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Reification in the Modern World

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
Honors in Philosophy

University of Mary Washington  
Fredericksburg, Virginia

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Philosophy 485

4/26/2020

Supervised by Professor Craig Vasey

REIFICATION IN THE MODERN WORLD

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I. In this paper, I will discuss a couple of ways that our experiences as individuals are affected by the capitalist structures of the society we live in. Mainly, I will focus on the process of reification, and whether it can help us understand society. There is reason to believe that by living in the late-capitalist society that is the United States, we are expediting our process of dying. Tempting, as it may be, to call upon statistics, they would be meaningless in the context of this paper. Therefore, I will not reference studies which may posit conclusions such as suicide being one of the leading causes of death in America or that one of the leading causes of homelessness is exorbitant medical bills. It seems that understanding the world, purely in this quantitative fashion, still misses the actual nature and experience that people live. That is ultimately what philosophers like Lukács and Heidegger aim to capture; experience.

In the midst of a global pandemic, impending environmental collapse, economic recession, and a game show host as our president, most Americans feel as though there is little hope for the future. The United States has often championed itself as one of the richest and most “developed” nations in the contemporary world. However, despite this assertion of superiority our society believes, to some degree, that some of its members do not deserve access to healthcare, food, and shelter. As I am writing this project during COVID-19, we are seeing unprecedented unemployment levels. At the same time, we also are seeing great gains in the stock market, which means wealth is being consolidated even more against the working class to benefit those on top. We have empty hotels, with the rooms being illuminated to display heart symbols to the homeless people sleeping in cold parking lots below, where they have drawn out spaces for them to distance themselves. Food service industry workers went from being ignored by politicians when asking for better pay and working conditions to “essential employees.” Yet, unfortunately, in most cases the term “essential employee” still translates to long hours and

unlivable wages with no hazard pay. Truthfully, “essential” really means “expendable” for these workers in the eyes of our society.

In the year 2020, we have mass graves in New York City, and our society is debating the semantics of what a “mass grave” is; the same society that debates the semantics of whether we can call the camps on the border “concentration camps.” While the media debates what type of words we should use to describe the absolute inhumanity of what is happening, we lose any sense of meaning that was already there. The focus is on semantics and not on the experiences. The focus is on the things and not the people. We have people in prison, from non-violent offenders to the wrongfully convicted, who are now at a huge risk of getting infected with the virus. This is happening in a place where access to quality medical treatment is even harder to get than it is for the common American (which is already hard for a different reason) and we will not release them. Our hospitals are now at the point where people are dying alone, with a disease that isolates them from their family; adding to this gloomy visage, doctors have to practice triage just to determine who is worth saving because supplies are limited. All of these problems in society, that I just highlighted, reflect a persistent reality for many poor and working people. However, COVID-19 has shown that these problems were an inevitable experience for the ever-shrinking middle class. Amongst the youth, nihilism is running rampant. We feel as though there is nothing that matters in the future; this world that we have been thrust into without our consent has nothing to offer us. A common sentiment, uttered by my contemporaries, is, “If the virus isn’t going to kill me, global warming probably will.” A lot of these experiences that are happening right now in society, can be attributed to a positivized existence, because we are so caught up in trying to maintain this idealized notion of the “American dream.” While COVID-19

and the problems I highlighted are not central to this project, the effect of what is happening to the individual *is*.

Georg Lukács published *History and Class Consciousness* in 1923, well before we were in the age of globalized economics like we see today. During this time, the Bolshevik Revolution was wrapping up and the world was in the process of recovering from World War I. One part of what I will be investigating, in this project, is whether or not this concept and process can be applicable in 2020. I will ask whether “reification” still has some relevance in the modern context; it is describing a system that is different from modern late capitalism as Lukács was writing in the time of industrial capitalism. A feature of modern American capitalism is that unlike before, where corporations and the government were more separated, the State and the corporations seem to serve similar interests and protect the same class. Ultimately, I plan to show that while reification has relevance because it does describe how a worker becomes alienated, I think that we have probably moved on from calling the process simply “reification,” because Lukács was not talking about late-stage capitalism. Therefore, I am arguing that reification is too loaded a concept for 2020 to be directly translated, but it still has use as a tool for understanding the reduction of the working class consciousness.

In our analysis of reification, I will be defining what reification is and how Lukácsian scholars explain that it pervades from society down to the individual experience in our society. As a result I will be showing that reification has existential qualities because it is an experience; this is not to say I will posit a brand new understanding of reification. I will also be investigating whether some concepts from other authors can aid in our understanding of reification. In doing so, I will be making a subtle critique of capitalist structures and society. A hard part in understanding the process of reification is not falling victim to the very process that reification is

describing. This difficulty will inform our analysis about the contemporary status of reification and whether or not it even makes contemporary sense to use “reification.”

In order to give an evaluation of the contemporary status of reification, we will have to look at the relationship between reification and commodity fetishism and understand these concepts through the help of secondary sources. We will lay out some fundamental Marxist economic concepts, that show how labor and time have become reified through commodification. After that, we will dive into the effects that the workers feel in a society where exploitative economic practices are the norm; this is something that we still see today. What this discussion will highlight is the concept of “alienation.” Alienation is important because, as we have already seen, it is a phenomenon that is felt not only individually, but societally. Ultimately, Lukács is responding against the positivism that pervades Orthodox Marxism and philosophy in general.

Following the discussion of Lukács’ expansion of Marxist economic concepts, we will look at the possible conceptual relationship between Lukács and Heidegger. The feeling of “alienation” also appears to be at the center of Heidegger’s discussion of anxiety. What I plan to show is that both philosophers provide great examples of why positivism is a negative way of thought, especially when talking about the experience of the individual. Lukács and Heidegger did not agree on everything; we will examine Lukács’ criticism of Heidegger. Despite this, the idea that the psychologization of anxiety is an example of positivist thought will be explored. We will also see if reification can be applied to our discussion of anxiety. Ultimately, both philosophers are concerned with the historical subject; they just have different definitions of what that is.

