

From Value-Relevance to Class Standpoint: Lukács's Historicization of Rickert's Principle of Value-Relevance

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Abstract: *Georg Lukács, through a process of “historization,” transforms the principle of value-relevance formulated by Heinrich Rickert within Neo-Kantianism into the Marxist category of class standpoint. As an external epistemological mechanism of selection, Rickert’s principle of value-relevance presupposes an abstract and contemplative structure of subjectivity. Lukács exposes the roots of this abstract subject in the phenomenon of reification and proposes the concept of class standpoint as the historically concrete form of the principle of relevance. By demonstrating how the proletariat, as the “identical subject-object” of history, transforms self-consciousness into a practice that changes reality, Lukács advances a radical reinterpretation of transcendental categories as forms of being. Ultimately, through his critique of Rickert’s principle of relevance, Lukács transforms it from a merely methodological and logical operation into an ontological form of historical praxis. This move provides a new perspective for understanding the epistemological turn of Western Marxism.*

Keywords: Value-relevance, Class standpoint, Reification, Historization, Heinrich Rickert.

1. Introduction

In debates on the foundations of the historical sciences at the turn of the twentieth century, the concept of relevance (*Beziehung*) gradually emerged as a key category for explaining how historical meaning is constituted. Neo-Kantian thinkers, most notably Heinrich Rickert, sought to resolve the crisis of historical relativism through the principle of value-relevance. According to this principle, historical phenomena become objects of scientific knowledge insofar as they are related to a horizon of values. Historical cognition is therefore structured by a normative act of selection, which establishes methodological order within the otherwise limitless multiplicity of empirical reality.

Interpretations of Georg Lukács have generally oscillated between two positions. The rupture thesis treats Lukács as breaking decisively with Neo-Kantianism, while the continuity thesis emphasizes the persistence of Neo-Kantian influences within his thought. Both approaches, however, overlook a decisive problem: the transformation of the structure of relevance itself. Whether defending Neo-Kantian methodology or criticizing Lukács's Marxism, these interpretations typically assume that relevance refers to a value-projection by a knowing subject onto an external historical object. This assumption presupposes a neutral observer and an abstract subjectivity, thereby obscuring the possibility that relevance itself is grounded in the structural conditions of social being. For this reason, Rickert's principle of value-relevance, while designed to overcome relativism, ultimately fails to account for the socio-historical presuppositions on which it depends.

Lukács's intervention consists not in rejecting the principle of value-relevance but in historicizing it. What appears in Neo-Kantianism as a transcendental condition of cognition is reinterpreted as a positional relation generated within social practice. In this transformation, the concept of class standpoint emerges as the historically concrete form of

value-relevance: the subject is no longer an external observer but a constitutive moment within social relations. The shift thus marks a transition from epistemology to historical ontology. Relevance ceases to function merely as a methodological principle governing the selection of historical objects; it becomes the structural form through which historical praxis itself is articulated.

From this perspective, Lukács's critique does not stand outside Neo-Kantianism but radicalizes its internal problem. By exposing the ontological dimension implicit in the principle of relevance, Lukács transforms value-relevance through the critique of reification into a structure of social being. The concept of class standpoint therefore does not replace value-relevance; it historicizes it.

2. The Structure of the Principle of Relevance: Value-Relevance as a Mechanism of Epistemological Selection

In Neo-Kantian discussions on the foundations of the historical sciences, the principle of value-relevance formulated by Heinrich Rickert constitutes a key concept for understanding the generation of historical meaning. Rickert argues that historical objects are not defined through causal laws or natural properties; rather, they acquire significance through their relevance to a horizon of values [1]. In other words, history consists in the selective grasp of those events that stand in a meaningful relevance to values.

Structurally, value-relevance first appears as a principle of selection. For Heinrich Rickert, reality itself is understood as an infinite multiplicity, and the historian can neither describe nor meaningfully attempt to describe every detail of what has occurred in the past. Consequently, the historian requires a criterion by which to determine which states and events are “essential” (*wesentlich*) in their individuality; he must possess a principle for selecting what is historically significant [2]. The task of the historical sciences, therefore, is to extract from

this multiplicity those individual objects that possess cultural significance. In this context, values do not appear as empirical facts but as a normative standpoint that distinguishes essential from non-essential elements and thereby determines which contents deserve inclusion in historical narration [3]. Accordingly, relation is not an intrinsic property of the object itself but a form of relevance imposed upon the object by the subject in the act of cognition. This implies that historical meaning is not inherent in facts but is constituted through a relevance introduced by the knowing subject.

