

Ethics and Social Transformation in Marxist Thought

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between ethics and social transformation in Marxist thought, analyzing how morality is historically conditioned and instrumentalized in class struggle. By critically examining alienation and dominant hegemony, it investigates the possibility of a revolutionary ethics that contributes to social emancipation. The objective of this study is to explore the formulation of a transformative and libertarian ethics within the context of a post-industrial society. Through the analysis of different ethical conceptions, particularly in Marxism and the philosophy of praxis, it seeks to understand how moral values are historically shaped and utilized in ideological disputes. Furthermore, it aims to examine the role of ethics in overcoming alienation and constructing a new social hegemony by exploring its intersections with politics, economy, and culture. This study concludes that ethics, from a Marxist perspective, is intrinsically linked to class struggle and the critique of dominant hegemony. Unlike normative conceptions, Marxist ethics is built through praxis, driven by the necessity of social transformation. By highlighting the ideological function of bourgeois morality in sustaining exploitation and alienation, the study reinforces the importance of constructing a new ethical hegemony oriented toward emancipation. In light of contemporary crises, the redefinition of human values emerges as an essential element for overcoming capitalism and building a just and solidaristic society.

Keywords: Ethics. Marxism. Alienation. Hegemony. Emancipation.

INTRODUCTION

In the intricate landscape of contemporary capitalist society, the interaction between ethics and politics emerges as a central axis of debate. As ethical and political challenges intensify, the need for a deep analysis of these relationships becomes increasingly urgent. This article explores the possibility of cultivating a robust and liberatory ethics within the context of a post-industrial society, aiming to renew the promises of freedom, justice, and equality.

The justification for this study lies in the necessity of understanding the role of ethics within Marxist theory, particularly in a scenario of growing social and political crisis. In the face of contemporary capitalism's contradictions, reflecting on moral values and their function in the class struggle becomes essential to envision alternatives to the prevailing structure. Moreover, the analysis of Marxist thought allows for a deeper critique of dominant morality, revealing its ideological mechanisms and its limitations in building a truly emancipated society.

The article is structured into three parts. The first part addresses the foundations of ethics, analyzing its historical evolution and key philosophical contributions, with emphasis on Aristotle, Kant, Spinoza, and Moore, as well as Luhmann's distinction between ethics and morality.

The second part examines the relationship between ethics, alienation, and hegemony¹ in Marxist thought, highlighting the contributions of Marx, Engels, Gramsci, Lukács, and contemporary authors such as Fraser and

¹ In Marxism, hegemony is not limited to the coercive control of the State, but also manifests itself in the construction of ideological and cultural consensus. In this way, the dominant class imposes its worldview, values and ideologies so that they are accepted as natural or universal by other social classes (Guimarães, 2023).

Honneth. Finally, the third part discusses the political and social implications of this revolutionary ethics, reflecting on its viability in overcoming capitalism and constructing a new social order.

This analytical structure allows for a broad understanding of ethics as a historical and social phenomenon, situating it within the context of political struggles and structural transformations of society. By articulating theory and practice, the study aims to demonstrate how Marxist ethics differs from traditional conceptions and presents itself as an instrument of emancipation and social transformation.

Ethics, Conflicts, And Society

Throughout history, ethics has been a subject of reflection for various philosophers, evolving according to social, political, and economic contexts. This section explores the ethical conceptions of Aristotle, Kant, Spinoza, Gramsci, and Marx, analyzing their implications for morality, politics, and the struggle for social transformation.

Ethics is understood as the means through which society and culture determine values, distinguishing what is considered negative—such as crime and vice—from what is identified as positive—such as good and virtue. Being intersubjective and social, ethics is linked to historical, political, economic, and cultural conditions that shape morality (Chauí, 2000).

Aristotle (2016) argues that the ultimate purpose of human life is *eudaimonia*, understood as happiness or complete fulfillment. This state is achieved through virtue, which can be moral—developed through habit—or intellectual—acquired through learning. Virtue, in turn, lies in the balance between extremes, such as courage, which exists between cowardice and recklessness. Furthermore, Aristotle emphasizes the central role of reason in guiding ethical conduct and reinforces the connection between ethics and politics, as individuals can only reach their full potential within a well-organized society (Aristotle, 2016).

