialectic Democratic Theory as a Philosophical Doctrine**

When summarizing my theoretical mixture of Habermas and Lukács, it turns out that there are four equally crucial notions that constitute the dialectic democratic theory. These notions are: Communicative praxis (borrowed from Habermas), goal-oriented praxis (the one that involves political power and the subjective appraisal of the objective reality, in contrast to the Habermasian notion of conflict-free communicative relations oriented on reaching understanding), totality and reification. The proper theory of democracy is the one that is constructed with these four notions. The problem of Lukács was that he lacked the communicative notion of praxis, whereas Habermas didn't take seriously the notions of totality and purposive rationality (goal-oriented praxis). Dialectic theory of democracy unites all four of them into one doctrine and does offer an alternative not only to the Lukácsian or Habermasian philosophies, but to the normative philosophy as well.

As one might have already noticed, I chose to retain the word *dialectic* in the title of the theory that is introduced here because it's still a theory of change and renewal. Even though it's modified with the considerations of communicative reason, dialectic democratic theory still assumes that the social world isn't static and the way to really approach it is to engage into the praxis that will combat not only the effects of reification, but the root cause of it. It's a particular way of looking at things that is distinguished from the popular modes of thought in today's academic intellectual discourse. Bertell Ollman (2003) writes the following about the specificity and radical character of dialectics in his book *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method*: "The existing breakdown of knowledge into mutually indifferent and often hostile academic disciplines, each with its own range of problematics and methods, has

replaced the harmonious enlightenment we had been promised with a raucous cacophony of discordant sounds. In the confusion, the age-old link between knowledge and action has been severed, so that scholars can deny all responsibility for their wares while taking pride in knowing more and more about less and less. It is a way of criticizing this state of affairs and developing an integrated body of knowledge that a growing number of researchers are turning to Marxian dialectics.” (13) While I am not going to apply the dialectic approach to various academic disciplines, I am trying to advocate a theory that isn’t partial in a sense that it doesn’t provide justifications for democratic freedoms and distributive justice separately. My theory doesn’t take the world as given (as Habermas takes the gap between the Lifeworld and the System forever fixed), but by engaging into totalization, it seeks to overcome the gap without the assumption of metaphysical finality.

In dialectic democratic theory economic transformations serve the enhancement of individual freedom. It is the major character of the critique of reification that it seeks to grant human beings a true freedom that will enable them to perceive their lives in totality and make a truly free decisions. This is not what people are accustomed to in the modern capitalist democratic world, where formal rights are secured, but in reality, one finds it hard to express herself freely because of the material dependence either on the employer or on the state institutions that are not fully accountable to citizens (one of the main reasons of it is again the inability of disadvantaged citizens to exert a political influence on the government). Moreover, the institutions of market economy contribute to the dissolution of the human sense of totality. One is alienated from the fruits of her labor and as a result, one doesn’t feel that she is directly responsible for her actions and her labor. The fruits of the labor don’t belong to the individual, but they belong to the capitalist. In this sense, individuals are not able to act. It has to be noted that the totalitarian socialist states didn’t do justice to this second principle either. The products of the labor in the Soviet Union and its satellite states belonged

to the state, not to the individual workers themselves. Marx (1844) explicitly opposed such forms of communism in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, where he wrote the following regarding the matter: “Just as woman passes from marriage to general prostitution, [Prostitution is only a *specific* expression of the *general* prostitution of the *labourer*, and since it is a relationship in which falls not the prostitute alone, but also the one who prostitutes – and the latter’s abomination is still greater – the capitalist, etc., also comes under this head. – *Note by Marx* [31]] so the entire world of wealth (that is, of man’s objective substance) passes from the relationship of exclusive marriage with the owner of private property to a state of universal prostitution with the community.”