Furthermore, value-relevance also implies a methodological principle of individualization. Unlike the natural sciences, which explain phenomena through general laws, the historical sciences aim to grasp the unique significance of individual events, and this uniqueness is defined precisely through their relevance to values. For this reason, Heinrich Rickert is able to provide a normative foundation for historical knowledge while avoiding historical relativism: as long as the horizon of values is assumed to possess supra-empirical validity, historical selection is no longer arbitrary [4]. Rickert therefore argues that, provided the historian refrains from making non-historical value judgments and describes the past solely in accordance with these normative and universally valid cultural values, historical narration depends entirely on the accuracy of the empirical material and thereby attains the “highest objectivity” (höchste Objektivität) possible within an empiricist framework [5]. At the same time, this solution establishes a specific conception of the subject: the subject is understood as a knowing subject capable of selecting and relating elements of reality from the standpoint of values.

It is precisely at this point that the deeper structural feature of value-relevance becomes apparent: it presupposes an external relevance between the subject and history. In Heinrich Rickert, value-relevance is initially introduced from the outside. As Sammlung Merzler notes, “in Rickert, external value-relevance constitutes the starting point for the construction of historical concepts and thereby makes possible the transcendental constitution (transzendente Konstitution) of historical objects. At the same time, this form of value-relevance incorporates a consideration of the conditioned character of historical knowledge, insofar as concrete subject-matters of interest (Sachinteressen) already determine from the outset how historical objects are selected and understood.” [6] The subject, from the standpoint of values, “directs itself toward” historical objects, yet it is not conceived as a constitutive part of historical relations themselves. In other words, relevance here is conceived as a logical operation, rather than as a relevance of being. Historical meaning thus appears as the result of the subject’s selective activity rather than as the immanent unfolding of the historical process itself. This structure allows the historical sciences to preserve both normativity and objectivity, but it simultaneously places the subject in a position analogous to that of an observer.

This extrinsic structure of correlation engenders a latent tension. While value-relevance dictates which objects can qualify as historical ones, the validity of value itself remains an underspecified problem: value must be capable of exerting an effect on reality, that is, sifting essential elements from an infinite reality to constitute the objects of history and science.

Why, then, is the subject able to comprehend history from a specific value-standpoint?

The subject is able to understand history because historical objects and the historian (the knowing subject) are connected through a shared “world of meaning and values.” [7] In Heinrich Rickert, the historian is also a member of culture. When writing the history of his own cultural sphere, the historian shares with the historical objects a set of cultural values. As long as the knowing subject can comprehend any given value, he can, in principle, understand the values pursued by historical agents and thereby reconstruct history objectively. Yet this history is not a product of human subjective arbitrariness. Historical inquiry necessarily presupposes the existence of some absolutely valid, supra-empirical values [8]. This transcendence means that, as subjects, we cannot directly observe these values in experience; we can only relate them, more or less closely, to the normative cultural values presupposed by the historian [9]. Consequently, in Rickert, the knowing subject is stripped of practical engagement with reality and becomes a purely “intuitive/contemplative” (Kontemplation) subject [10]. In other words, the subject is conceived as a knowing subject who transcends concrete historical contexts, and the relevance between subject and reality therefore assumes an abstract character. This implies that, although historical meaning gains a methodological foundation through value-relevance, the position of the subject within history itself remains unspecified.

Therefore, we can say that while value-relevance successfully establishes a foundational epistemology for the historical sciences, it simultaneously introduces a structural limitation: relevance is understood as an external relation imposed by the subject upon the object, rather than as an intrinsic relation between subject and history. This limitation does not immediately undermine the principle’s validity as a methodological guideline, but it raises a crucial theoretical question for subsequent reflection, namely, that by understanding “relevance” differently, it ceases to be merely an epistemic operation and becomes a structural form of the subject’s existence within history. It is precisely against this backdrop that the reinterpretation of the principle of relevance acquires its philosophical necessity. Yet because value-relevance, as a selection mechanism, possesses an external structure and inherent tension, any attempt to overcome the abstraction of the subject entails a redefinition of “relevance” itself. This task will be further developed in the next section through an analysis of the problem of the abstract subject.