Kant's ethical conception is based on rationality as the universal principle of morality. "Good will" is the only unconditional value, and morality consists of acting out of duty rather than interest or inclination. Kantian ethics is governed by the categorical imperative, which states that an action is only valid if its maxim can be universalized as a law (Kant, 2014).

The autonomy of the will, in turn, defines freedom as the ability to act according to rational, self-imposed principles rather than being driven by external impulses. Moreover, human dignity must be preserved, ensuring that each individual is treated as an end in themselves, never merely as a means to another's ends. Finally, Kant envisions a "kingdom of ends," in which all individuals participate in formulating moral laws, promoting an order based on reason and mutual respect (Kant, 2014).

Spinoza's ethics, on the other hand, is based on natural determinism, according to which everything follows the necessary order of nature, eliminating the traditional notion of free will. God and nature are a single infinite substance, and beings are its modes. The concept of *conatus*, or the striving to exist, underpins the pursuit of well-being, which is achieved through reason and knowledge (Spinoza, 2002).

For Spinoza, freedom is not to be confused with arbitrariness but consists of understanding the necessity of things. In the social sphere, he advocates for democracy and freedom of thought, valuing collective rationality. Furthermore, he rejects the notion of absolute good and evil, considering them relative to the preservation or weakening of the capacity for rational action (Spinoza, 2002).

Although ethics has a universal character within the context in which it is established, it transforms over time to adapt to cultural and historical changes. Morality, on the other hand, is defined as the set of norms and values that regulate individual behavior, influenced by social, historical, and cultural factors, which explains its variation according to circumstances (Chauí, 2000).

Moore (1903) rejects the definition of "good" based on natural properties, calling this attempt the "naturalistic fallacy." For him, "good" is a simple and indefinable concept, grasped through intuition. He also proposes the principle of organic units, according to which the moral value of a whole is not reducible to the sum of its parts.

Moreover, he criticizes hedonism and argues for the existence of multiple goods, such as art and relationships. Moore further distinguishes intrinsic value from moral correctness, asserting that the morality of actions should be evaluated based on their consequences.

Luhmann (1996), in turn, differentiates between morality and ethics by stating that morality consists of a set of rules that determine what is right or wrong in a society, being socially communicated and dependent on group acceptance. Ethics, on the other hand, corresponds to the reflection on these rules, analyzing how they change over time and how they are justified. In other words, while morality concerns the norms followed in daily life, ethics studies and questions these principles.

The combination of these perspectives reveals the complexity of the ethical debate throughout history². Aristotle links virtue to balance and *eudaimonia*, while Kant bases morality on reason and duty. Spinoza rejects the traditional notion of free will, conceiving freedom as the rational understanding of necessity.

Traditional ethics, represented by thinkers like Aristotle, Kant, and Spinoza, seeks universal moral principles based on reason, duty, or balance. Despite their differences, these views share the belief that morality transcends history. In contrast, Marxist ethics rejects this abstraction, arguing that moral values stem from social and economic relations. While Kantian ethics upholds absolute duty and human dignity, Marxism sees these as ideological constructs often used to justify domination.

Unlike timeless moral frameworks, Marxist ethics is rooted in historical materialism and class struggle. Marx and Engels assert that morality serves ruling class interests, legitimizing exploitation—a view echoed in Gramsci's critique of hegemony. However, rather than embracing full relativism, Marxist ethics advocates a revolutionary morality focused on overcoming alienation and constructing an emancipatory ethical hegemony.

Rather than proposing fixed moral norms, Marxism sees ethics as historically conditioned and shaped through revolutionary praxis. Lukács and Gramsci argue that true ethical transformation arises from restructuring society, not from abstract ideals. Thus, Marxist ethics goes beyond interpretation, positioning morality as a tool for political and ideological struggle aimed at social transformation.

In the realm of the philosophy of praxis, ethics reformulates historical materialism, opposing an abstract or universal morality. Its ethical conception arises from concrete action and social transformation (Gramsci, 1999).

