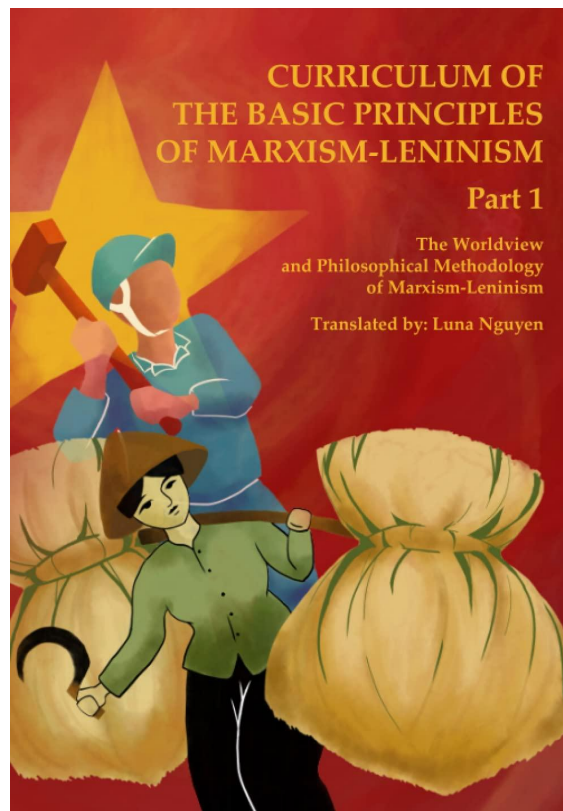


The Worldview and Philosophical Methodology of Marxism-Leninism: Part One

Curriculum of the Basic Principles of Marxism-Leninism



12 Mar. 2023

Contents

[Front Matter]	13
[Title Page]	13
License	13
[Epigraph]	15
Support for This Work	15
Dedication and Gratitude	17
Foreword	18
Preface to the First English Edition	20
Introduction	22
Editor's Note	23
A Message From <i>The International Magazine</i>	24
Notes on Translation	25
Guide to Annotations	26
Original Vietnamese Publisher's Note	26
Original Vietnamese Preface	27
Table of Contents	28
Introduction to the Basic Principles of Marxism-leninism	31
I. Brief History of Marxism-leninism	32
1. Marxism and the Three Constituent Parts	32
Annotation 1	33
2. Summary of the Birth and Development of Marxism-Leninism	33
a. Conditions and Premises of the Birth of Marxism	34
Annotation 2	34
Annotation 3	34
Annotation 4	38
Annotation 5	39
Annotation 6	40
Annotation 7	40
Annotation 8	41
Annotation 9	42
Annotation 10	43
Annotation 11	46

Annotation 12	46
Annotation 13	48
Duality of Commodity Production Labor	49
Annotation 14	50
* Commodity Production	50
** Value-Form	51
Annotation 15	52
Annotation 16	52
Annotation 17	53
Annotation 18	54
Annotation 19	54
Annotation 20	56
b. The Birth and Development Stage of Marxism	57
Annotation 21	57
Annotation 22	57
Annotation 23	58
Annotation 24	58
Annotation 25	59
Annotation 26	59
Annotation 27	59
Annotation 28	60
Annotation 29	60
Annotation 30	61
Annotation 31	63
c. The Defending and Developing Stage of Marxism	63
Annotation 32	64
Imperialism	64
Subjective and Empiricist Idealism	64
Annotation 33	68
Annotation 34	68
Annotation 35	69
Annotation 36	71
Annotation 37	72
d. Marxism-Leninism and the Reality of the International Revolutionary Movement	74
Annotation 38	74
Annotation 39	75
Annotation 40	76
Annotation 41	76

II. Objects, Purposes, and Requirements for Studying the Basic Principles of Marxism-leninism	78
1. Objects and Purposes of Study	78
Annotation 42	78
Annotation 43	79
Annotation 44	80
Annotation 45	80
2. Some Basic Requirements of the Studying Method	80
Annotation 46	81
Part I: The Worldview and Philosophical Methodology of Marxism —	
Leninism	84
Annotation 47	85
Annotation 48	85
The Worldview and Philosophical Methodology of Marxism-Leninism . .	85
Annotation 49	86
3. Excerpt From <i>Modifying the Working Style</i> By Ho Chi Minh	88