3. The Crisis of the Abstract Subject: From the Neutral Observer to the Subject’s Social Position

In Rickert’s theoretical framework, the subject is conceived as a knowing subject capable of relating reality from a standpoint of values. This subject does not take its concrete historical situation as a premise but is understood as a bearer of a methodological stance. It is in this sense that the subject appears as a “neutral observer”: it confers meaning on objects through a horizon of values, yet it is not conceived as a constituent moment within the network of historical relations.

This structure of the subject contains a profound tension. Once the subject is posited as capable of selecting among different value perspectives, it seems necessarily to occupy a position transcending concrete social relations. In other words, the subject presupposed by value-relevance possesses a degree of abstraction: it is not defined by particular historical conditions but characterized by its formal capacity. While this abstract subject secures the normativity of historical cognition, it simultaneously obscures the question of the subject's own historical existence, that is, how the subject can exist within history and participate in historical processes.

It is precisely at this point that Lukács's analysis provides a decisive theoretical turn. Lukács argues that Neo-Kantian value-relevance preserves a rigid opposition between the "transcendental subject of knowledge" and the "empirical object to be known", reducing the subject to a mere observer (kontemplatives Verhalten) and turning history into inert facts and abstract values detached from reality [11]. For Lukács, a pervasive form of ideology in modern society consists in the abstraction of social relations, presenting them as objective structures independent of the subject [12]. In his analysis of the phenomenon of reification, formal rationality and abstract thought are understood as ideological expressions of specific social relations: when social relations appear through exchange as calculable and comparable forms, the subject tends to conceive of itself as an observer facing objective structures. Consequently, the stance of neutral observation ceases to be merely an epistemological assumption and is revealed as a form of consciousness with social roots.

From this perspective, the abstract subject structure on which value-relevance depends can be reinterpreted. The subject's ability to relate to historical objects in a neutral manner does not stem from a supra-historical standpoint, but from the tendency of social structures themselves to produce an abstract form of subjectivity. In this form, the individual experiences social relations as external objects while conceiving of themselves as a subject who knows and evaluates these objects. In other words, neutrality is not a purely logical feature but a socially mediated experiential structure.

This analysis does not imply that the principle of value-relevance loses methodological validity; rather, it reveals its implicit presupposition: relation is understood as an external relation of the subject to the object because the subject is assumed not to belong to the historical structures it observes. Lukács explicitly notes that bourgeois epistemology (for example, Kant's method) defines the subject as "something that can never become an object," that is, an "unbeteiligter Zuschauer" (uninvolved spectator) [13]. From this, it is clear that the epistemological framework established by value-relevance is closely tied to a specific subject schema, in which the subject is conceived as a bearer of a standpoint capable of judging independently of concrete social relations. Once, however, the subject is reinterpreted as an existential participant in social relations, this external structure of relation begins to unravel.

To illustrate this epistemological limitation of situating the subject outside historical structures, Georg Lukács draws on Ernst Bloch's apt metaphor of the "landscape". When nature

is treated as a landscape, it presupposes a "spatial distance" between the observer and nature, that is, the observer stands outside the landscape [14]. Lukács argues that bourgeois historiography approaches history in a similar way, adopting an aesthetic or contemplative stance that positions the subject outside the historical process. This inevitably produces what Bloch calls a "harmful space" (schädlicher Raum) between the knowing subject and historical objects, preventing the subject from grasping the true connections of history from within. This isolated reality leads to the atomization and externalization of historical objects. Since the subject is presupposed to stand outside the historical process, historical objects, in bourgeois science, whether vulgar economics or historicism, degenerate into isolated, immutable "facts" or monads (Monaden). From this perspective, not only is the relation between subject and object external, but the relations among these historical monads themselves are also "external to them", relying solely on contingent, subjective Value-Relevance to be pieced together externally [15].

Lukács further critiques Rickert's attempt to eliminate the historian's subjective arbitrariness through cultural values. Rickert maintains that as long as the historian refers to culturally recognized values of their community, their account remains objective. Lukács points out that this simply transfers subjectivity to the standard used to measure objectivity itself, that is, the cultural values [16]. As a result, these so-called cultural values become, for the historian, "thing-in-itself" (Ding an sich) that cannot be verified or known. The subject, therefore, cannot understand how these values are generated within historical practice and is forced to treat the given values as eternal measures for evaluating equally given, inert facts.