The next section will focus on how Herbert Marcuse was able to engage with both Lukács and Heidegger. This is mainly to show an example of an author who was able to combine

concepts that were historically separate: Existential Phenomenology and Marxism. This means he is looking at the individual in capitalism specifically. In his later works, Marcuse embraced psychoanalytic philosophy to further show the effect of society on our psychology and behavior. In a series of lectures on Freud, he shows an example of what Grondin talks about in his analysis of reified labor-time. Marcuse talks about the repression that takes place in a worker who is alienated from their labor, which is something that is hinted at in our analysis of Lukács.

I will have looked at some of the possible conceptual relationships between Lukács, Heidegger, and Marcuse, with reification at the center of our dialogue. I also will have illustrated that the working class that Lukács and Marcuse are referencing, experience reification and that is a part of what alienates them from not only their labor but also their social sphere. The alienation that takes place could possibly be described by what Heidegger talks about with the lived experience of anxiety. After my analysis of these authors, in my conclusion, I will shift the focus back to the point brought up earlier, namely on whether or not reification has contemporary relevance.



II. Reification is most closely associated with Marxist philosophy as a result of Georg Lukács' contributions in *History and Class Consciousness*. On a larger scale, Jean Grondin notes that "reification" actually has relevance in both the Analytic and Continental traditions, but we will focus on the Continental way of using it.<sup>1</sup> There is a lot to be said about the epistemological status of reification. As Timothy Bewes points out, there is a certain ironic reifying quality to people's discussions of reification.<sup>2</sup> We will come back to the discussion of this irony later; his point is related to the contemporary relevance of reification. I do not think there is any denying that *what* Lukács is describing in the process of reification can still be observed in our society because the working class is still alienated from time and labor. However, I think that we should be wary of actually calling it "reification." One aspect of reification, that we will need to take into consideration, is that we are talking about a concept from almost a hundred years ago before the internet and globalized economies.

A problem in most people's understanding of reification is that they routinely confuse "reification" with concepts like "commodity fetishism," and "alienation." The confusion is not unforgivable because the concepts are extremely interrelated and similar. Therefore, in order to understand reification, we must also have an understanding of all the concepts that are related. However, the main problem is trying to distinguish reification from commodity fetishism.

Reification is not simply a conceptual "thing." Instead, it is an experiential process that is rooted in consciousness. Most of our discussion and analysis of reification will be from contemporary Lukácsian scholars in *Lukács Today*. "Reification" stems from the latin words *res* and *facere*, meaning *thing* and *to make*, respectively. A literal understanding of reification is the process wherein a concept becomes a thing; a non-object becomes an object. Timothy Bewes

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Grondin, "Reification from Lukács to Habermas," trans. David Lang, in *Lukács Today*, ed. Tom Rockmore (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1988), 87

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Bewes, *Reification: The Anxiety of Late Capitalism*, (New York: Verso, 2002), 5

says that “[r]eification refers to the moment that a process or relation is generalized into an abstraction, and thereby turned into a ‘thing.’”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps a clearer explanation of this is Jean Grondin’s who says “[r]eification designates the transformation into a ‘thing’ of what, originally, does not have the mode of being of a thing.”<sup>4</sup>

Before going into how one should understand reification, I will provide some brief context that is important in understanding why Lukács proposes the concept of reification as a move from the traditional Marxist concept “commodity fetishism.” Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness* was published in 1923, and it was crucial in providing a philosophical and historical understanding of Marxism and the Revolution of 1917. Lukács believed that this was a time where Orthodox Marxism had drifted from classical philosophy and vice-versa. In philosophy, Marxism was called “positivism” or “materialism,” and it was treated like a science or economic theory. On the other hand, Marxist reflections relating to problems within consciousness were no longer relevant because theorists could scientifically explain the socio-economic systems at hand. This results with “consciousness being a simple mirror image [...] of economic reality.”<sup>5</sup> Lukács believed Marxism was focused too strictly on the historical and economic aspects of society, and therefore neglected to account for the actual experiential relation of the proletariat worker in bourgeois capitalist society. Reification in *History and Class Consciousness* is a central theme for the discussion of the reduction of the proletariat consciousness. Lukács believed that this scientific and economic reductionism from Marxist theorists was in fact a result of the process of reification from bourgeois ideology.<sup>6</sup> This is because Marxism had become positivized to some degree. From this we can conclude that

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<sup>3</sup> Bewes, *Reification*, 3

<sup>4</sup> Grondin, “Reification from Lukács to Habermas,” 88.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

Lukács thinks that the process of reification is different from a purely economic process. Therefore we can begin to see how these authors discuss reification as separate yet similar to commodity fetishism. To describe this relationship simply: *reification is more than commodity fetishism*. What I mean by this, is that the process of reification seems to be an expansion of commodity fetishism. It seems that Lukács attributes commodity fetishism to a more economic, and as result, objectivist framework. I believe the reason he uses “reification” instead of “commodity fetishism” to describe what is taking place in commodity fetishism, is because he wants to move the understanding of reification from commodities (objects in the world) to experiences (consciousness), specifically the experiences of the working class. This would make reification a sociological process. Lukács is not positioning himself as a proto-sociologist, because he is informed by sociologists like Max Weber and Georg Simmel.

Grondin and others provide some analysis of Marx’s theory of commodities found in *Capital* and how Lukács is addressing them within *History and Class Consciousness*. Marx first distinguishes use-value from exchange-value in relation to commodities. This is important for Lukács, because by distinguishing use-value and exchange-value, he is able to illustrate from Marx that there is a social origin involved in the exchange of commodities. Grondin continues and says this is because we see that it is human labor that determines the price of a commodity. Further, if we separate the use-value of a commodity from the exchange-value of a commodity, we see what is similar in the nature of commodities; that they are products of labor. Grondin illustrates how, because of profit from capital, the worker produces more profit for the capitalist than what is paid to the worker. The worker is then paid a wage that allows them to buy other commodities, but that wage also still forces them to work for the capitalist.