One more important aspect of the dialectic democratic theory is that it focuses on those conceptions of good life that are potentially negotiable. The idea that one has to work to reach understanding with all the members of the community is potentially workable. The improvement of the socio-economic conditions that sustain and enhance the communicative or purposive rationality also isn’t an inconceivable ideal. It’s this focus on the socioeconomic aspect of freedom, not on the identity issues that makes dialectic democratic theory an offshoot of the Enlightenment tradition. Nationalist ideologies may also focus on the enhancement of freedom, but it’s the freedom that is exclusively secured for one particular ethnic or religious group. Contrariwise, dialectic democratic theory tries to redirect disagreements on the socioeconomic plane where the condition for winning of one particular group doesn’t equal to the elimination of the other group. David Ost (2005) makes this point when he talks about the eruption of identity politics and ethnic or religious violence in the post-socialist countries. He shares the Schmittian insight that politics involves the dichotomy of “friend versus enemy” (this is somewhat close to our definition of political as necessarily subjective and particularistic); He argues that it’s safe to organize the accumulated anger against the “enemy” along the class lines, rather than along ethnic or religious lines. (24-25)

Dialectic democratic theory takes this lesson and retains the spirit of the two great traditions of the modern political thought: Liberalism and Marxism. Irreconcilable political conflicts are addressed on the economic, rather than on the cultural plane.

### ***3.2 Contrasting the Dialectic Democratic Theory with Similar Theories***

Now that I managed to unite Lukácsian dialectics with the Habermasian theory of communicative reason and deliberative democracy, there are three further steps I am going to undertake. The first thing is that I will argue for the novelty of such theory against other prevalent theories of democracy or positive political theories of distribution (in our terminology, goal oriented praxis). At the second stage, I will try to connect the results of my undertaking with already existing critiques of reified liberal doctrine and its embodying institutions, and finally, I will try to present a program that will satisfy the demands of the dialectic democratic theory.

On the table 1 I contrasted the dialectic democratic theory with the other similar theories.



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Table 1: Dialectic Democratic Theory vis-à-vis Two Marxist and Two Deliberative Democratic Theories

	Communicative Action	Goal-Oriented Praxis	Totality	Reification
Lukács and similar theories of dialectics				
Habermas				
Gerald Cohen				
Joshua Cohen				

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As one can see on the Table 1 I included two normative theories that come closest to the dialectic theory of democracy. One is Joshua Cohen's (1989) deliberative democracy and the other is Gerald Cohen's Analytic Marxism. I've already criticized the first from the Lukácsian perspective in the first chapter on the Lukácsian dialectics. To recap, there are three broad problems with Joshua Cohen's account: First, it lacks the notion of praxis that is not merely formal but also practical (that is, has a "content" – a positive program of actual socio-economic change), second, it disregards the question of totality and third, it doesn't take into account the existence of reification. Habermas also criticizes Joshua Cohen for disregarding the reified character of certain social relations and as I already noted in the second chapter, on this point he fully shares Lukácsian and Marxian insights.

Gerald Cohen (1995), even though he is one of the most prominent representatives of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century Analytic Marxism, also offers un-dialectic and un-democratical account of Marxism. As one can see from the Table 1, the main problem with Gerald Cohen is that his philosophy doesn't recognize the problem of reification and the idea of communicative reason.

Lukács made it clear that praxis without the program of de-reification isn't a real praxis. In the *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat* he emphatically remarked that "praxis can only be really established as a philosophical principle if, at the same time, a conception of form can be found whose basis and validity no longer rest on that pure rationality and that freedom from every definition of content. In so far as the principle of praxis is the prescription for changing reality, it must be tailored to the concrete material substratum of action if it is to impinge upon it to any effect." (Lukács 1973, 126) While Gerald Cohen (1995, 2001) makes a successful step by extending the principle of egalitarianism to the whole society (and thus adopting the principles of totality and praxis), he still lacks the dialectic notion of de-reification. The main implication of reification is that

the human life has been deprived of the possibility to be experienced as it has to be naturally: In totality and in a social manner. The contention is that it doesn't matter how much equality human beings achieve, but what matters is that to what extent they will be freed from the chains of reification, restore the sense of totality and experience a real freedom of social relations. The institutions of private property and free market are the ones that lie at the root of reification as they alienate the workers from the fruits of their own labor and subjugate them to the laws and impersonal forces of free market. De-reification would imply the eradication the impersonal forces of market and empowering workers to make free decisions.