In the debate on common sense and spontaneous philosophy, Gramsci identifies an ethical problem in the passivity of the masses toward dominant ideologies, emphasizing that true ethical evolution occurs when individuals become aware of their worldview and transform it. Thus, his ethics is intrinsically linked to emancipation and the critique of cultural domination, being inseparable from historical, material, and cultural conditions (Gramsci, 1999).

Every social organization requires ethical principles to ensure its cohesion and uniformity. However, these principles should have a universal scope, transcending particular interests. Ideally, politics should culminate in morality, resulting in coexistence where both would no longer be necessary. The tension between public and private morality reflects the structural inequalities of society. Furthermore, there is criticism of the lack of discipline and intellectual irresponsibility, highlighting the importance of rigorous self-criticism within cultural institutions (Gramsci, 1982).

² Conventional ethics preserves the moral values of the current social system, ensuring stability and legitimizing power structures without questioning inequalities. In contrast, Marxist ethics seeks social transformation, breaking with moral standards that sustain exploitation and alienation. In the 20th century, several movements illustrated these concepts. In the United States, the struggle for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s challenged the dominant morality that justified racial segregation, resulting in laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In China, the Revolution of 1949 implemented radical changes in production relations, applying Marxist ethics to build a new socialist morality. In Europe, the French Resistance (1940-44) fought Nazi-fascism and questioned political and economic structures that favored its rise. These events show that ethics can reinforce established norms or promote ruptures in search of collective emancipation (Hobsbawm, 1995).

Morality, therefore, should not be seen as an abstract dogma but as something that emerges from social and political practice. Cultural hegemony is strengthened through the construction of common ethical values, which are fundamental to consolidating the power of a social class. In this context, intellectuals, especially organic ones, play a crucial role in disseminating and legitimizing these values (Gramsci, 1982).

Moore critiques the reduction of the concept of "good" to natural properties, relying on moral intuition. Meanwhile, Luhmann differentiates morality as a normative system from ethics as its critical analysis. Together, these conceptions highlight that ethics is not fixed but evolves according to historical and cultural conditions.

Gramsci employs the dialectical method to connect the state, civil society, hegemony, ideology, and culture, seeking to reveal the mechanisms of domination that obscure the history of the subaltern. The state, resulting from the interaction between political and civil society, operates as an instrument of the ruling classes, making social mobilization difficult. Its structure aims to neutralize resistance and consolidate hegemony (Simionatto, 2009).

Beyond direct repression, the state acts through private institutions, such as major media outlets, which play a crucial role in maintaining consensus and legitimizing the concentration of wealth (Simionatto, 2009).

Gramsci (1996) understands ethics as historically conditioned, tied to cultural hegemony and the struggle for power. He rejects abstract morality, emphasizing its relationship with politics and economics. He criticizes the separation between ethics and politics, arguing that morality should be analyzed within the context of social transformations and the construction of a national-popular collective will.

Marx and Engels (1987) argue that morality does not manifest as a universal principle but rather as a historical construct that reflects the interests of the ruling classes, serving as a tool for legitimizing capitalist exploitation. Thus, they reject any notion of absolute morality, as moral values are determined by the material and structural conditions of society.

True human emancipation goes beyond mere economic changes, requiring the full development of individuals and the overcoming of the alienation imposed by the division of labor. The prevailing morality, derived from capitalist production relations, contributes to the perpetuation of the dominant ideology, hindering class consciousness and revolutionary transformation (Marx & Engels, 1987).

Dialectics is based on four essential principles: the interconnection of phenomena, the constant transformation and evolution of nature and society, the conversion of quantitative changes into qualitative ones, and the opposition between contradictory elements as the driving force of development. In historical terms, progress occurs through the conflict between classes with divergent interests, with these struggles driving revolutions and transforming modes of production (Stalin, 1940).

By emphasizing the interconnection of phenomena and the constant transformation of reality, dialectics establishes an intrinsic relationship with ethics, particularly concerning the evolution of norms and values over time.

Ethicity develops in class societies as a manifestation of collective values and norms, but its realization is conditioned by the socioeconomic structure. In Ancient Greece, this notion was restricted to the elite, excluding slaves and non-citizens, preventing its universalization. For Marx, labor is essential in shaping humanity and constructing ethnicity, while morality and law reflect class conflicts, functioning as instruments of the ruling class (Neto, 2011).