Therefore, the critical issue that Lukács raises is not the rejection of the principle of relation, but the reframing of a more fundamental question: the subject is not an external observer but a participant in social relations, that is, the subject exists as a historical participant and "identical subject-object". Lukács argues that, to truly overcome this rigidity, the subject's identity must be transformed: from a "spectator" to a "participant and creator" of social relations, that is, a practical subject. In dialectics, the subject is no longer an unchanging observer before objective reality and the dialectic of concepts (Zuschauer); the dialectical process unfolds essentially between subject and object [17]. This raises a decisive question: in the process that unfolds between subject and object, can relation still be understood as a relevance imposed by the subject upon the object, or must it be reinterpreted as the subject's positional relation within social structures? This question marks a shift in theoretical focus, from the conditions of knowledge to the conditions of the subject's existence.

Although the principle of value-relevance provides a methodological standard for historical selection, it does not explain how the subject acts as a historical being. If relation is no longer understood as the observer's orientation toward the object, but as the subject's positioning within the social whole, the principle of relation itself may acquire a new ontological significance. It is precisely at this turning point that the categorical shift from value-relevance to class standpoint becomes a theoretically intelligible path.

4. The Ontological Reinterpretation of Relation: From Value-Relevance to the Class Standpoint

The principle of value-relevance establishes an epistemic structure centered on selection by conceiving historical meaning as a relation between the subject and values, while simultaneously presupposing an abstract observer-subject. Once the subject is reinterpreted as a being situated within social relations, however, the principle of relevance can no longer be understood merely as an external epistemic operation; it must instead be redefined as a form of relation between the subject and the historical structure in which it is embedded. It is precisely at this theoretical turning point that Georg Lukács's concept of class standpoint can be understood as an ontological reinterpretation of the principle of relevance.

First, from a structural perspective, value-relevance implies that the subject, proceeding from a normative standpoint, incorporates objects into a relation of meaning. In the theory of Heinrich Rickert, empirical reality, comprising both nature and the objective facts of history, is in itself meaningless and unrelated to values [18]. Values, by contrast, belong to a non-empirical and transcendent sphere: they do not exist (existieren) but rather hold validity (gelten). The subject must therefore, through an "act of meaning-bestowal" (Akt-sinn), combine values as form with empirical facts as content, thereby enabling otherwise blind objects to acquire meaning (Sinn) and to become cultural goods (Kulturgüter) or historical individuals [19]. In this context, relevance appears as a form of intentional orientation: the subject directs itself toward the object and confers historical meaning upon it through value criteria. Subject and object remain logically distinct, and relevance functions as a methodological operation occurring between them.

In the theoretical framework of Lukács, however, class standpoint does not mean that the subject chooses a particular interpretive perspective; rather, it refers to the subject's position within the totality of social relations. Lukács firmly rejects the identification of class consciousness with subjective ideas in the empiricist or psychological sense. He explicitly states that class consciousness "is neither the psychological consciousness of individual proletarians nor the mass-psychological consciousness of the proletariat as a whole, but the meaning that becomes conscious of the class's historical position." [20] This implies that class standpoint is the subject's true grasp of its own objective situation within the network of objective social relations. It is a form of "ascribed" (zugerechnet) consciousness, that is, the thoughts and feelings that necessarily correspond to a class's objective position when individuals are able to fully comprehend their specific objective conditions of life and the interests that arise from them with regard to the structure of society as a whole [21]. In other words, the subject does not understand history by choosing a standpoint; rather, it is drawn into the historical process by virtue of the standpoint it occupies. Accordingly, relevance is transformed from an external relation into an internal one.

This transformation can be understood as a fundamental change in the structure of relevance. If, in the case of value-relevance, the subject establishes a relevance to the

object through selection, then in the case of class standpoint the relation between the subject and the social totality is not established through choice but is experienced as a given condition of social existence.

In Heinrich Rickert's account, value-relevance is a purely theoretical act. The subject distinguishes the "essential" from the "non-essential" by relating certain parts of reality to specific universal values, thereby constructing "historical individuals" [22]. This means that the formation of historical objects depends on a subject endowed with autonomous will, who acknowledges and adopts a position (Stellungnahme) toward normative values. Within this framework, the relevance between the subject and history is established through the subject's selection of historical material and attribution of value.