According to Marx, the profit which the owner of the means of production collects arises from the disproportion between the compensation given to the

work-force and the value that it effectively produces in goods. It is, therefore, on the exploitation of human work that the production of goods and the inequality of social classes rest.<sup>7</sup>

Grondin's quote on Marx reflects the notion that a capitalist society is built upon economic exploitation and that said exploitation translates into a cultural phenomenon. Another point is that profit takes on an object-like nature because it seems like it physically follows the production of goods. This leads Marx to think that the structures of commodities are thing-like in nature, because bourgeois ideology tends to think of commodities as some type of magical surplus generators. "Commodities in the process of exchange take on an existence independent of their function in the process of man's self-realization: instead they come to stand opposed to the original goals of the economic process itself and attain an abstract being of their own."<sup>8</sup> Grondin is talking about the idea that in a capitalist society, the exchange-value of commodities are a hindrance to society, because labor is made to be thinglike and thus not important. Therefore, the worker's labor *is* a commodity itself, and the exchange value, which is rooted in a social relation, is reduced to a reified state. This does not suggest that social qualities are erased, but rather falsely attributed. Instead of the actual social part of commodities: labor and exchange-value; the commodities themselves take on a social quality.<sup>9</sup>

So how is commodity fetishism different from reification? The difference lies mainly in the connotation and context, and it is most likely that commodity fetishism is a type of reification. Remember, Lukács is replying against seemingly objectivist thoughts that were inherent to Orthodox Marxism, because positivism pervaded society, and he thinks by moving to reification, he is losing the positivist connotations. So despite the explicit references to the social aspect in

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 89

<sup>8</sup> Luis Dupre, "Objectivism and the Rise of Cultural Alienation," in *Lukács Today*, ed. Tom Rockmore (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1988), 72

<sup>9</sup> William L McBride, "Reification Re-Examined," in *Lukács Today*, ed. Tom Rockmore (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1988), 116

the theory of commodities, Lukács is claiming that commodity fetishism is a process that is primary to the economic sphere (an economic process), while reification is a sociological process. Grondin notes that for Lukács, he is not discounting the economic relation that is inherent to societal structures, but rather making a more explicit expansion from economic spheres to social spheres. We also have seen that Marx is not discounting the social element that is inherent to economies in commodity fetishism.<sup>10</sup> Dupre expands on this notion because he says that for Lukács, a critique of the economy can be made in a similar vein about society whereas Marx is less clear. Lukács is establishing from Marx that the commodification of labor is not simply an economic problem, but rather a structural problem of society. With this being the case, Lukács wants to shift the focus of Marx's critique from economic structures to more universal structures. "Commodity has become a universal determinant not only of the economic process, but of all social relations."<sup>11</sup> The workers no longer see each other as other humans, because the nature of exchange-value makes them see each other as commodities, and therefore objects. So really what I am saying here is that reification is an expansion of commodity fetishism, because it is being written in a time later than when Marx was writing and responding to the problems of his time.

What this expansion is also establishing is that the exploitation of the worker is a structural component to a capitalist society, and by saying this we are also saying that the process of reification is a structural component of living in a capitalist society. While Lukács is describing a process that occurs in the world, he wants to also investigate how the individual is affected. Because we are essentially talking about one of the ways that our individual being is affected by capitalism, this may lead one to falsely think of "reification" as a psychological process. Instead, it is a process that affects our psychology. Reification ultimately is close to

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<sup>10</sup> Grondin, "Reification from Lukács to Habermas," 89-90.

<sup>11</sup> Dupre, "Objectivism and the Rise of Cultural Alienation." 74

being parallel to Marx's commodity fetishism. From an epistemological standpoint, both terms are describing a very similar process. The way they are distinct is because "reification" was used chronologically after "commodity fetishism." Thus "reification" is an expansion from "commodity fetishism." One can make the interpretation that commodity fetishism has cultural and social implications, which is probably true. Nonetheless, Lukács thinks reification is more accurate in capturing the cultural aspect to commodity fetishism. To sum up this part of my section, Lukács is more clearly outlining that this process of commodity fetishism has explicitly greater implications than what can be interpreted from Marx. This is mainly because the interpretation of Marxism during Lukács' time was a victim to positivist thought. Positivist thoughts are themselves representations of the reified consciousness that is prevalent in bourgeois culture that Lukács is talking about. Because just how labor is reified, the consciousness itself is reified. What I mean here is that the labor itself loses its experiential qualities and becomes a thing. The reason labor is so important for understanding reification is because labor is the only phenomenon commodity that absolutely has no thing-like nature to it in its actual state, yet it takes on a phantom objectivity because it is required to uphold a capitalist society. "Phantom objectivity" means that labor appears as an object or thing despite it not being that. Labor shouldn't have a thing-like nature to it, since it is an experience it should be something that one wants to do. The labor itself should be what externally motivates one to get out of bed, not the prospect of starving. However in capitalism, we have completely lost all understanding of how to authentically experience labor. Effectively then, labor loses its meaning because it is experienced alienated and different from the original nature of labor.<sup>12</sup>

Before I can talk about how reification affects individuals, I should make it known that reification is not a process that exclusively affects the proletariat, but it also affects the bourgeois,

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<sup>12</sup> McBride, "Reification Re-examined," 116

this means that the process is experienced differently by both classes. Since the process of reification is a structural component of bourgeois society, it logically has to affect both classes. Lukács thinks of the relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeois in reification similar to Hegel's master and slave. The bourgeois are unable to see that they also are reified because they support and benefit that process that upholds the *status quo*. I am saying that the exploitation of the workers by their reified experience of labor into commodities is what benefits the bourgeois and maintains their *status quo*. So what this means is that while both classes are affected, only the proletariat suffers, but also they are the only class that can escape reification and challenge the powers that be.