The second problem with Gerald Cohen's Analytical Marxism is that it doesn't leave the room for communicative reason. It's interesting that Cohen (1995) inadvertently acknowledges the problem in *Self-ownership, Freedom, and Equality* where he makes a distinction between the market and non-market motivations. The first denotes motivations such as fear or greed that generally lead to self-serving actions. In the second type of motivation one produces because one desires to serve her fellow-beings, and also being served by them. (Cohen 1995, 262) It's clear that egalitarian form of socialism that implies equalization of the incomes without eradicating the root cause of inequality, doesn't take into account the possibility of justice that isn't calculable. When Habermas writes about the domain of communicative action, he means exactly the same phenomenon that Marx described under the name of the *realm of freedom*. But unlike Marx and Lukács, Habermas elevates the communicative action to the supreme moral ideal so as it ought to be respected in the very process of political transformation, not only at the end of the process. This is the exact same idea that beyond the distributive justice, there always remains the room for justice that is completely spontaneous and altruistic, without any preliminary scheme of distribution. Jacques Derrida (1994), also famously raises this point in his *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, where he speaks about the justice

which is centered on the idea of a gift. It does not hinge on the calculable equality or “symmetrizing and synchronic accountability” (Derrida 1994, 26). Nor it has to do with duty, or even revenge (Ibid., 30). It does what it “must”, but does so without debt or duty. In other words, it dispenses to the singular (un-symmetrized) other, without any preliminary distributive considerations.

I’ve deliberately avoided mentioning partial distributive theories, like that of John Rawls (1999). Rawls himself acknowledges that he circumscribes his notions of justice to the basic structure of society (1999, 6); he refuses to discuss the relevance of the principles of justice in the relations of production. Gerald Cohen (2000) rightly criticizes him on this point by emphasizing the importance of the redistributive considerations within the private economic institutions. (123) Ronald Dworkin’s (2007) theory of “equality of resources” also didn’t qualify for our discussion, because it takes market relations as having an absolute value and doesn’t consider to analyze how justified the economic relations are within the private economic institutions.

One theory which I didn’t include in the table but I still consider it to be worthy of discussion is Žižek’s version of communism. Žižek rightly argues for the re-politicization of the economy. He writes the following regarding the matter: “Postmodern politics definitely has the great merit that it 'repoliticizes' a series of domains previously considered 'apolitical' or 'private' ; the fact remains, however, that it does not in fact repoliticize capitalism , because the very notion and form of the 'political' within which it operates is grounded in the 'depoliticization' of the economy.” (Butler et al. 2000, 98) With regards to this particular issue, Žižek shares the belief in totality; however he has problems when it comes to clarifying what exactly this re-politicization means. For instance, he claims that “The so-called 'Nazi revolution', with its disavowal/displacement of the fundamental social antagonism ('class struggle' that divides the social edifice from within) - with its projection/externalization of the

cause of social antagonisms into the figure of the Jew, and the consequent reassertion of the corporatist notion of society as an organic Whole - clearly avoids confrontation with social antagonism: the 'Nazi revolution' is the exemplary case of a pseudo-change, of a frenetic activity in the course of which many things did change - 'something was going on all the time' so that, precisely, something - that which really matters - would not change; so that things would fundamentally 'remain the same'." (Ibid., 124-125) It turns out that, according to Žižek, the only difference between the Nazi revolution and the real revolution is that the latter address the class struggle. If it's true, then it becomes rather dubious what Žižek's position towards Stalin would be. Stalin addressed the class struggle, but did so in a way that neither solved the problem of reification nor involved the efforts of reaching understanding with the populace. Žižek provides neither the theory of reification nor the theory of communicative action.

Now that I've situated dialectical democratic theory vis-à-vis other important theories that come closer to its claims, I will proceed to discuss how already existing criticisms of the reified democratic theory and its manifestations relate to the four basic concepts that I am developing here.

### ***3.3 The Possibility of Testing the Two Concepts of the Dialectic Democratic Theory in Political Science***

The notions of communicative praxis, dialectical praxis, totality and reification are not without match in the existing criticisms of the liberal reified theory and its social manifestations. I am building a theory here by uniting these four concepts into one doctrine, but in reality, they are already utilized separately by various theorists and social scientists. Some political scientists now started to talk about the need for abandoning apolitical concepts of democracy and human rights and to focus on the re-politicization efforts. It is these

attempts that I want to outline now. Even though I am not going to empirically test anything, it would be propitious for our purposes if I describe those social scientific studies that somewhat corroborate my theory (although there are important differences that I will also point out).