For Georg Lukács, however, the relation between class consciousness and the social totality is not established through individual value preferences or subjective choice; rather, it is determined by the class's objective position within the process of production [23]. Lukács cites Marx's statement in *The Holy Family* to emphasize that the fundamental basis of class standpoint and class consciousness lies in its being: "The question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment regards as its aim. The question is what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being (Sein), it will historically be compelled to do [24]." Lukács stresses that class consciousness is by no means the psychological consciousness of individual members of a class, nor the aggregate of their subjectively "chosen" ideas. Rather, it is "ascribed class consciousness" [25]. It refers to the rationally appropriate response that emerges when individuals grasp their specific historical situation and its implications for the structure of society as a whole. Such responses are objectively "ascribed" or "assigned" to particular typical positions within the process of production. The connection between the subject and the social totality therefore lies in the "objective possibility" (objektive Möglichkeit) contained within its given class position in the course of historical development.

In comparison with Heinrich Rickert's principle of value-relevance, the subject no longer stands before history but belongs to history; it no longer directs itself toward society from an external standpoint but exists as a moment within social relations themselves. This means that relevance is no longer merely a form of cognitive activity. For Lukács, relation becomes a mode of being itself. In value-relevance, relations are maintained by a subject external to the object through acts of selection. In Lukács's framework, by contrast, the proletarian subject is itself a product and object of the social totality, namely, the capitalist process of production. Its relation to the social totality is determined by its given fate as a commodity. It does not need to "choose" to establish this relation, because the objective economic laws of capitalism have already thrown it into the deepest core of this structure; its historical task is simply to awaken, through practice, the class consciousness corresponding to its given conditions of existence.

Furthermore, the reason class standpoint can assume this ontological function lies in the specific reflexive structure it

reveals. In the view of Lukács, reification is not merely a misuse of categories at the epistemological level, but a structural closure in the ontological sense of social being. The proletariat's transition toward the "identical subject-object" does not begin from an external moral appeal; rather, its logical starting point lies in the dual character of its social existence. Within the capitalist process of production, the proletariat is at once a fully reified "object" (a commodity) and the potential "subject" that sustains this very process. The crucial element in this transformation from consciousness to practice lies in the deconstructive power inherent in the act of cognition itself. Unlike Heinrich Rickert's "theoretical value-relevance", which never alters the properties of the object and merely performs a logical selection among them, proletarian class consciousness manifests itself as a form of self-consciousness endowed with practical force. Lukács incisively argues that when the worker becomes aware of their essence as a commodity, this act of cognition itself already transforms the objective structure of the object of knowledge.

For Lukács, a class is able to attain knowledge of the social totality not because it occupies a detached or transcendent standpoint, but because its own situation concentrates the fundamental contradictions of social relations. The proletariat gains access to the truth of the totality precisely because it stands at the deepest point of capitalist reification. Lukács cites Marx to emphasize that in the proletariat the deprivation of humanity reaches its extreme: "all the conditions of life of contemporary society are concentrated in the proletariat in their most inhuman culmination (in ihrer unmenschlichsten Spitze zusammengefaßt sind)" [26]. For the proletariat, recognizing its own class position is a matter of life and death, and this position can only be truly grasped through knowledge of the entire social totality [27]. The proletariat's self-knowledge therefore necessarily coincides with knowledge of society as a whole. In this way, the proletariat becomes the "identical subject-object" of history: it is at once the object of its own knowledge (the oppressed within the social structure) and the subject of that knowledge (the agent capable of transforming society through that knowledge). Within this historical situation, theory and practice are unified.

In this context, the notion of the identical subject-object is no longer an abstract dialectical term, but the site where theory and practice achieve their ultimate unity. The proletariat is the subject of knowledge insofar as, through its own condition, it apprehends the truth of the social totality; yet it is simultaneously the object of knowledge, since the object of its cognition is precisely the social existence in which it itself is embedded. Through this form of practically oriented self-knowledge, relevance (*Beziehung*) completes its final transformation, from a logical mediation into a historical driving force. Correct class consciousness thus ceases to be an external guide to action; it becomes the immanent moment through which the historical process awakens to itself and transforms itself.