Chapter 1: Dialectical Materialism **90**

I. Materialism and Dialectical Materialism **92**

1. The Opposition of Materialism and Idealism in Solving Basic Philosophical Issues	92
Annotation 50	93
Annotation 51	93
Annotation 52	93
Annotation 53	95
Annotation 54	96
2. Dialectical Materialism — the Most Advanced Form of Materialism	96
Annotation 55	97
Annotation 56	97

II. Dialectical Materialist Opinions About Matter, Consciousness, and the Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness **98**

1. Matter	98
a. Category of “Matter”	98
Annotation 57	99
Annotation 58	101
Annotation 59	103
b. Mode and Forms of Existence of Matter	105
Annotation 60	105
Annotation 61	106

Annotation 62	106
Annotation 63	109
Annotation 64	109
Annotation 65	110
c. The Material Unity of the World	111
Annotation 66	111
2. Consciousness	111
a. The Source of Consciousness	111
Annotation 67	112
Annotation 68	113
Annotation 69	115
Annotation 70	119
Annotation 71	119
Annotation 72	119
Annotation 73	127
Annotation 74	127
Annotation 75	128
Annotation 76	131
b. Nature and Structure of Consciousness	131
Annotation 77	133
Annotation 78	134
Annotation 79	135
Annotation 80	135
Annotation 81	137
Annotation 82	137
Annotation 83	138
Annotation 84	140
Annotation 85	142
Annotation 86	143
Annotation 87	143
Annotation 88	144
Annotation 89	145
3. The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness	146
Annotation 90	146
a. The Role of Matter in Consciousness	147
Annotation 91	147
b. The Role of Consciousness in Matter	149
Annotation 92	149
Annotation 93	152
4. Meaning of the methodology	152
Annotation 94	153
Annotation 95	154

Chapter 2: Materialist Dialectics **158**

I. Dialectics and Materialist Dialectics	160
1. Dialectics and Basic Forms of Dialectics	160
a. Definitions of Dialectics and the Subjective Dialectic	160
Annotation 96	160
b. Basic Forms of Dialectics	161
Annotation 97	162
Annotation 98	162
Annotation 99	165
Annotation 100	166
Annotation 101	167
2. Materialist Dialectics	168
a. Definition of Materialist Dialectics	168
b. Basic Features and Roles of Materialist Dialectics	168
Annotation 102	169
II. Basic Principles of Materialist Dialectics	171
Annotation 103	171
1. The Principle of General Relationships	172
Annotation 104	172
Annotation 105	173
Annotation 106	175
Annotation 107	176
Principle of General Relationships	176
Diversity in Unity	176
b. Characteristics of Relationships	179
Annotation 108	179
Annotation 109 Translation note:	182
Annotation 110	182
Annotation 111	183
Annotation 112	183
c. Meaning of the Methodology	184
Annotation 113	185
Annotation 114	186
Annotation 115	187
Annotation 116	188
2. Principle of Development	189
a. Definition of Development	189
Annotation 117	189
Annotation 118	193
Annotation 119	196

b. Characteristics of Development	196
Annotation 120	196
Annotation 121	197
Annotation 122	197
Annotation 123	198
c. Meaning of the Methodology	198
Annotation 124	198
Annotation 125	199

III. Basic Pairs of Categories of Materialist Dialectics **200**

Annotation 126	200
Annotation 127	201
Annotation 128	202
1. Private and Common	202
a. Categories of Private and Common	202
Annotation 129	202
b. Dialectical Relationship Between Private and Common	210
Annotation 130	210
Annotation 131	211
Annotation 132	211
c. Meaning of the Methodology	212
Annotation 133	212
Annotation 134	214
Dogmatism and Revisionism in Relation to the Private and Common . .	214
Metaphysical Perception of the Private and Common	214
Annotation 135	215
2. Reason and Result	216
a. Categories of Reason and Result	216
Annotation 136	216
b. Dialectical relationship between Reason and Result	219
Annotation 137	219
Annotation 138	225
Annotation 139	225
Annotation 140	226
c. Meaning of the Methodology	226
Annotation 141	226
Annotation 142	227
3. Obviousness and Randomness	227
a. Categories of Obviousness and Randomness	227
Annotation 143	227
Annotation 144	228
Annotation 145	228