Harris et al. (2005) in the edited volume called *Politicizing Democracy: The New Local Politics of Democratization* talk about the importance of re-politicization for promoting democracy. Especially, the University of Oslo political science professor Olle Törnquist is vocal in pointing out the weaknesses of the transitional and elitist theories of democracy. What's the most important, Törnquist in his essay on the political deficit of substantive democratization, defines democratization in a way that is somewhat related to my definition of dialectic democratic theory. For him, democratization doesn't entail the promotion of social and economic equality. Rather, the focus is made on the so called formalistic notions of democracy and the central question is about the conditions that promote those formalistic freedoms. (201-202) Similarly, in the dialectic democratic theory, one doesn't claim that beyond communicative and procedural notions of freedom there are other central ethical considerations – for instance, that of economic equality, but instead one makes three crucial claims: First, the real democracy entails the expansion of those principles to the hitherto untouched spheres of human activity (the notion of totality), second, real democracy is achieved by the help of subjective, goal-oriented praxis undertaken by the political actors (the idea of dialectic praxis), and third, democratic expansion has to do with the curtailment of those activities that are steered by the non-linguistic media (the critique of reification). Törnquist actually engages with the former two aspects of dialectic democratic theory and presumes that real expansion of democracy has to do with two important conditions being in place: There should be an action on behalf of the disadvantaged groups (rather than on behalf

of the elites) and civic action groups and political action groups have to be connected to each other. (202)

Törnquist starts with the critique of elitist notions of democracy in order to make a point about the importance of actor-based, rather than elite-based models of democracy. He argues that elitist models gained popularity in the dominant academic discourse because it was presumed that the radical democracy involved the engagement of the left-wing masses; the latter would demand radical socio-economic reforms and would be harshly resisted from the dominant groups. Ensuing violent turmoil would make the question of democracy intractable and for that reason scholars chose to avoid such radical notions of democracy altogether. They rather see the process of democratization as a technocratic pact-making exercise between the elites of the country that is mediated by the international actors. (Harris et al. 2005, 203)

Törnquist argues that the view that popular democracy is not feasible to pursue in the process of democratization isn't borne out by the facts. First, it's the poor reading of history. For instance, radical structural modernization efforts were not always associated with bad outcome. For instance, anti-colonial liberation struggles and Scandinavian leftist mass organization parties had positive repercussions. Moreover, one can assume that some of the negative outcomes were occurring "because of the actors and forces that hijacked them in the midst of the cold war and in the context of poorly reformed agrarian and other power relations" (Harris et al. 2005, 204); the second case against the dominant democratization is based on the assertion that democratization not necessarily leads to the expansion of rights and liberties. But this argument obscures the relationships between the state and society (especially, business groups). Törnquist cites Sidel's article contributed to the same volume who speaks about the "*ménage à trois* between primitive accumulation, liberal elections and bossism".(206) It is arguable whether the suppression of the popular democracy produces

liberal forms of democracy or brings the society under the domination of the small groups of influential citizens. Third, popular efforts at democracy even despite the fact they have rarely been decisive, have proven themselves increasingly important. Törnquist cites the examples of the Indian state Kerala and leftist participatory practices in Brazil. (Ibid.)

Törnquist uses the examples of Kerala and Brazil as well, when he tries to argue that civil society groups have to coordinate their actions with the political groups. Regarding this problem (which I called the problem of totality), he writes the following: “The more balanced left-oriented thinkers and campaigners behind the significant cases of popular democratization in Brazil and Kerala, on the other hand, realize, as was also noted in the Introduction to this book, the need to link new polycentric activities in civil society with local government and political activism and to generate common agendas.” (Harris et al. 2005, 207) Abovementioned empirical examples are discussed in detail in the volume, but the most important in Törnquist’s and other contributors’ analysis is that they try to approach the problem on the empirical plan and empirically demonstrate the soundness of the theoretical hypothesis that I am presenting here, namely, the indispensability of the political and totalizing (that will unite civic with political) praxis for the process of democratization.

Törnquist and other contributors of the volume in their daring studies give important examples how the argument about the need for repolitization of democracy can be tested empirically. However, Törnquist’s account of democracy isn’t what I am proposing here in the form of the dialectic democratic theory - It doesn’t include the critique of reification and economic relations. Unfortunately, not every aspect of the dialectic democratic theory can be tested so easily- for instance, there are virtually no examples of democratic movements that achieved some success and were simultaneously arguing for de-reification of the economic relations (old communist totalitarian regimes don’t naturally qualify for such study as they weren’t democratic).