Thus, the class standpoint can be understood as the historicalized form of the principle of Value-Relevance. Both concern the relation between subject and meaning, yet their structural logic undergoes a fundamental transformation. Within the framework of Value-Relevance, meaning is established through the subject's act of selection; within the

framework of class standpoint, meaning is disclosed through the position the subject occupies. The former understands relevance as a methodological relation, whereas the latter interprets it as an ontological relation. This difference can therefore be understood as a categorical displacement: the same problem is reformulated at different theoretical levels.

This displacement also implies a profound transformation in the concept of the subject. The subject shifts from a purely formalized, transhistorical epistemological subject, which situated in contemplation and structured by a dualistic opposition, to a concrete and historical collective subject, in which the unity of subject and object is realized through revolutionary praxis.

First, the "formalized subject" of Neo-Kantianism is transformed into a "historical collective subject." In Heinrich Rickert's epistemology, the subject is not an empirical, psychological, flesh-and-blood individual; rather, it is an "empty form" from which all objective content has been abstracted, or a "consciousness in general" (*Bewusstsein überhaupt*) [28]. This epistemological subject exists in opposition to the objective world. Its function is to make logical judgments and, through Value-Relevance, to organize the chaotic empirical reality into meaningful historical concepts [29]. In other words, within the framework of Value-Relevance, the subject's role is to establish standards of meaning; the subject is conceived as a knower capable of judging between different value horizons. Within the framework of class standpoint, however, bourgeois thought, including that of Kant and Rickert, remains confined to the isolated and individual level. Such an individual subject, when confronted with a reified objective world that appears to be governed by quasi-natural laws, can only become a powerless spectator [30]. Georg Lukács moves beyond this individualism by redefining the subject as a macro-level "collective subject", namely the social class (in particular, the proletariat) [31]. For Lukács, the individual can never become the measure of all things; only a class can enter into a practical and revolutionary relation with reality at the level of the totality. Accordingly, the subject is no longer the legislator of meaning but the bearer of historical relations. The consciousness of the subject is not an external determination imposed upon the object; rather, it is the expression of the subject's own conditions of social existence. Cognition itself is thus reinterpreted as the unfolding of a relation of being.

Second, Rickert's "subject-object dualism" is transformed into the "identical subject-object of history". In Rickert's system, an insurmountable distance is maintained between the cognizing subject, the cognized object, and the transcendent values. The subject understands the object through value-relevance, but this remains a theoretical and contemplative act where the subject must never be conflated with the object [32]. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács incorporates Hegelian dialectics to propose that the proletariat is the "identical subject-object of history" [33]. The proletariat is the object of the historical process of capitalism (as alienated and reified commodities); simultaneously, upon its awakening, it becomes the subject that creates and transforms this very process [34]. When the proletariat recognizes itself within the social totality, the cognizing subject coincides with the cognized object, thereby

shattering the rigid subject-object dualism inherent in bourgeois thought.

Third, Rickert's theoretical intuition is transformed into revolutionary praxis. Rickert's value-relevance is a purely theoretical and methodological tool. When a historian or scientist employs value-relevance, they are merely distinguishing between the essential and the non-essential in thought to formulate historical concepts; such an act never alters the object itself in reality. It remains a form of theoretical contemplation [35]. For Lukács, however, proletarian class consciousness is by no means a passive reflection or theoretical contemplation, but rather a praxis capable of transforming its own object [36]. Lukács points out that when the worker recognizes themselves as a commodity, this self-recognition in itself brings about a substantive change in the object of cognition (i.e., the objective structure) [37]. Consequently, proletarian class consciousness is the ethics of the proletariat, a unity of theory and praxis. The attainment of class consciousness is synonymous with the seizure of social leadership.

Fourth, Lukács's concept of the subject entails a fundamental transformation of consciousness. For Lukács, class consciousness transcends mere psychological consciousness; it does not refer to the actual psychological states of individual workers within the proletariat. Drawing upon Max Weber's concept of objective possibility, Lukács proposes that class consciousness is an "imputed" (zugerechnet) consciousness, the rational and totalizing thoughts and feelings a class would possess if it were to fully comprehend its objective historical situation [38]. In Lukács's view, the bourgeois scientific and philosophical methods of Rickert and others (such as the separation of fact and value) are themselves reflections of the phenomenon of capitalist reification (Verdinglichung) within the realm of consciousness [39]. The task of Lukács's new subject (proletarian class consciousness) is precisely to pierce the fetishistic veil that disguises relations between people as relations between things, thereby re-dissolving stagnant things into the living process of human society.