Because it is to the detriment of the proletariat that reification occurs – because it is the proletariat which in its suffering bears the burden of capitalist exploitation – its social situation must, for that reason, take the form of an objectivity separated from the subjectivity of the worker, a brutal objectification of work which will thus be able to be raised to consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

The proletariat are, therefore, both the subject and the object. The proletariat is able to recognize their exploitation from a reified consciousness; the bourgeois only benefit from the process at hand, so they have no way of escaping or challenging it. We have seen that labor has a humanistic element to it, because it is a social experience. However, the bourgeois stamp out that element of labor by reducing the proletariat consciousness through reification. Despite this, the proletariat are able to maintain their humanity because they have not fallen completely victim to an objectivized mindset because they don't benefit from that mindset.<sup>14</sup> They are the subject, because they are able to be cognizant of their conditions; they are the object because they are alienated and oppressed by these conditions. This is how we start to see that reification is not only a structural aspect to the upholding of a capitalist society, but also that reification is

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<sup>13</sup> Grondin, "Reification from Lukács to Habermas," 93

<sup>14</sup> Bewes, *Reification*, 93-94

suppression of the worker's subjectivity that helps maintain a capitalist society. Ultimately, reification is as much an economic problem as a sociological problem and also a phenomenological problem because we are dealing with lived experiences of individuals. It is for that reason that Lukács decides to move beyond commodity fetishism. The reason *History and Class Consciousness* has "class" in the title is because the subject is a collective individual. While this also refers to an actual singular individual, it also refers to the collective individual, i.e. the proletariat. Which is why Lukács says that the proletariat and bourgeois relationship is dialectically rooted.

From our foundation, we can discuss how reification affects the consciousness of the proletariat and that is mainly through an understanding of alienation. I interpret alienation to be the result of reification, mainly in a phenomenological sense, because what is at the core of alienation is the experience of the worker, and thus their existence in society. Grondin provides a quote that links the two main reified aspects of the worker's experience: labor and exchange value. "Reification is, [...] the fact of a double alienation: the worker is first of all cut off from the substance of his work and then, secondly, from the product of his labor."<sup>15</sup> This "double alienation" of what Grondin is describing is a loss of individuality and humanity of the worker because the worker is losing the experiential sense of labor meaning the activity, as well as the product of labor. This indicates that the worker, having been alienated from their labor, becomes alienated from the experience of life.<sup>16</sup> Expressing a similar notion, William McBride says the best example of reification is reified labor-time because, as I have already said, labor becomes a commodified thing meaning the worker is a commodity himself/herself.

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<sup>15</sup> Grondin, "Reification from Lukács to Habermas," 90

<sup>16</sup> This notion will be important for our discussion of Heidegger's anxiety



Labor-time is contrasted to leisure-time in society. I think of leisure-time as the time when the worker has the opportunity to not be alienated. Leisure-time is still reified time, because the worker still feels like they are in an objectified state like they do in labor-time, there is a loss of naturalness to time itself. The reason leisure-time is reified time is the worker has to go back to work giving them only a limited amount of time to do things. Therefore, the social construction of “weekends” is an example of reified leisure-time. With leisure-time limited by bosses, the worker’s leisure time is reduced to only being able to buy other commodities.

If workers sees themselves as a commodity (thing), then they see other aspects of their existence as things, because the only part of their life that matters is being a worker. It is not because they enjoy working; the reason it matters is so they can buy other commodities and participate in society.<sup>17</sup> The effect upon the worker is that they literally feel alien, like they do not belong to the world. Life itself takes on a level of unconquerable absurdity, because the subjectivity of the worker is reduced to a quantified relation. For this reason, I think that there is some relation between Heidegger’s lived experience of anxiety and Lukács. Whether or not we can make the explicit connection might be difficult, but there is definitely some reason to conclude that Heidegger had at least engaged with some concepts from Lukács.

A central theme for both Heidegger and Lukács is the alienation of the individual. Lukács is pretty unclear about how he defines alienation in *History and Class Consciousness*, which he even acknowledged later in life. However, McBride seems to say that alienation is dependent on reification, because alienation encapsulates what experience is occurring in reification for the worker. There is still a lot of debate surrounding what Lukács meant by “alienation.” While McBride says it is up for debate, we will move past it, because that debate goes beyond our discussion. One part where there is agreement, is that alienation only occurs when there is

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<sup>17</sup> McBride, “Reification Re-examined,” 118

oppression.<sup>18</sup> It would make sense to think of alienation as a dependent result of the process of reification, among other results as well. It is here that we can begin to see the relationship of Heidegger and Lukács, because both are trying to move away from the objectivized experience of the subject. Both believe that positivism has reduced the subject to become a passive onlooker of their own experience. For the sake of brevity, we will be focusing on the discussion of anxiety in *Being and Time*. Generally, anxiety stands out as the most applicable concept when discussing the effects that an individual can feel by living in a society. So a way to understand how the figures are related, is to look at anxiety itself and what it means. This will also show us how reification may be applied when we talk about anxiety. However, it should be clear that anxiety, like labor, is not simply a thing.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 114

III. In their respective works, Lukács and Heidegger are critiquing the pervasiveness of positivist methodologies that were happening in the academic fields in the 1920's. The reason both philosophers are trying to move away from positivism has to do with the desire to bring the individual back into the forefront of philosophy; to bring them back into subjectivity, because subjectivity had become reified in the philosophical tradition. At the center of both philosophers' thoughts was that the description of the feeling of alienation from the world had become reduced from an experience, to a thing. "The critique of alienation [...] is another central theme that the views of Heidegger and Lukács have in common. Both present alienation as a process of radical occultation of what in their eyes constitutes the essence of human experience."<sup>19</sup> We will come back to their similarities when we talk about Lukács' criticism of Heidegger, because their similarities truly highlight what Lukács' problem was. This will also make the possible relationship between anxiety and reification more clear. Ultimately, what we will need to decide is if the proletariat, that Lukács is talking about, can be worked in with *Dasein* from Heidegger. I should also add that both Lukács and Heidegger were fans of Dostoevsky, who is noted for giving great literary accounts of hopelessness.<sup>20</sup>

First, in order to understand how anxiety and reification are possibly related, it is important to understand that Heidegger is trying to show that anxiety is a lived-experience. Heidegger starts his section on anxiety by differentiating it from fear. He says that anxiety for *Dasein* is like a flight from itself and its potentiality for being. "Fear", for Heidegger, is a phenomenon for *Dasein* wherein it is "always a detrimental innerworldly being, approaching nearby from a definite region, which may remain absent."<sup>21</sup> The only things that can be

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<sup>19</sup> Nicolas Tertulian, "Lukács Ontology," in *Lukács Today*, ed. Tom Rockmore (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1988), 267

<sup>20</sup> Tertulian, "Lukács Ontology," 264

<sup>21</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1953), 180

“fearsome” are innerworldly beings. These “innerworldly beings” are things in the world, like another person. Therefore fear seems to be like a subject-object construction, whereas anxiety is more related to literal experience. He believes that we mischaracterize fear as anxiety and anxiety as fear, because that which we fear is usually thought of as something we can flee from. But when we actually are in fear, while we may be physically “fleeing,” we are existentially going towards that which we fear in our consciousnesses. What I mean here is that *Dasein* is orienting their being towards the fear. This means that fear is about *things*. One cannot have fear without anxiety first, but one can have anxiety exclusively.