The interconnection between ethics and society extends from Aristotle's pursuit of *eudaimonia* to the Marxist critique of bourgeois morality. Ethics is not fixed but transforms according to historical conditions. Thus, understanding it requires considering its relationship with hegemony, ideology, and the structures of domination and resistance.

Ethics and Alienation: Marxist Critique of Bourgeois Morality

Marxism proposes a critical analysis of social and historical reality, emphasizing the interdependence between the individual and society. This section discusses the conceptions of Lukács, Marx, and other theorists regarding the relationship between ethics, ideology, and social transformation, exploring the limitations imposed by capitalism and the necessity of overcoming alienation.

The Marxist project seeks to analyze socio-historical reality with objective criteria, overcoming the dichotomy between the individual and society. Lukács highlights that social mediations shape traditions, customs, and ethics but argues that capitalism limits the construction of a truly social ethics by fragmenting human relations and perpetuating alienation. For him, only the abolition of capital—not internal reforms—can enable lasting ethical transformation. Under capitalism, social relations are shaped by the market, reducing interactions to mercantile exchanges that weaken genuine human values (Lessa, 2007).

Bourgeois ideology shapes an illusory consciousness among workers, making it essential to develop an ethics aimed at overcoming this alienation and mobilizing class struggle. Bourgeois morality is not neutral; rather, it functions as an ideological mechanism to preserve elite dominance, justifying inequality and the exploitation of wage labor (Marx & Engels, 1987).

Furthermore, social transformation cannot depend on reforms within the bourgeois state, as its institutions are structured to ensure the reproduction of capitalism. Thus, profound changes and the organization of the proletariat, in alliance with other exploited sectors, become indispensable for overcoming the capitalist system and constructing a new social order (Marx, 2016).

The proletarian revolution should not be seen as a mere ethical ideal but as a historical necessity to end exploitation. Private ownership of the means of production is identified as the primary cause of social inequalities, making it imperative to replace it with a system of collective and democratic control based on solidarity and proletarian internationalism (Marx & Engels, 1987).

The traditional Marxist view, which conceives of classes as fixed historical agents, is questioned by highlighting that class struggle cannot be directly deduced from production relations, as social identities are dynamic and mutable. In this context, the concept of hegemony becomes essential for understanding the social struggles of the 20th century, reinforcing the idea that no class or group has a predetermined role in social transformation (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

The political process is understood as the articulation of diverse social demands, in which political identities are not given a priori but constructed through alliances and variable meanings. Thus, hegemony should not be seen as an inevitable unfolding of economic structure but rather as a contingent relationship permeated by cultural, political, and discursive disputes. Consequently, the economy does not absolutely determine politics, as the struggle for hegemony occurs on multiple levels (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

The relationship between ethics and social transformation in Marxist thought is grounded in the critique of alienation and dominant hegemony. Lukács emphasizes alienation as a key barrier to revolutionary ethics, arguing that capitalism fragments class consciousness and reduces human relations to commodity exchanges, necessitating an ontological transformation through revolutionary praxis.

Gramsci situates ethics within the struggle for hegemony, asserting that a new morality must arise from the conscious political action of subaltern classes, guided by organic intellectuals. Laclau challenges traditional Marxism by highlighting that political identities are discursively constructed and contingent, with ethics emerging from ideological disputes rather than fixed economic structures. Together, these perspectives reveal that Marxist ethics evolves historically through struggles against alienation and domination, demanding not only structural change but also a redefinition of moral values to achieve social emancipation.

Marxism tends to conflate moral philosophy with social reform, rejecting the notion of universal morality and treating moral systems as products of material conditions and class interests. However, this approach often

results in a contradiction, as it simultaneously proclaims moral relativism while establishing absolute moral norms for revolution and socialism, creating theoretical incoherence (Kamenka, 1962).

Influenced by thinkers such as Rousseau, Kant, and German Romanticism, Marx initially adopted a utopian ethics, later overshadowed by materialist, Darwinist, and utilitarian approaches. Marxist socialism seeks to establish a "truly human morality" based on the end of alienation and the elimination of material conditions that perpetuate class conflict (Kamenka, 1962).