This fundamental transformation of consciousness also explains why, in Lukács's framework, the consciousness of reification is understood as an object endowed with real efficacy. If consciousness were merely the subject's cognition of an object, then the recognition of reification would not alter the social structure. However, if consciousness is understood as the self-recognition of social relations, then this recognition itself becomes an integral part of the transformation of those relations. Here, relevance no longer remains at a logical level; instead, it manifests as an immanent moment of the historical process. It is in this sense that the principle of relevance acquires a practical dimension.

In summary, the transition from "value-relevance" to "class standpoint" is not a simple substitution of concepts, but rather an ontological transposition of the correlative structure. The shift from Rickert's value-relevance to Lukács's class consciousness marks the transformation of the subject from a "logical/formal phantom", posited merely to guarantee the objectivity of knowledge, into a historical and practical entity tasked with shattering the reified structures of capitalism and achieving human liberation. This transition also stands as a

definitive hallmark of Lukács trajectory, as he moved away from his early subjective idealism and Neo-Kantian background toward Western Marxism, thereby establishing his dialectics of praxis [40]. Relevance is thus transformed from a selective relationship between subject and object into a positional relationship of the subject within the social totality; it evolves from a condition of cognition into a condition of existence. This transposition not only alters the relationship between the subject and history but also redefines the very significance of the cognitive act: cognition is no longer merely an understanding of history, but becomes a form of history's self-understanding. Through this transformation, the concept of relevance, originally appearing as an epistemological principle, acquires ontological depth, providing a theoretical foundation for comprehending the intrinsic link between cognition and praxis.

5. The Historicization of Transcendental Structures: The Ontological Significance of the Principle of Relevance

The theoretical transition from value-relevance to class standpoint signifies Lukács's reimagining of the preconditions for historical science. Value-relevance can establish criteria for selecting historical significance at a methodological level because it presupposes that the subject confronts reality from a certain normative perspective. However, once the subject is re-envisioned as a being embedded within social relations, this presupposition is no longer self-evident. Consequently, the focus shifts from "how historical cognition is possible" to "how the subject exists within history", thereby investing the principle of relevance with new philosophical meaning.

From this vantage point, we can understand class standpoint as a historicized treatment of transcendental structures. Within the Neo-Kantian framework, Rickert sought to establish an objective foundation for the historical and cultural sciences (Kulturwissenschaften). He proposed that, when faced with an infinitely complex empirical reality, the historian must employ theoretical value-relevance to distinguish the essential from the non-essential in history [41]. This theoretical value-relevance differs from subjective valuation; rather, it examines the object in relation to universally recognized cultural values. For Rickert, such a system of values based on trans-historical or transcendental forms provides objective criteria for the historian's conceptual formation. Lukács, however, contends that while Neo-Kantianism attempts to eliminate individual subjectivity by appealing to cultural values, it merely displaces that subjectivity into the evaluative standard itself. The cultural values valid for their community upon which Rickert relies are, in fact, the reified facts of a specific social class (the bourgeoisie) formed in a specific historical period, treated as eternal natural laws or supra-historical values [42]. This method reduces objects into isolated, rigid monads, leaving the historian trapped in immediacy (Unmittelbarkeit) and intuitive contemplation, unable to grasp the totality of historical transformation.

To overcome the impasse of Neo-Kantianism at the level of intuition, Lukács replaces the ahistorical, purely contemplative transcendental subject with a collective subject

practicing within history, namely, the social class [43]. He profoundly notes that although the objective reality of capitalist society remains “the same” in its immediacy for both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the “categories of mediation” (Vermittlungskategorien) used to elevate this immediacy into consciousness are fundamentally different, owing to the disparate positions these two classes occupy within the same economic process [44]. In Rickert’s system, categories (such as value-relevance) are “empty forms” abstracted from content. Lukács, however, shatters this contemplative epistemology through the category of mediation (Vermittlung). Here, class standpoint effectively supplants the Kantian “transcendental categories,” becoming the ontological precondition that determines the extent to which the subject can discern totality. Categories are no longer pure logical forms detached from content; rather, they are the forms of being, determinations of existence (Daseinsformen, Existenzbestimmungen) of a specific social existence [45]. The social being of a class determines the degree of totality it can perceive. For instance, the class standpoint of the bourgeoisie objectively dictates its inability to penetrate the reified appearance of capitalist society, leaving it ensnared in the dualisms of fact and value, and subject and object.