Anxiety is not only anxiety about... , but is at the same time, as attunement, anxiety for... That for which anxiety is anxious is not a *definite* kind of being and possibility of *Dasein*. The threat itself is, after all, indefinite and thus cannot penetrate threateningly to this or that factually concrete potentiality of being. What anxiety is anxious for is being-in-the-world itself. In anxiety, the things at hand in the surrounding world sink away, and so do innerworldly beings in general. The “world” can offer nothing more, nor can the *Dasein*-with of others. Thus anxiety takes away from *Dasein* the possibility of understanding itself, falling prey, in terms of the “world” and the public way of being interpreted. It throws *Dasein* back upon that for which it is anxious, its authentic potentiality-for-being-in-the-world.<sup>22</sup>

Heidegger is saying that anxiety is about nothingness in the sense that it cannot be tangibly understood in terms of things. “Anxiety, as a mode of attunement,[...] discloses the world as world,” this makes *Dasein* unable to understand things because the things “sink away” into the world, meaning things lose meaning.<sup>23</sup> Anxiety makes *Dasein* like an object, because there is a loss of potentiality-for-being-in-the-world and it makes *Dasein* lose sense of being-in-the-world. Which means that *Dasein* is not literally disappearing from the world; they are not ceasing to exist. So ultimately *Dasein* is in-the-world but there is no sense of being. What I mean here is

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 181-182

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 181

*Dasein* knows the world as an abstraction, but doesn't understand the world, and therefore *Dasein* doesn't understand itself.

As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons Heidegger and Lukács have similarities is because of their opposition to positivism and their interest in the phenomenon of alienation. Heidegger's discussion of anxiety makes it very explicit, because he points out that society thinks of anxiety exclusively as a physiological thing or a medical condition. This diminishes anxiety's ontological standing by reducing it into a thing and not understanding it as a lived experience. He says "the physiological triggering of anxiety is possible only because *Dasein* is anxious in the very ground of its being."<sup>24</sup> The goal of his phenomenology is to understand the experience of how things are; so while he does not literally say "anxiety is a lived experience," his methodology does. Anxiety is not simply feeling sadness as a result of chemical imbalances, which is the predominant contemporary conclusion. Rather, anxiety is a loss of meaning for everything in the world; an alienation from the world itself. It is like watching yourself drown in a mirror underwater.

Also, it is somewhat clear that Heidegger is not exclusively talking about anxiety as a philosophical concept, because of how he describes the effect anxiety has on *Dasein*. This leads me to believe that he is also adding a psychoanalytic theme to his discussion of anxiety. William Blattner posits that what Heidegger means by "anxiety," in our modern context probably means "depression," or "hopelessness." These similarities are rooted in the German word *angst*, which can mean both "anxiety," and "depression."<sup>25</sup> Blattner describes anxiety as "a complete collapse of the structure of meaning in which one lives. In anxiety one does not constitute oneself,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 183

<sup>25</sup> William Blattner, *Heidegger's Being and Time*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), 138

because one cannot. In a sense, one is unable to exist.”<sup>26</sup> We are forced to be in the world and not only understand the world but also the things in the world. In anxiety, we only see the world as world; things have no meaning. We know what is in the world, but it does not help us understand the world, and if we can not understand the world then we cannot understand ourselves.

Heidegger is not exclusively talking about *Dasein* individually, he is also talking about *Dasein* with others. This is only to show that anxiety is not solipsism, but an alienation from the world *and* others. As a result, the world loses its handiness. “The world has nothing to offer, not because there is something defective in the world *per se*, but rather because in anxiety everything about the world, including especially the ways we might carry on in life, are insignificant.”<sup>27</sup> I agree with Blattner’s idea that what Heidegger meant by “anxiety,” is what we mean when we talk about “depression.” There are other ontological qualities to anxiety, however for our discussion we have been mainly concerned with the psychologization of anxiety.

Heidegger differentiates fear and anxiety, and he says that fear is rooted in a type of relationship with things in the world. Anxiety is related more to existence itself and the very nature of being in the world. However, since anxiety is a mode of attunement or as we say “mood,” I think that there is something off in thinking about anxiety as purely individual because of being-with-others and being-in-the-world. To me, this implies that there is a societal/social aspect to anxiety that Heidegger does not adequately account for because, despite his discussion of worldliness, his main focus is on the individual experience in *Dasein*. But just because his focus was the individual, doesn’t mean that it neglected the collective individual.

The reason that Heidegger is important for our project in the discussion of reification is because, while he may be missing the social connection that one could (should) make between

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 139-140

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 141

anxiety, he does make a strong criticism of the objectivized experience of anxiety. On a greater scale, he possibly lays a groundwork to discuss how our experience in society affects our psychology and experience by giving us a good definition about the existential qualities of anxiety. Generally, anxiety is something that is otherwise understood from a scientific foundation, and thus anxiety is seen as thing that happens in our minds, and not an experience in our being. From our discussion of anxiety, and our discussion of reification, we can see that both philosophers were concerned with the reduction of the subjectivity of the individual.