"Accumulation by dispossession" characterizes contemporary capitalist dynamics, contributing to the perpetuation of inequalities and further hindering the realization of ethical practices on a broader social scale. Capitalism continues to reconfigure itself in ways that deepen the exploitation of individuals and communities, making the struggle for collective ethics even more challenging under the dominance of capitalist production relations (Harvey, 2005).

Recognition theory offers a new perspective on Marxist ethics by emphasizing the struggle for recognition as a driving force for social justice. Honneth suggests that mutual recognition between social subjects could form the basis of a new ethics capable of transcending the limitations imposed by capitalism, promoting a sociability that values human dignity over market relations (Honneth, 1995).

These perspectives reinforce the need for an integrated and holistic approach when discussing ethics and politics in Marxism, highlighting the complexity of achieving a truly just and equitable society within a system dominated by capitalist logic.

The experience of the Paris Commune revealed workers' resistance to bourgeois morality, proposing a new ethics based on equality and collective management. This historical episode demonstrated that gradual reforms are insufficient to eliminate oppression. The model of workers' self-management implemented in the Commune served as the basis for the Marxist conception of the transition to communism through the dictatorship of the proletariat, ensuring that the distribution of goods and wealth was guided by social needs, and not by individual merit (Marx, 1986).

The critique of commodity fetishism exposes how capitalism conceals exploitation, widening inequalities and consolidating capitalist wealth through the appropriation of surplus value, dehumanizing workers and aggravating cyclical crises. This process reinforces the need to overcome capitalism, both politically and ethically (Marx, 1985).

The Marxist perspective rejects the idea of the neutrality of the bourgeois state and questions the supposed legal equality, which only covers up the structural inequalities of society. Instead, it proposes a model of social justice based on the contribution proportional to the capacity of each individual and on distribution according to collective needs, driven by the advancement of the revolutionary struggle (Marx, 2016).

A critical approach to social justice in capitalist contexts suggests that the struggle for equity must encompass not only economic redistribution, but also recognition and representation, essential elements for achieving full ethical justice. Thus, critical theory should encompass these three dimensions to effectively combat oppression in all its forms (Fraser, 2003).

Another relevant aspect is the role of the public sphere and democratic dialogue as means to achieve rational understandings and ethical consensus that respect the plurality of identities and interests within a society. In this sense, deliberative democracy offers a path to the realization of truly inclusive and emancipatory ethical practices (Habermas, 1996).

Contemporary theorists expand the Marxist debate by defending a multifaceted approach to confront the challenges of capitalism. The critique and the proposal for transformation go beyond overcoming capital, including changes in social, political and cultural relations. This integrated perspective seeks not only to challenge the dominant economic structure, but also to promote an ethical reconstruction of society, based on

equality and mutual respect. The dialogue with Fraser and Habermas reinforces the need for a continuous struggle for conditions that allow the full realization of the human being.

Georg Lukács, a Marxist philosopher, participated in the founding of the Soviet State and devoted himself to the study of ontology, analyzing the relationship between ethics and politics. Even witnessing the negative aspects of communism, he remained faithful to his ideals, arguing that the ends do not justify the means. For him, a system that ignores its ethical purpose will never be genuine. His critique of real socialism emphasizes that the transition to communism must be aligned with ethical principles (Lessa, 2007).

Lukács (2014) investigates the viability of a Marxist ontology, rejecting the idea that ontological categories can be reduced to mere historical-social aspects. For him, ontology examines the essential connections of being and supports the primacy of being in relation to thought, opposing idealist conceptions. Society must be understood as a "complex of complexes", and its analysis requires the consideration of ontological connections. Work emerges as the fundamental category of social being, as it links causality and teleology, being essential to understanding social transformations.

In the political field, Lukács adopts an ontological approach, criticizing both irrationalism and the lack of theoretical rigor within the Marxist left. He opposes practicism and spontaneity, emphasizing that revolutionary action needs to be based on a deep understanding of social reality (Lukács, 2014).

Furthermore, he analyzes the impact of Stalinism and real socialism, defending the need for a return to Marxist foundations. He criticizes cultural manipulation and argues that the fight against alienation should encompass not only the economy, but also free time and cultural production. For him, Marxist ontology enables a historical reading of reality, inserting social changes within a continuous process of human development (Lukács, 2014).