At the same time, the concept of reification used in its Lukácsian sense is instrumental for understanding why actors are unable to unite the civil and political causes or to think in terms of the participatory, rather than elitist forms of democracy. As I already noted, Lukács argues that the process of reification is extended to not only social institutions, but to human consciousness itself. He writes the following in the *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat*: “thought and existence are not identical in the sense that they ‘correspond’ to each other, or ‘reflect’ each other, that they ‘run parallel’ to each other, or ‘coincide’ with each other (all expressions that conceal a rigid duality). Their identity is that they are aspects of the same real historical and dialectical process.” (Lukács 1971, 204) In such a manner, both the consciousness of the actors and the social institutions that are the embodiments of the “real historical process” are subject to the forces of reification. That’s why it’s so difficult for the actors to envisage the project that will connect civic and political actors. Marx (1844) discussed the same problem in his early work *On the Jewish Question*. He argued that political annulment of private property and abolition of the distinctions of birth, social rank, education and occupation in a political sphere don’t necessarily mean that these distinctions are truly overcome. On the contrary, by confining the economic, social and religious distinctions to the sphere of civil society, the state manages to de-politicize and harbor them from the political interference. The freedom to be distinct /different is secured by the so called human rights concept. The latter subjects the *citoyen* (or a member of the political community) to the egotistic *homme* of the civil society.

While empirical reformulation of the theoretical ideas present in this paper is important, no less crucial is to discuss those theoretical endeavors that will help us to connect the ethical imperatives with the empirical reality. As I already noted above, the impact of reification on democratic freedoms is very difficult to measure as we don’t have any examples of

democratic countries which fundamentally reformed capitalist relations of production. So the question arises concerning the feasibility of de-reification and its limits (if there is any).

### **3.4. The Feasibility of De-Reification**

As I already mentioned at the very beginning of the chapter on Lukács's dialectics, Lukács's account of materialistic dialectics is dramatically different from those interpretations of Marx that involve the nature-individual dialectics. Lukács (1971) in the endnotes of his essay *What is Orthodox Marxism?* remarks the following regarding the matter in hand: "It is of the first importance to realize that the method is limited here to the realms of history and society. The misunderstandings that arise from Engel's 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." (24)

Confinement of dialectics to the realm of society has crucial implications for the dialectic democratic theory. It's apparent that the political utopia has to be conceived solely within the realm of society as there are natural limits to the political projects. One cannot do everything what one thinks is ethical to do. There are limits to what human beings desire. Democracy cannot be expanded beyond what is naturally conceivable under the current stage of development of technologies. Thus, new technologies bring new possibilities for de-reification and give us even more incentive to argue for change in the name of dialectic democratic theory. For instance, the question of the elimination of necessary labor time that will result into more free time for individuals to exercise their freedoms is very much

dependent on the technological level of development. Moreover, it will be hard to subject government re-distributive functions (which for dialectic democratic theory serves the purpose of de-reification) to the popular control in the proverbial “complex societies” without proper technological tools for either controlling or monitoring the activities of the government officials (remember that Habermas’s initial purpose was to reinvigorate the discourse of democracy in the age of welfare state).

The critique of reification and non-utopian understanding of Marx’s dialectic vision of the future society complement each other. The former is necessarily utopian as its final purpose is the elimination of reification, while the latter is pragmatic and empirical. The critique of reification can serve as a benchmark for evaluating the possible reform projects for the future. If a proposed solution (that is imaginable given the current state of the technological development) doesn’t advance the cause of de-reification, then it has to be rejected. Only those political projects are justified that give its participants more, rather than less democratic freedom. Of course, already existing basic forms of capitalist reification are regarded as the root cause of reification.

## Conclusion

The version of the Marxian theory that I criticized here (Lukácsian dialectics purified by and coupled with the Habermasian deliberative democracy) is allegedly democratic. In this version of the Marxian theory the socio-economic reforms are not the ends in themselves. Instead, they are meant to advance the cause of freedom. In this respect, it's also different from those distributive theories that focus on social equality as an ultimate ideal, independent of the considerations of freedom and democracy. When Lukács spoke about the formalism of the Kantian and other liberal doctrines of right and argued that form couldn't exist without content, he essentially had socioeconomic content in mind. He didn't have any conception of nationalist or cultural content. His only purpose was a true human liberation.