b. Dialectical relationship between Obviousness and Randomness	228
Annotation 146	229
Annotation 147	229
Annotation 148	230
c. Meaning of the Methodology	230
Annotation 149	230
4. Content and Form	231
a. Categories of Content and Form	231
Annotation 150	231
Ideal	233
Content and Form in Art	234
Content and Form in Specific Artistic Media	235
Other Viewpoints of Content and Form	236
b. Dialectical relationship between Content and Form	237
Annotation 151	238
Annotation 152	238
Annotation 153	239
c. Meaning of the Methodology	240
Annotation 154	240
5. Essence and Phenomenon	241
a. Categories of Essence and Phenomenon	241
Annotation 155	242
b. Dialectical relationship between Essence and Phenomenon	242
Annotation 156	243
c. Meaning of the Methodology	245
Annotation 157	245
Annotation 158	246
6. Possibility and Reality	247
a. Categories of Possibility and Reality	247
b. Dialectical Relationship Between Possibility and Reality	247
Annotation 159	248
c. Meaning of the Methodology	249
Annotation 160	249

IV. Basic Laws of Materialist Dialectics 250

Annotation 161	250
Annotation 162	251
1. Law of Transformation Between Quantity and Quality	251
Annotation 163	252
Annotation 164	252
a. Definitions of Quality and Quantity	253
Annotation 165	253

Annotation 166	254
Annotation 167	255
Annotation 168	255
Annotation 169	256
Annotation 170	256
Annotation 171	257
b. Dialectical Relationship Between Quantity and Quality	257
Annotation 172	257
Annotation 173	258
Annotation 174	259
Annotation 175	259
Annotation 176	261
Annotation 177	262
Annotation 178	263
c. Meaning of the Methodology	265
Annotation 179	265
Annotation 180	266
Annotation 181	268
2. Law of Unification and Contradiction Between Opposites	268
Annotation 182	268
a. Definition of Contradiction and Common Characteristics of Contra- diction	268
Annotation 183	269
Annotation 184	272
Annotation 185	272
Annotation 186	273
Annotation 187	274
b. Motion Process of Contradictions	275
Annotation 188	275
Annotation 189	276
Annotation 190	277
Annotation 191	277
Annotation 192	280
c. Meaning of the Methodology	281
Annotation 193	281
Annotation 194	281
3. Law of Negation of Negation	282
a. Definition of Negation and Dialectical Negation	282
Annotation 195	282
Annotation 196	286
Annotation 197	289
Annotation 198	290

Annotation 199	290
Annotation 200	291
b. Negation of Negation	295
Annotation 201	296
Metaphysical Conception of Linear Development	296
Dialectical Materialist Conception of Development	296
Annotation 202	299
Annotation 203	300
Annotation 204	304
Annotation 205	305
c. Meaning of the Methodology	305
Annotation 206	306
Annotation 207	306
Annotation 208	307
Annotation 209	307

Chapter 3: Cognitive Theory of Dialectical Materialism 309

Annotation 210	310
--------------------------	-----

1. Praxis, Consciousness, and the Role of Praxis in Consciousness 311

a. Praxis and Basic Forms of Praxis	311
Annotation 211	311
Annotation 212	313
Annotation 213	314
b. Consciousness and Levels of Consciousness	314
Annotation 214	316
Annotation 215	317
Annotation 216	318
Annotation 217	322
Annotation 218	323
Annotation 219	324
Annotation 220	324
c. The Relationship Between Praxis and Consciousness	325
Annotation 221	325
Annotation 222	327
Annotation 223	328

2. Dialectical Path of Consciousness to Truth 329

a. Opinions of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin about the Dialectical Path of Consciousness to Truth	329
Annotation 224	329