Lukács bases his ethical analysis on Marxism, highlighting work as an essential element for human existence and for the transformation of society. Consciousness, shaped by the social environment, reflects the tension between the individual and the collective, driving historical conflicts and raising social awareness. Values such as justice and freedom emerge from this clash and evolve in line with social development. He innovates by considering individual acts as agents of historical change, because, when choosing between individualism and universality, such acts generate value systems that drive progress (Lessa, 2007).

Ethics, according to this perspective, is a social and historical phenomenon, determined by relations of production and power. In the capitalist system, the dominant morality legitimizes exploitation and alienation, favoring the dominant class. In this context, the alienation of labor dehumanizes the individual, while the fetishism of the commodity³ hides the relations of exploitation (Silva, 2021).

The discussion addressed Marxist ethics as a social and historical phenomenon, conditioned by the class struggle and the economic structure. Bourgeois ideology shapes an alienated consciousness, while ethical transformation requires overcoming capital. The critique of the dominant morality and ideological hegemony reinforces the need for a cultural and political revolution to achieve a truly emancipated society.

Ethics, Alienation and Social Transformation

In Marxist thought, ethics emerges as a central element in overcoming alienation and building a more just society. This topic will address the reflections of Lukács and other theorists on the relationship between ethics, class struggle and social transformation, analyzing their political, philosophical and historical implications.

Ethics constitute a dynamic set of values that regulate social interactions, adapting to historical circumstances. Epistemological and logical definitions, such as Kant's, did not go beyond the stages of social development already achieved. For Lukács, ethics is a historical and dynamic social function, capable of promoting the

³ The fetishism of commodities occurs when products are perceived as having an inherent value, detached from the human labor involved in their production. In the capitalist system, commodities cease to be seen as the result of social relations and come to appear autonomous (Oliveira, 2011). An example of this phenomenon can be observed in the luxury goods market, such as smartphones, where certain brands are purchased not only for their functionality but also for the status and social prestige they confer on consumers.

overcoming of the conflict between the individual and society. While Marx distinguishes between ethics and morality – morality being a reflection of societies and ethics a transcendent critique –, Lukács emphasizes the productive base as essential for understanding social relations (Lessa, 2007).

The distinction between economic struggle and political struggle, as highlighted by Marx, accentuates a significant division in the class consciousness of the proletariat. Although such a separation is fundamentally unfounded, the understanding that every economic struggle becomes a political struggle – and vice versa – often remains obscured. Lukács explores this dialectical duality, which manifests itself in the proletarian revolution, by highlighting the tension between partial and final goals (Lukács, 1970).

This duality arises from the fact that the ruling classes of previous societies, upon achieving success in their revolutions, imposed their immediate interests using the means of coercion available to them, without, however, revealing the true social meaning of their actions (Lukács, 1970).

In this way, he discusses the separation between economic and political struggle in proletarian class consciousness, highlighting how this division often obscures the intrinsic connection between the two and the broader implications of the revolutionary process. Lukács also criticizes the hierarchy based on private property, which perpetuates ruling class domination and exploitation in productive and ideological relations (Lessa, 2007).

For him, politics is closely linked to property and power, consolidating the State's dominance over the lower classes. Although he recognizes the structural function of these institutions in society, Lukács considers them incompatible with communism. Thus, political transformation becomes essential, and ethics emerges as the way to overcome the dichotomy between individual and society, allowing the construction of a more just social order (Lessa, 2007).

A central tension between the individual and the collective is also identified, intensified by bourgeois sociability, which, while driving productive progress, deepens alienation. Individuals, distanced from their essence, prioritize the accumulation of capital, and daily decisions reflect the conflict between private property and productive development, generating social dilemmas. For Lukács, ethics can overcome the antagonism between the universal and the particular, revealing possibilities for emancipation. However, legal norms and customs contribute to the maintenance of this contradiction, perpetuating alienation (Lessa, 2007).