Consequently, the principle of relevance, originally posited as a condition of cognition, is reinterpreted as a structural relationship within historical praxis. This implies that the subject does not relate to history through abstract judgment, but is rather embroiled in the historical process by virtue of its position within the social totality. In this sense, relevance is no longer merely a normative perspective; it becomes a fundamental form of social existence. Accordingly, the act of cognition is no longer understood as an external grasping of a pre-given object, but rather as the self-manifestation of social relations within the subject.

This transition simultaneously redefines the relationship between cognition and praxis. In the framework of value-relevance, the task of cognition is to endow the object with meaning through value-standards, while praxis remains external to theory. Conversely, in the framework of class standpoint, cognition itself constitutes an integral part of the movement of social relations, as the subject’s understanding of its situation directly participates in the historical process. Lukács contends that when the proletariat becomes the subject of cognition, the object of cognition is no longer an external world alien to the subject. The proletariat is both the object of labor (as a commodity) within the capitalist production process and the subject that creates history. Consequently, the proletariat’s self-recognition of its class position is, at once, the objective cognition of the capitalist social totality as a whole [46]. The unity of theory and praxis is, in effect, the other side of this socio-historical position of the proletariat: from its standpoint, the proletariat becomes simultaneously the subject and object of its own cognition (the identical subject-object of history) [47]. This marks the most fundamental change in the relationship between cognition and praxis: for the proletariat, cognition is no longer a pure reflection detached from praxis; rather, a proper and correct consciousness is itself a praxis that transforms its object.

When a worker recognizes their essence as a commodity, this recognition becomes practical, substantively altering the object of cognition within the objective structure. Proletarian consciousness is capable of elevating the positive and novel elements, arising from the contradictions of capitalist development, into consciousness, thereby transforming abstract possibility into concrete actuality. Thus, proletarian class consciousness is not an ideological cloak masking its goals, but its goal and its weapon itself. Through this fusion of cognition and praxis, the proletariat is able to shatter the reign of reification.

In summary, Rickert’s principle of value-relevance is essentially a logic of selection based on a contemplative stance. While it methodologically establishes the individuality of historical objects, it does so at the cost of maintaining a subject-object dualism, relegating the subject to the abstract position of a neutral observer and reducing historical meaning to the result of external projection. Lukács, however, reduces this originally transcendental relevance to a positional relationship within social praxis. By introducing the category of mediation and the doctrine of the identical subject-object, Lukács demonstrates that proletarian class consciousness is not a passive reflection of reality, but rather the self-awakening of its objective social situation; such a cognitive act in itself constitutes a “revolutionary praxis” that transforms history. This categorical transposition marks the complete historicization of transcendental structures. The logical forms once detached from content are transformed, in Lukács’s context, into concrete forms of being (Daseinsformen). Consequently, the principle of relevance is no longer merely an epistemological tool for distinguishing the essential from the non-essential, but has become the structural form through which historical praxis manifests itself.

By historicizing the cognizing subject into a class situated at the center of the relations of production, Lukács bridges the chasm between cognition and action: correct theory is no longer an external guide for action, but an immanent component of revolutionary praxis; likewise, praxis is no longer a blind impulse, but the objectification of self-consciousness within history. The principle of relevance thus acquires a practical dimension, wherein cognition is not merely a way of interpreting the world, but a moment of the world’s self-understanding. Therefore, while the principle of relevance manifests in its initial form as a structure of logical selection, it appears in its historicized reinterpretation as a structure of existential relations. This transition reveals a deeper philosophical significance: so-called conditions of cognition are rooted in concrete social relations rather than in transcendental forms. By understanding relevance as the subject’s mode of orientation within the historical totality, epistemological problems are here transformed into ontological ones. Historical meaning no longer depends solely on a normative perspective, but on the movement of social relations themselves. This shift not only lays a profound philosophical foundation for the Marxist conception of history but also provides lasting theoretical insights for reflecting on the intrinsic relationship between the subject and history in modern society.

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