Lukács and Heidegger were ultimately interested in understanding the history of the individual through the lense of philosophy. To this effect, Lucien Goldmann says that both figures had studied the traditions of Kierkegaard and Hegel.<sup>28</sup> If this is the case, both Lukács and Heidegger were trying to provide philosophy that will help the reader understand the point in time they are in from the subjective perspective. Lukács has a Marxist understanding of history, while Heidegger has a romantic understanding. This “romantic understanding” is likely why Heidegger does not take any explicit positions about society and keeps his thoughts more abstract in *Being and Time* and uses *Dasein* as his subject while Lukacs thinks of the proletariat as his subject. As Goldmann states “[...]for Heidegger the historical subject is the individual whereas Lukács, tracing in it the authentic tradition of Hegel and Marx, conceives of history as the action of the transindividual subject and, in particular, *of social classes* [emphasis added].”<sup>29</sup> This distinction is mainly what Lukács uses in his criticism of Heidegger because Lukács is focused on the collective individual; society. Both philosophers are trying to find a way to bring subjectivity back to the forefront of philosophy, however Lukács brings a more worldly understanding to it, because he is more grounded in Hegel and Marx. This means that Lukács’

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<sup>28</sup> Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy*, trans. William Q. Boelhower, (Boston: Routledge, 1998), 5

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

philosophy brings in the historically materialistic understanding that is shown in disciplines like anthropology, sociology, politics, and even psychology. Goldmann states: “being and history for Heidegger are situated on the ontological level [...]”<sup>30</sup> This means that Heidegger is saying that history is rooted in being, and is maybe not as rooted in the sciences like anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Lukács is no stranger to sociology and openly embraces aspects of other fields. However, since both are trying to bring subjectivity back to the front of philosophy, both Lukács and Heidegger agree that philosophy was falling to positivism, but Heidegger thought those “soft sciences” are also often examples of positivist thoughts. Which is why he strived for more universal explanations. As we will see, Lukács’ problem with Heidegger seems to be as much of a personal problem as it is a philosophical one.

I generally agree with Lukács’ criticism that I am about to explain. First, Lukács states that Heidegger’s individualistic ideas about *Dasein* and existence were “epistemological hocus-pocus, so typical of the whole imperialist period [...]”<sup>31</sup> He says this because Heidegger was trying to find a way around materialism and idealism. This “third way” for Heidegger “gave the impression of an objectivity independent of human consciousness.”<sup>32</sup> Lukács says Heidegger is replacing actual objectivity in the world, with “pseudo-objectivity,” because Heidegger is making his assumptions from the realm of consciousness; that he is making objective claims from a subjective foundation. From this notion, Lukács says that despite Heidegger’s efforts to separate ontology from anthropology, he ends up basically creating a pseudo-anthropology despite his efforts. Heidegger is trying to describe the nature of being abstractly, but results in positing an abstract theory of man. Lukács calls the result of this attempted distinction: “[...]no

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>31</sup> Lukács, “Martin Heidegger,” in *The Lukács Reader*, ed. Arpad Kardarkay (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 267

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 267, 268



more than an abstractly mythicizing, anthropological description of human existence.”<sup>33</sup> Since we have established that Lukács is saying that Heidegger is presenting a pseudo-anthropology, Lukács then points us to the post-First-War period in which *Being and Time* was written. He states that this was a time wherein the people of Germany were feeling lost in the world. With this being the case, Heidegger appealed to the notion of individualistic freedom that is inherent in imperialistic bourgeois thought. He further says that Heidegger was writing when the Western-world was seeing both the horrors of early-20th century “monopoly capitalism” and the rise of a strong socialist superpower.<sup>34</sup> The reason I agree with Lukács’ point about Heidegger presenting a pseudo-anthropology, is because *Being and Time* does sound like an abstract theory of man at times.

As we have seen Lukács is not necessarily against the idea of the individual subject, but what is at the core of his criticism is the fact that he thinks Heidegger’s phenomenology of existence is geared *too much* towards the individual and not enough by the collective individual. This is problematic for Lukács because by orienting a philosophy towards the sole individual, it is able to be more effectively worked into a bourgeois ideology. This effectively avoids the experience of the working class because it does not account for a class consciousness. I think that both Lukács and Heidegger would agree that most people of this time were feeling lost and hopeless, however Lukács thinks that this feeling of hopelessness is better understood through the lense of the working class. Lukács also says that even if Heidegger wasn’t purposely ignoring the struggles of the working class, he still *did* ignore them, which is also indicated by Heidegger’s association with the Nazi Party.<sup>35</sup> Lukács thinks that Heidegger was ignoring the obvious missing piece of his phenomenology by not talking about the working class experience.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 271

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 276, 281

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 281

Heidegger may or may not have been purposely ignoring the working class, but he certainly did not write for them to read his material, so it does make sense that Lukács is saying that Heidegger's thoughts are inherently bourgeois. But since Heidegger has inspired so many liberal philosophers like de Beauvoir, Sartre, and Marcuse to name a few, I am not sure if I agree with Lukács' implication that Heidegger's philosophy is only geared towards the bourgeois, because he did not mention them by name either. Also, I am able to find the implications of how anxiety is applicable to the working class experience, however that may be because of my understanding of other leftist philosophers, but I don't think there is any denying that people in Germany were feeling hopeless during this time, and a lot of them happened to be working class.

Lukács makes the criticism that Heidegger's phenomenology focused too much on the individual and not enough on the others in society, mainly those in the working class. This led Lukács to say that Heidegger's implications about society weren't reflective of the actual struggle of the working class, and that Heidegger appealed more to the bourgeois class *because* his philosophy was so individualistic. However, that does not suggest that Heidegger was wrong in how he describes the lived experience of anxiety, or that it cannot be attributed to the lived experience that those in the working class have. As we will see, Marcuse provides us a way of making the connection between the social aspect of labor and our psychology.