Lukács conceives alienation as the denial of the human essence – an "objectification" that, at certain times, impedes progress and transforms into inhumanities constructed by individuals themselves. In capitalism, the social totality is reduced to the market, subordinating individuality to capital and interconnecting bourgeois democracy to the market system itself. Even so, human nature remains dynamic and driven by history (Lessa, 2007).

The relationship between ethics and everyday life is essential, even in liberal democracies. Individuality operates in two spheres: the public sphere, where it manifests itself as citizenship, and the private sphere, dominated by the accumulation of capital. The bourgeois tend to follow the rules, but transgress them to obtain advantages, which causes alienation to take root in capital itself – the elimination of which necessarily requires its overcoming (Lessa, 2007).

Lukács argues that all human action has a transcendental dimension, resulting from the assessment of needs and possibilities, grounding values and the search for freedom within a historical context. For him, freedom is conditioned by the social environment and its causal determinations (Lessa, 2007).

The development of productive forces under private capital generates risks, such as the technological manipulation of reality, which replaces the authentic understanding of the world. Capitalist alienation and the centrality of the commodity restrict individual autonomy, while the contradiction between particularity and generality sustains ethics, customs and morals (Lessa, 2007). Marxist ethics are directly linked to the theory of history and the concept of species-being, highlighting the collective construction of humanity. Alienation, caused by the division of labor and the class structure, impedes this development. Thus, Marxist ethics arise from social needs, reconciling relativism and universal values in the proletarian struggle. Instead of relying on

a fixed conception of human nature, Marx emphasizes historical transformation as a path to overcoming classes (Bancroft, 1980).

The ruling classes fragment the subordinates and construct a new common sense, devaluing politics and community life. In civil society, nonviolent strategies promote conformity, reducing social struggles to merely economic issues. Subordination is overcome when a social group transcends the economic level and achieves political-intellectual hegemony. Gramsci argues that bourgeois domination over the proletariat can be broken through a Cultural Revolution based on education, capable of formulating a critical and cohesive vision of reality (Simionatto, 2009).

Human beings react to the possibilities that objective reality presents to them, transforming their inclinations into questions through abstraction. This response is not merely spontaneous, because by modifying their relationship with the environment through work, they create problems that require solutions, influencing the course of history. In this context, the relationship between freedom and necessity must be reformulated in a concrete way, ensuring that freedom is not nullified, but rather realized (Lukács, 2014).

The human capacity to anticipate and transform situations transcends mere spontaneity, as the individual is constantly reinterpreting reality and converting challenges into critical points. This historical dynamism requires the search for a way to harmonize individual freedom with the demands of social reality, ensuring that freedom is not suppressed, but fully effective (Lukács, 2014).

This defends the concept of a radical democracy, in which diverse political subjects construct meanings and identities in a field of permanent dispute. Instead of a single revolutionary agent, there is a multiplicity of antagonisms that need to be articulated. Political identities, far from being preexistent to the social struggle, emerge and are transformed in this very process (Laclau; Mouffe, 2001).

Hegemony, in this sense, is a continuous process in which different forces seek to form a "historical bloc" to affirm their worldview. This demonstrates that politics is essentially contingent, depending on the discursive construction of collective identities and the constant renegotiation of meanings in the public space (Laclau; Mouffe, 2001).

Ethics plays a fundamental role in the relationship between the individual and society, enabling full social consciousness by allowing the selection and overcoming of prevailing values. It is rooted in the formation of values and influences the creation of new historical conditions, requiring active responses from individuals (Lessa, 2007).

Lukács points out that value complexes result from the interaction between subjectivity and concrete reality. Social contradiction intensifies both the production of wealth and deficiencies, and in times of crisis, capital seeks to absorb all social relations. The centrality of commodities reinforces this duality, deepening human alienation from their own labor and social structures (Lessa, 2007).

For Lukács, politics in bourgeois society is reduced to a mechanism of domination, while ethics anticipates a future society in which there are no contradictions between individual and collective consciousness. Law, due to its connection with private property, imposes limits on social transformation, making it incompatible with ethical sociability. Thus, revolution emerges as the only possibility for overcoming capitalism, with ethics as its precursor. The reconfiguration of politics would replace power based on material possession with a model founded on being (Lessa, 2007).