Annotation 225	329
Annotation 226	330
Annotation 227	332
Annotation 228	334
Annotation 229	336
Annotation 230	337
Annotation 231	339
b. Truth, and the Relationship Between Truth and Reality	340
Annotation 232	341
Annotation 233	341
Annotation 234	342
Annotation 235	343
Annotation 236	346
Annotation 237	347
Annotation 238	348
Annotation 239	348
Afterword	354
Part 2: Historical Materialism	355
Part 3: Political Economy	355
Part 4: Scientific Socialism	355
Moving Forward	356
Advice on Further Study	358
Creative Application of Dialectical Materialism and Materialist Dialectics . .	361
In Closing	361
In Solidarity,	362
[Appendices]	363
Appendix A: Basic Pairs of Categories Used in Materialist Dialectics	364
Appendix B: the Two Basic Principles of Dialectical Materialism	366
Appendix C: the Three Universal Laws of Materialist Dialectics	368
The Law of Transformation Between Quantity and Quality	368
The Law of Unification and Contradiction Between Opposites	368
The Law of Negation of Negation	368
Appendix D: Forms of Consciousness and Knowledge	369
Forms of Consciousness	369

The Cognitive Process	370
Forms of Knowledge	371
Appendix E: Properties of Truth	372
Appendix F: Common Deviations From Dialectical Materialism	374
[Back Matter]	377
Glossary & Index	378
[Publisher Advert]	380
[Back Cover]	381

[Front Matter]

[Title Page]

**CURRICULUM OF
THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF MARXISM-LENINISM
PART 1**

**THE WORLDVIEW AND PHILOSOPHICAL METHODOLOGY OF
MARXISM-LENINISM**

For University and College Students

Not Specializing in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought

FIRST ENGLISH EDITION

Translated and Annotated by Luna Nguyen

Foreword by Dr. Vijay Prashad

Introduction by Dr. Taimur Rahman

Edited, Annotated, and Illustrated by Emerican Johnson

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[Epigraph]

“Step by step, along the struggle, by studying Marxism-Leninism parallel with participation in practical activities, I gradually came upon the fact that only socialism and communism can liberate the oppressed nations and the working people throughout the world from slavery.”

- *Ho Chi Minh*

Support for This Work

Translating, annotating, and typesetting this book has taken three years, which would not have been possible without the support of our supporters on GoFundMe. GoFundMe is also the reason we are able to make the digital version of this entire text available for free online. We would therefore like to recognize all of our supporters:

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There is still plenty of work to be done to complete the translation of this entire curriculum. If you would like to financially support our efforts, you can support us at:

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Dedication and Gratitude

This book is dedicated to all the backers of the GoFundMe campaign that raised the funds to allow me to translate this text. What I initially believed would be a straightforward three-month process of translating ended up taking over three *years* of not just translation but also research, study, review, annotation, editing, proofreading, peer review, and more — with the incredible support of a full team of talented comrades — in order to make sure that everything would be digestible and intelligible for audiences outside of Vietnam. So, sincerely, thank you to everyone who backed this project for your patience, support, and encouragement.

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Thanks also to *The International Magazine*, who have provided guidance and suggestions throughout the process of developing this translation. I have had the opportunity to work with *The International Magazine* on various projects and I can recommend no better monthly periodical for internationalist communists to learn about socialist movements around the world.

We owe a great deal of gratitude to Dr. Vijay Prashad and Dr. Taimur Rahman for taking the time to read through our translation and, in addition to providing their feedback and encouragement, also taking the time to write the foreword and introduction to the text. I know that you are both extremely busy with your own important literary, academic, and political work, so this assistance is so very much appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank the Vietnamese intellectuals and experts who have done such an amazing job at taking hundreds of texts and distilling them down into the original volume which I have translated here. The elegance and precision with which they have been able to capture the essence of Marxism-Leninism is a monumental contribution to the workers of the world, and I only hope my translation does their work justice.