IV. Heidegger was not from the Marxist tradition, so the problems that he wanted to solve in philosophy were not rooted in the class struggle; he wanted to outline the experience of the individual. This focus on *Dasein* as the subject in a time when the experience of being a subject was seemingly becoming objectified is what attracted Herbert Marcuse to want to study with Heidegger at Freiburg. Marcuse was from the Marxist tradition, but like Lukács he believed that most of Marxist discourse had overlooked the individual experience.<sup>36</sup> I agree with John Abromeit's claim that Marcuse was adding Heidegger's phenomenology to a Marxist framework. Marcuse was also heavily influenced by Lukács' theory of reification because he thought that it was a good way of understanding the way that material conditions affect aspects of life like psychology. Ultimately, what the difference between Lukács and Heidegger is, is that they highlight and blame the reduction of subjectivity on different aspects of temporality; Heidegger on abstractions and misunderstandings of time and Lukács on the reification of labor/leisure-time.<sup>37</sup> A lot of Marxists deemed *History and Class Consciousness* as being too metaphysically abstract and not actually helpful in analyzing the exploitation of workers.<sup>38</sup> One of the aspects that Marcuse respected about Heidegger was his understanding of historicity for *Dasein*, because the way most Marxists had described history usually was based out of "objective historical laws."<sup>39</sup> What this means is that Marcuse was also trying to move away from positivism. He also thought that Heidegger's notion of historicity was useful because it made clear that Marcuse thought of the subject as one with a given place and time in history, whether it is past, present, or future. For Marcuse, this makes the individual even more at the front because Lukács did not go into the abstract ramifications of time that Heidegger did. Ultimately the reason Marcuse ended

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<sup>36</sup> John Abromeit, "Herbert Marcuse's Critical Encounter with Martin Heidegger 1927-33," In *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, ed. John Abromeit & W. Mark Cobb (New York: Routledge, 2004), 133

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 135

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 144

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 134

up engaging with Heidegger's historicity was because Heidegger focused on the movement of history at the level of the sole individual. Lukács' historicity was the movement of history for the collective class of individuals, i.e. the proletariat..

Marcuse wants to be able to look at the individual, and since he is a Marxist, he is looking at the effects that a capitalist society has on the individual or how that capitalist society affects one's experience. The reason that Marcuse felt as though he was able to use these abstract concepts from Heidegger, is because he thought that a phenomenology of experience was able to explain the material conditions of people in the world specifically because it focuses on experience. So in that regard he is agreeing with Lukács' criticism, because he is saying that Heidegger can and should be extended to talk about the oppression of the working class. Even further, Marcuse uses this similar critique of explaining why Heidegger did not dissociate from the Nazi Party. Because seemingly, Heidegger could have talked about the plight of workers, but didn't. And this lack of an account for material conditions made Heidegger's thoughts not as concrete for Marcuse, according to Abromeit.<sup>40</sup> The main reason that I outlined Heidegger in the previous part is for the same reason that Marcuse engaged with Heideggerian philosophy; because Existential Phenomenology, when applied to a material understanding of conditions, allows for us to understand the effect the material world has on experience. Marcuse also shares the same criticism with Lukács, which is that Heidegger neglected to talk about the social reality that many individuals faced.<sup>41</sup> Marcuse, after his interest in philosophers like Heidegger, Lukács, and Hegel, began to venture into psychoanalytic philosophy. Since Heidegger is writing about some type of abstract theory of man, it makes sense that Marcuse would focus on the psychology of the individual. It appears to me that Lukács was also talking about how the psychology of an

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 137

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 143

individual was affected when he was talking about the exploitation of the worker's labor. The reason that I highlighted anxiety from Heidegger, is because that phenomenon that he is describing is very real and takes place on account of being exploited by a capitalist society. The worker becomes a thing, they lose any sense of autonomy, because they don't feel natural.

Grondin on the effect of alienation on the worker says:

The alienation of the worker in regard to the reified substance of his work follows in the wake of a decomposition of his subjectivity. The human being must [repress] the whole affective, or qualitative, side of his person when he works at the factory, where the quantitative imperatives of the rationalized process of production reign supreme. Consequently, the subject loses its active character in order to become the passive spectator of what happens to it. Man no longer appears as the bearer and the accountable source of social reality, as the axle which makes the system turn, but as one of its cogs.<sup>42</sup>

This quote is important because I think Grondin highlights what is a major theme in some of Marcuse's *Five Lectures*, because he is talking about how Marx could be added to Freudian psychoanalysis. While Freud is not that relevant, the way that Marcuse describes the effects of a capitalist society on an individual's psychology is relevant, because he is seemingly alluding to the process of reification. The first lecture covers freedom and the second covers progress, both provide a nice way of expanding on some notions that we have covered with Lukács and Heidegger, however more of it is related to Lukács. In his lecture on freedom he talks about how the ruling class is a class of domination over the individual. He says that as society has advanced, the ruling class has found a way of making domination less personally oppressive and more universal. This means that the individual (worker) is faced with a false sense of freedom, because they are able to purchase things that satisfy their needs. The worker feels free, but is actually dominated by the ruling class's rules or social norms. This means that the needs of the worker

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<sup>42</sup> Grondin, "Reification from Lukács to Habermas," 90

are actually dictated by the working class, and not by themselves.<sup>43</sup> Because of these oppressive “laws” that dictate the workers repress their humanity, the worker’s sole goal is labor. By humanity I literally mean, their human-ness, or rather their non-objectivity. Marcuse says this as a way to indicate that the worker never works for themselves, because happiness becomes a reward for doing labor for someone.<sup>44</sup> Here we can begin to see the more explicit relationship with Lukács, because we see that time is split into labor-time and “non-labor” time. Marcuse says that time is becoming more universalized, which is a negative thing, because time is being essentially controlled by the ruling class. This means that leisure-time is no longer something that is autonomous, this seems to be referencing the reification of labor-time that we talked about from Lukács.<sup>45</sup> Marcuse also shows that the domination and exploitation of the workers is not solely at the hands of the bosses, like it was for Marx. He says that there is a strong relationship between the political, economic, and military spheres, which also indicates to me that he is referring to the structural qualities of reification in society. One part of this lecture that extends some of Lukács’ thoughts is how Marcuse talks about the organization of labor, because it explains how the workers don’t unite for a revolution because if the ruling class can make the dominated class associate pleasure with labor because of the relationship of leisure-time and labor-time, then they have no reason to unite; all the worker needs is already presented to purchase. Any possibility for the experience of pleasure to happen, is presupposed by the idea that one must labor. This account, I think more accurately describes how the worker feels hopeless and in anxiety *because* of labor. This is because Marcuse is highlighting that any quest for happiness or “freedom” is almost an absurd notion in a capitalist society, because leisure-time is reified. The reason this relates to anxiety, is because when one is repressing their needs