However, Lukács didn't remain faithful to his initial undertaking. In his philosophy, content- socioeconomic revolution subsequently overrode all other ideals (including freedom of speech and basic democratic freedoms) and became an end in itself. Lukács falls into this trap when he assigns the revolutionary role to one social actor and regards any democratic freedom subjected to the exigencies of the proletariat struggle. He forgets that meanings are communicatively and hence, democratically negotiated and they have to be secured in the democratic way. As Habermas convincingly argued the reason for this failure was the flawed concept of purposive rationality. To address this problem, Habermas introduced the concept of communicative action and asserted that humans are oriented on reaching understanding and the meanings are never fully fixed, but they remain constantly in flux. However, later, he mistakenly discarded the whole Lukácsian dialectics and sought to replace it with the new paradigm of communicative rationality.

In this thesis, I demonstrated that the best solution to the problem is the mixture of these two doctrines. I merely added communicative rationality to the three crucial notions of

Lukácsian dialectics: dialectical praxis (which involves purposive rationality), totality and reification. Subsequently, I arrived at the dialectic democratic theory that is different from not only Lukácsian or Habermasian Marxist philosophies, but from the non-dialectic Marxist theory.

I also maintained that dialectic democratic theory is an ethical doctrine – no matter what the concrete historical conditions are, the causes of reaching understanding, uninhibited praxis, restoring totality and de-reification always have to be advanced. I call “sociological Marxism” those theories that consider the state of Marxism dependent upon the concrete social conditions that are deemed to be favorable or not favorable for the large-scale transformations. For example, Habermas belongs to this camp of sociological Marxists as his only argument against the radical utopias with concrete agendas of social change is the disintegrative influence of the System on the Lifeworld. No matter what kind of impact the System exerts on the realm of communicative action, it shouldn’t affect our ethical and political ideals.

However, I also don’t argue that any change is feasible. This would be a bad reading of Marx and Lukács. To what extent the de-reification program is feasible is very much dependent on the current technological development. Not everything is possible, but those proposals of de-reification that are offered must be judged by the normative criterion. The success of such endeavors of substantive democratization can be empirically tested as I demonstrated it by examining the work of Olle Törnquist.

Speaking of the empirical feasibility of the project of radical democratization, it will be worthy to note that further research has to pay greater attention to two important considerations: First, the role of a new technology in furthering the cause of democratization

and de-reification, and second, the role of education in the emancipatory struggle. Below, I will briefly outline possible directions of such arduous undertakings.

When we talk about technology, it's absolutely necessary to stress that it belongs to the realm of nature and hence, it has no direct bearing on the ethical questions of dialectic democratic theory. Alain Badiou (2002) remarks the following regarding the question of technology: "The question of technology, of modernity, of *techne* is in my opinion not a very important question. There are always technical questions, but there is no capital newness in the question of technology. There is no direct ethical question of the relation between ethics and technology. Ethical questions, for me, are questions in the field of truth." Likewise, we need technology for the realization of our ethical goal, not the other way round (i.e. ethical goals tailored to the technological level of development, like in Habermasian theory of communicative action and deliberative democracy). In recent years, there has been an upsurge in the research on the relationship between the information technology and democracy (Schlosberg et al. 2008); however, dialectic democratic theory is more interested in those studies that don't take for granted the existence of the capitalist relations of production. For instance, Jakob Rigi (2013) investigates the role of peer production in shaping the alternatives of the capitalist system. Johan Söderberg (2012) also discusses the possibility of transforming capitalism with the help of information technologies in his book *Hacking Capitalism: The Free and Open Source Software Movement*. It is of utmost importance to continue this line of research and investigate the ways how new technologies (especially the information technologies) could impact the development of more democratic and freer system.

The second important concern of the dialectic democratic theory is education. Even if the relations of production can be transformed within one country, it will be extremely hard to socialize education and scientific research. The major problem is that education isn't

equally distributed in the world. Some countries attain higher levels of scientific development and offer a very high quality education (those countries also attract scientists and educators from the less developed countries), while others lack the human and material resources to do the same. One needs knowledge to exercise her democratic freedom in today's world of scientific and technological development. The role of educational theory in Marxist theory has to be carefully examined with a particular focus on the issues of democratization and democracy.

I believe there are other problematic aspects of the theory that require a careful examination, but for the reasons of limited space, I will refrain from expounding them. My central task in this paper was to elucidate the ethical framework within which one can imagine social-economic and political transformations. The rest is in the hands of future researchers.

I also hope that investigations of these fundamental problems of the Marxist theory and democratic theory will be beneficial for the activists of various stripes. The crucial implication of such an undertaking is that democracy and Marxism aren't the contradictory doctrines, but they can be reconciled in such a way that their radical claims won't be compromised.

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