Foreword

In December 1998, Fidel Castro addressed the Young Communist League's 7th Congress in Havana, Cuba. The Soviet Union and the Communist state system in Eastern Europe had collapsed, which greatly weakened the cause of socialism. Not only was Cuba hit hard by the loss of its major trading partners and political ally, but socialists in general were penalised by the lethal argument made by the imperialist sections that "socialism had been defeated." After 1991, Fidel revived the phrase "Battle of Ideas," which had been used in *The German Ideology* by Marx and Engels. To the Young Communists, Fidel said:

We must meet, in the heat of the battle, with the leading cadres to discuss, analyse, expand on, and draft plans and strategies to take up issues and elaborate ideas, as when an army's general staff meets. We must use solid arguments to talk to members and non-members, to speak to those who may be confused or even to discuss and debate with those holding positions contrary to those of the Revolution or who are influenced by imperialist ideology in this great battle of ideas we have been waging for years now, precisely in order to carry out the heroic deed of resisting against the most politically, militarily, economically, technologically and culturally powerful empire that has ever existed. Young cadres must be well prepared for this task.

Bourgeois ideology had tried to sweep aside its most fundamental critique – namely Marxism – by saying that "socialism had been defeated" and that Marxism was now obsolete. Marxist criticisms of the "casino of capitalism" – as Fidel called it – were being set aside both inside and outside the academy, with neoliberal policy confident enough to ignore each and every criticism. Fidel argued that young communists must learn the fundamentals of Marxism – including both dialectical and historical materialism – and must learn this in a way that was not religious thinking but would allow them to become "new intellectuals" of the movement, not those who repeat dogma but who learn to understand the conjuncture and become "permanent persuaders" for socialism (the two phrases in quotations are from Gramsci's prison notebooks). The general ideological confidence of the cadre was not clear, and that confidence and their clarity needed to be developed in a project that Fidel called the Battle of Ideas.

During this period, communists around the world conceded that the demise of the Soviet Union had created a serious dilemma for the left. Not only were we penalised by the argument that "socialism has been defeated," but our own arguments to explain the turbo-charged drive toward globalisation and neoliberalism and to make the case

for a socialist alternative were not strong enough. One indication of that weakness was the 2001 World Social Forum meeting held in Brazil, which promoted the slogan – Another World is Possible, a weak slogan in comparison to a more precise slogan, such as – Socialism is Necessary. Young people drifted into our ranks in this decade, angered by the wretched social conditions created by the permanent austerity of neoliberalism, but bewildered about how to transform the political environment. The lack of Marxist political education was felt by socialist forces across the world, which is why many parties around the world began to revive a conversation about internal political education for cadre and active engagement with other social forces regarding the pressing issues of our time. Fidel called these two processes – internal education for the Party and external engagement on the dilemmas of humanity – the Battle of Ideas.

In line with this broad direction, the government of Vietnam worked with the national publishing house Sự Thật (The Truth) to develop a curriculum for universities and colleges in the country. They developed this order of study along five subject areas: Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, Marxist-Leninist Political Economy, Scientific Socialism, Vietnamese Communist Party History, and Ho Chi Minh Thought. This project worked to educate an entire population that would be able to understand the world in a rational and factual manner, outside the illusions of bourgeois ideology. Four years later, Communist Party of Vietnam adopted a resolution to take this work forward, and – under the leadership of Professor Nguyễn Việt Thông – produced this textbook that brought together the many themes of Marxism into focus for the introductory student and cadre. A book such as this is never easy to create, since it must introduce a form of thought that is critical of the foundations of bourgeois ideology – so it is a critique – but at the same time it provides a worldview to understand the actual world in which we live – so it is a science. The text must, therefore, show how bourgeois thought is partial and at the same time how socialist thought, creatively applied, will allow one to have a firmer grip of reality and be able to participate in fighting to transcend the obstinate facts of human indignity that are reproduced by capitalism. No manual such as this is without its flaws and without its limitations, but no education can start without a manual such as this one. The Vietnamese comrades have done a great service to the left movement by producing a text such as this, which can be used for study and then used as a model to develop similar texts in different parts of the world.

Ho Chi Minh, whose interpretation of Marxism and whose ideas about the Vietnamese Revolution, are all over this text once said: “Study and practice must always go together. Study without practice is useless. Practice without study leads to folly.” There can be no better injunction to get to work, to study and develop one’s theoretical armour and to use that theory as the guide to one’s work in the Battle of Ideas and in the battle for the streets, because this unity between theory and action is indeed praxis (thực tiễn), not just practice, but conscious human activity. That is what Fidel encouraged in his lectures on the Battle of Ideas.

Dr. Vijay Prashad.
5 March 2023
Caracas, Venezuela.