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<sup>43</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro & Shierry Weber (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970,) 2-3

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 9

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

they are living inauthentically. The world is there for the worker, but the worker can't have any possibility of being free in the world, because they can't understand it. Thus they are feeling like an object. I am neglecting to mention how he ropes in Freudian analysis, but that isn't really subtracting from what he is talking about in relation to the exploitation of workers, because what is being presented is the idea that material conditions affect our experience, and more explicitly, our psychology. For the case of the worker in capitalism, the exploitation of their labor, leads to a type of alienation because the worker represses their pleasure needs. Here, I mean they never authentically experience pleasure, because their pleasure is always presupposed by labor. And if their pleasure is presupposed by labor, then the worker never even knows that are being exploited because they associate the need for buying commodities for pleasure with labor. <sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 21

V. I have shown the relationship between reification and commodity fetishism, the difference is mainly their contexts. For Lukács, reification is a sociological construction that is an expansion from the economic and objectivistic Orthodox Marxist account for reified labor and time. What is at the center of commodity fetishism and reification is the idea of alienation, Lukács makes the idea of a social alienation clearer than Marx, because reification is a sociological phenomenon. Alienation is a flight from the social sphere, but it is rooted in reified labor. This makes the worker feel like a thing in society. Heidegger's anxiety provides a good analysis of how the alienation that is felt is an experience and not a thing, because Heidegger is also responding to positivist thought like Lukács. Lukács' criticism of Heidegger allows for us to see that Heidegger's analysis should be extended to a material understanding of history. By doing this, we see that Existential Phenomenology has merit in a Marxist framework, because authors like Marcuse were able to rectify both philosophers. We can now see whether reification makes sense to describe what is happening to working class people currently. Ultimately I *don't* think that reification adequately describes the experience that is happening in the contemporary context. That does not mean that I reject reification at all, in fact I still embrace it as a concept, and think that it provides a useful tool in understanding. I just believe that we have moved on from reification, much like how reification was a move from commodity fetishism. The difference for reification and commodity fetishism was mainly in the context. Lukács proposed reification was more of a structural process that affected society and the class consciousness, whereas commodity fetishism was something that was rooted in positivism and scientific thought. Lukács was writing about the problems of industrial capitalism that were inherent to the early 20th century. As I mentioned earlier there is a great amount of difference in societies in industrial capitalism and late-stage capitalism. Class structure is different because there is a



middle class, although that is gradually changing. People in 2020 have significantly greater technologies and the whole economic and political landscape is different because of globalized economies. So I think we would be playing philosophical ventriloquism if we thought that reification could just be historically translated into contemporary times. Commodity fetishism was describing a process that occurred when Marx was writing *Capital*; reification was for a problem when Lukács was writing *History and Class Consciousness*. Therefore both concepts are similar, yet they have distinct contexts associated with them. Although epistemologically, their processes are very similar.

However, it just so happens that what is occurring in the experience of the working class today happens to be very similar to what was happening in 1923 wherein people were being exploited in a capitalist society. The ways people are exploited differ because the times are different. When Lukács was writing, unions weren't even a thing yet; most labor was hard manual and physical labor. Today, you don't see as many people suiting up to go to the factory, though there still are people who do so. We have so many other different types of jobs where a boss can exploit their workers. The overarching concept of wage-slavery is one that persists throughout history, this points to a more dialectical notion that capitalism is essentially neo-feudalism.

Ultimately, what I am saying is that reification can help us understand and even describe the process that occurs when subjectivity is reduced to objectivity; however we may want to avoid saying "reification." By not using the word "reification," we are not harming the actual analysis and critique of living in capitalism from Lukács, but merely allowing the concept to remain authentic to what time in history it is describing. Bewes points out that by attributing reification to the modern world, one is literally reifying reification, because they are alienating

themselves from the original notions from which it was established.<sup>47</sup> This means that one is thinking of the concept of reification as a thing. I mentioned earlier that in explaining reification it is difficult to not fall victim to the process that it is describing, that is ultimately why I suggest that reification more accurately describes capitalism before the modern era. What I described in the first part about COVID-19 and the problems that it is exposing about our modern capitalist society, only scratches at the surface of what type of problems and exploitations occur within a capitalist society. Further, the problems that I talked about weren't started because of the pandemic, they were bound to happen because of what our society is structured on; exploitation. People have long felt like objects and just cogs in the machine of modern capitalist society and they will continue. McBride mentions that the great powers of the world have even more of a tremendous amount of force and ability to inflict violence in the world, so by describing reification as a modern process, one detracts from the experiences of those that are actually exploited. Because the world has grown to become more complex, we cannot call the exploitation of workers today simply the process of reification.<sup>48</sup> Anxiety might be more applicable to the modern world, for Heidegger was purposely abstract and trying to avoid material understandings. Lukács' criticism actually helps make anxiety make more sense under a modern context, because his criticism says that Heidegger is positing an abstract theory of man. By anxiety being abstract in its original construction, I think it has less connotation with the time it is written. Lukács explicitly said that reification was *not* metaphysically abstract, and that it was a structuring principle of society at his time. If we extend reification to the modern context, we are losing the historic sense of what the word is, and thus making it more abstract. This is what is at the core of most people's problems with "reification." Reification is not a historically

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<sup>47</sup> Bewes, *Reification*, 94

<sup>48</sup> McBride, "Reification Re-examined," 121

translatable concept, because it is rooted in historicity itself. So to answer the question from earlier: is reification relevant for contemporary society? As we have seen, the answer is yes and no. Yes, because the actual process of the worker's consciousness being reduced to an object is still present. Further, there are still countless aspects of our society that are reified. However the reason we may want to move past "reification" is because the term is too loaded with the history associated with it, that it neglects to accurately reflect the whole exploitation of a worker today, and that there are probably better terms that can describe the psychology of an alienated worker. Therefore "reification" is a great tool for understanding how the consciousness is affected by modern capitalist society, but does not capture the full picture.

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