Furthermore, Lukács rejects the possibility of social justice under the dominance of private property, arguing that isolated political acts do not structurally alter the relationship between the individual and society. Ethics only becomes political when it transcends its own nature, as human power relations, by definition, are antithetical to ethics (Lessa, 2007).

The construction of counter-hegemony requires that subaltern classes overcome common sense and develop a profound critique of historical and rational models of thought. This process, grounded in the philosophy of

Marxist praxis, faces resistance from the dominant ideology, which seeks to neutralize social critique. Gramsci argues that the subaltern class holds a limited worldview and must assimilate elements of elite thought to challenge hegemony. Social transformation demands the unification of values, the action of intellectuals, and an intellectual and moral reform (Simionatto, 2009).

The foundations of Marxism, rooted in Marxist philosophy, political economy, and scientific socialism, provide the necessary theoretical framework to understand and transform social reality. This methodological structure plays a crucial role in the construction of socialism (Chen, 2024).

The debate on historical materialism and its contemporary reformulations seeks to overcome the dichotomy between traditional materialism and the so-called "new materialism," particularly by emphasizing social action. While maintaining a critique of inequalities, it proposes a critical materialism that incorporates elements of new materialism without relying on a fixed conception of matter, allowing for the analysis of structures of domination. New materialism, by emphasizing the agency of matter and criticizing anthropocentrism, faces theoretical challenges, as it moves away from critical epistemology and power relations (Lettow, 2017).

The Marxist historical materialism, in turn, would not provide a solid foundation for moral philosophy. Although useful in formulating relevant questions, it would not have offered satisfactory answers, as it considers ideologies merely expressions of social interests or compensations for social reality. Marx, therefore, should not be interpreted as a traditional moral philosopher but rather as a social critic whose moral ideal centered on free and conscious cooperation among individuals, focusing on the removal of social obstacles to achieve this goal (Kamenka, 1962).

However, the Soviet Marxist attempts to formalize a discipline called "Marxist ethics" resulted in dogmatism and moralism, prioritizing labor discipline over philosophical reflection. Consequently, Marxism failed to develop a significant contribution to moral philosophy, neglecting fundamental questions of logic and moral argumentation, which led to a lack of theoretical sophistication (Kamenka, 1962).

Recognizing the need for updates, Habermas (1975) proposed a reformulation of historical materialism, suggesting that its reconstruction should integrate technical progress with moral and normative progress. For him, social change does not occur solely through economic contradictions but also through the development of new forms of legitimation and social coordination.

The historical dynamics of human existence unfold at the intersection of objectification and alienation, elements inseparable from social existence. The human world is constructed within this dialectic, where the externalization of being becomes both a possibility and a limitation. Estrangement arises when what manifests as a human creation imposes itself as a constraint, transforming from a creation into an enclosure (Lessa, 1992).

The discussion explored the Marxist conception of ethics as a dynamic process linked to class struggle and social transformation. Lukács highlights alienation as an obstacle to human emancipation, while Gramsci and Laclau emphasize the need to construct a new hegemony. Ethics, in this context, emerges as a precursor to revolution and political reorganization.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between ethics and social transformation, from a Marxist perspective, is deeply rooted in the class struggle and the critique of structures of domination. Unlike traditional approaches, which tend to dissociate morality from material conditions, Marxism highlights that ethical values are historically constructed and instrumentalized to either maintain or challenge the prevailing hegemony.

Dominant morality under capitalism functions as an ideological mechanism that naturalizes exploitation and alienation, making its overcoming essential for the construction of a new social order.

Marxist ethics, far from being normative or abstract, is embedded in praxis, guided by the necessity of transforming social and economic relations. Gramsci, Lukács, and other thinkers expand this vision by

emphasizing the role of cultural hegemony and class consciousness in shaping new values. Thus, revolutionary ethics is not confined to a fixed set of norms but emerges from the very process of social and political struggle.

In the face of contemporary crises, reflection on Marxist ethics becomes even more relevant. The persistence of inequality, alienation, and the commodification of life reinforces the need for an ethical horizon that transcends bourgeois morality. The construction of a new hegemony requires not only political and economic ruptures but also a redefinition of human values, capable of paving the way for an emancipated and solidaristic society.

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