Preface to the First English Edition

The text of this book constitutes part one of a four-part curriculum on Marxism-Leninism developed and published by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam. This curriculum is intended for students who are not specializing in the study of Marxism-Leninism, and is intended to give every Vietnamese student a firm grounding in the political philosophy of scientific socialism.

The entire curriculum consists of:

Part 1: Dialectical Materialism (this text)

Part 2: Historical Materialism

Part 3: Political Economy

Part 4: Scientific Socialism

In Vietnam, each part of the curriculum encompasses one full semester of mandatory study for all college students. Each part builds upon the previous, meaning that this text is the foundation for all political theory education for most college students in Vietnam.

However, it is important to note that this is not the first encounter with dialectical materialism which Vietnamese students will have had with these ideas, because Vietnamese students also study dialectical materialism, historical materialism, political economy, and scientific socialism from primary school all the way through high school.

As such, the text of this book — in and of itself — would probably seem overwhelmingly condensed to most foreign readers who are new to studying dialectical materialism. Therefore, we have decided to extensively annotate and illustrate this text with the information which would have been previously obtained in a basic Vietnamese high school education and/or provided by college lecturers in the classroom.

It is our desire that these annotations will be helpful for students who hope to learn these principles for application in political activity, but we should also make it clear to academic researchers and the like that our annotations and illustrations are *not* present in the original Vietnamese work.

We hope that this book will be useful in at least three ways:

- As a comprehensive introductory textbook on dialectical materialism and for selfstudy, group study, classroom use, cadre training, etc.
- As a quick and easy to reference handbook for reviewing the basic concepts of dialectical materialism for students of theory who are already familiar with dialectical materialism.

- As a companion book for further reading of theory and political texts rooted in dialectical materialist philosophy.

Also, please note: because this book is intended to be used as a quick reference and handbook for further study, there are many instances where we duplicate references, quotations, and other such information. We hope that this repetition may be an aid for study by reinforcing important concepts and quotations.

This book — Part 1 of the curriculum, which focuses on the universal philosophical system of dialectical materialism — serves as the foundation of all political theory and practice in the Vietnamese educational system as well as in the Communist Party of Vietnam and other organizations such as the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, the Women’s Union, the Farmer’s Union, the Worker’s Union, etc. Dialectical materialism is the framework for theory and practice as well as the common lens through which Vietnamese socialists relate, communicate, and work together.

This book focuses almost exclusively on the written works of three historical figures:

Karl Marx and *Friedrich Engels*... who initially developed the universal philosophy of dialectical materialism by synthesizing various pre-existing philosophical, political, economic, and historical tendencies including the idealist dialectical system of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the political economics of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, the materialist positions of Ludwig Feuerbach, and countless others.

...and *Vladimir Illyich Lenin*, who further developed and defended dialectical materialism, expanded the analysis of imperialism, demonstrated how to apply dialectical materialism to local material conditions specific to Russia at the turn of the 20th century, and made many other important contributions to dialectical materialist theory and practice.

Obviously, there are countless other writers, revolutionaries, philosophers, and scientists who have contributed to dialectical materialism and scientific socialism. This book focuses primarily on Marx, Engels, and Lenin, because these figures laid the foundations and formulated the basic principles of the philosophy of dialectical materialism and the methodology of materialist dialectics which are most universally applicable in all endeavors.

It is our desire that translating this important work into English will lead to further study, understanding, and appreciation of dialectical materialism as an applied philosophy which socialists can find value in returning to periodically. At the end of the book, we offer a glossary of terms which doubles as an index, appendices with summaries of important concepts and principles, and an afterword, in which we offer advice for further study and application of dialectical materialism.

At the time of publication, we are already in the process of translating and annotating Part 2 of this curriculum, which focuses on historical materialism, with the hopes of eventually releasing the full curriculum. Once it is complete, it will also be made available at *BanyanHouse.org* — where we also invite questions, constructive feedback, and suggestions.

Introduction

Just a generation ago, Vietnam was the site of the most brutal war of the 20th century. More tonnage of bombs were dropped on the Vietnamese people than were dropped by all sides combined throughout the Second World War. In addition, countless acts of cruelty were used to scorch the very soil of the nation. By the end of Vietnam's Resistance War Against Imperialist USA (known to the world as "the Vietnam War"), Agent Orange, napalm, and unexploded munitions had left a land deeply scarred and a people traumatised by decades of death and murder. The impression one had was that although Vietnam had won the war, it was so badly devastated that it could not hope to win the peace. But, miraculously, Vietnam is winning this war today, as the Vietnamese economy has become one of the fastest growing in the world and quality of life for the people is improving at a pace which could scarcely have been predicted in 1975.

No one could have imagined that Vietnam would turn around so dynamically and rapidly. How did they achieve this economic miracle? How could this nation — so recently devastated by imperialism and war — possibly be able to reconstruct, revive, rejuvenate, and rebuild? That story is now unfolding before our eyes.

Vietnam's development has not come without hardship, struggle, setbacks, and mistakes. The people of Vietnam have had to learn hard lessons through struggle and practice to develop and strengthen ideological and theoretical positions. In this manner, the philosophical development of Vietnam deserves study and attention from socialists around the world. To outsiders, Vietnam can appear to be rife with contradictions. As depicted by Western journalists, Vietnam is simultaneously a success story driven by capitalist markets and a failing socialist state. Every victory is chalked up to private enterprise, while every setback is attributed to socialism. In this sense, the media has failed to understand the essential character of the core contradictions which drive the development of Vietnam politically, socially, and economically.

Luna Nguyen has used social media and played an incredibly important role in helping the English speaking world understand the complexities of such contradictions that beguile so many academics and experts. She has helped to give an insider's perspective on her own country's path of development towards socialism.

Nguyen's translation of Part 1 of this influential work, *Introduction to the Basic Principles of Marxism-Leninism*, a textbook studied by university and college students across Vietnam, is yet another big step in the direction of making Vietnam's understanding of their own country's development available to the English reading world.

For me, as an outsider, it is fascinating not only to see how deeply Vietnamese society takes an interest in European philosophical development (referencing Hume, Hegel, Descartes, Marx, Engels, and so many other Europeans, almost as if they are figures seated in some ancient monastery in Fansipan), but, even more importantly, how they have assimilated that knowledge into the wider context of their own history, society, and culture. The textbook truly comes alive in all the parts where these ideas

are shown to be relevant to Vietnam itself. For instance, the textbook stands out with discussions of Ho Chi Minh's concept of "proletarian piety," which artfully blends elements of Vietnamese culture with Marxist concepts of class consciousness, or the story of Chi Pheo, who stands as a sympathetic stand-in for the interpretation of the unique characteristics of the Vietnamese Lumpenproletariat. The book itself is an instance of the dialectic of the universal and the particular, the abstract and the concrete.

Just as importantly, it shows that, in Vietnam, Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought are not mere perfunctory rituals that are repeated like a learnt formula for this or that exam; but that although the Vietnamese political economy in its current form certainly contains contradictions which must be negated in the process of building the lower stage of socialism, the government remains seriously committed to the goals, theory, and practice of Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought.

Hence, I highly recommend this book, not merely because it is a well-illustrated and easy-to-read book on the principles of dialectical materialism, but more importantly because it offers an insight into how the Vietnamese government collects and synthesises the philosophical developments that are, on the one hand, the collective legacy of all of humanity, and, on the other hand, the concrete manifestations of a revolutionary theory of (and for the oppressed yearning for) freedom in every corner of the world.

March, 2023

Dr. Taimur Rahman

Editor's Note

Working on this project has been one of the most illuminating experiences of my life. In translating this work, Luna has opened a door for English speakers into the wide world of Vietnamese scholarship and pedagogy as it relates to socialist theory and philosophy.

Luna and I have done our best to capture the original meaning and spirit of the text. Furthermore, as we have mentioned elsewhere, our annotations and illustrations are intended only to contextualize and expand on the core information of the original text similarly to the class/lecture setting for which the curriculum is intended.

In their lives, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were never able to finish clarifying and systematically describing the philosophy of dialectical materialism which their work was built upon. Engels attempted to structurally define the philosophy in *Dialectics of Nature*, but unfortunately that work was never completed since he decided to prioritize publishing the unfinished works of Marx after his untimely death.

I believe that this text is a great step forward in that work of systematically describing the philosophical system of dialectical materialism and the methodological system of materialist dialectics. I also believe it's worth noting how the Vietnamese scholars

who crafted this curriculum have embedded the urgent necessity of action — of creative application of these ideas — throughout the text in a way that I find refreshing and reflective of the works of Marx and Engels themselves.

As the text will explain, dialectical materialism is a universal system of philosophy which can be utilized to grapple with any and every conceivable problem which we humans might encounter in this universe. In Vietnam, dialectical materialism has been used to delve into matters of art, ethics, military science, and countless other fields of inquiry and endeavor. It is my hope that this book will, likewise, lead to a wider and fuller understanding and (more importantly) application of dialectical materialism in the Western world.

March, 2023

Emerican Johnson

A Message From *The International Magazine*

The International Magazine began in 2020 to connect international socialist movements and to strengthen the voice of oppressed people across the globe. We have been following the work of Vietnamese communists in their unique path towards peace, prosperity, and the construction of socialist values with a keen eye and much interest. It is with this spirit of international solidarity and a deep desire to learn from and share wisdom from our comrades around the world that we celebrate the release of this First English Edition of *The Worldview and Philosophical Methodology of Marxism-Leninism Part 1: The Worldview and Philosophical Methodology of Marxism-Leninism*.

Ho Chi Minh once said: “In order to build socialism, first and foremost, we need to have socialist people who understand socialist ideology and have socialist values.”

To this end, Vietnamese communists have expended tremendous resources building a curriculum on Marxist-Leninist philosophy and analysis which includes dialectical materialism, materialist dialectics, scientific socialism, historical materialism, and political economy. These topics are taught in primary and secondary schools and are mandatory subjects for all students attending public universities in Vietnam. Beyond that, Vietnam offers free degrees to students who wish to study Marxist theory and philosophy and Ho Chi Minh Thought (defined as the application of Marxist philosophy to the unique material conditions of Vietnam). In this manner, Vietnam has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to developing “socialist people” “with socialist values.”

We are, therefore, extremely excited to have worked with Luna Nguyen on the translation and annotation of Part 1 of the Vietnamese university curriculum on the worldview and philosophical methodology of Marxism-Leninism into English, which will make this unique perspective of socialist theory available to comrades around the world for the first time.

After having read through this volume, which outlines the fundamentals of dialectical materialism and materialist dialectics, we find the most important lesson to be the relationship between theory and practice. According to the Vietnamese scholars who authored the original text, Marxist-Leninist philosophy must be considered a living, breathing philosophy which requires application in the real world — through practice — in order to be made fully manifest.

We hope that readers of this volume will carry forward this guidance through practice which suits your material conditions, wherever you are in the world.

If you would like to learn the perspective of socialists from other nations around the world, we invite you to visit our website at InternationalMagz.com — the home of *The International Magazine* online. There, you will find articles written by comrades from a wide variety of backgrounds and nationalities with a clear bias towards anti-capitalism, anti-fascism, and anti-imperialism!

In solidarity,

The Editorial Team of *The International Magazine*

Notes on Translation

Vietnamese is a very different language from English, which has presented many challenges in translating this book. Whenever possible, I have tried to let the “spirit” of the language guide me, without altering the structure, tone, and formatting of the book.

One thing you will likely notice right away: this book is highly condensed! This is because most Vietnamese students are already familiar with these concepts. We have added annotations to try to make the book more digestible for those of you who are new to Marxism-Leninism, and these annotations are explained on the next page.

I have worked hard to try to make the language in this book consistent with the language used in popular translations of works from Marx, Lenin, etc., that would be familiar to English-language students of Marxism-Leninism. That said, different translators have been translating these texts into English for over a century, such that different word choices have been used to relate the same concepts, and even Marx, Engels, and Lenin used different terms to describe the same concepts in many instances (not to mention the fact that Marx and Engels wrote primarily in German, whereas Lenin wrote primarily in Russian).

As such, I have made it my first priority to keep the language of this translation internally consistent to avoid confusion and, again, to match the spirit of the original text as much as possible. As a result, you may find differences between the translation choices made in this text and other translations, but it is my hope that the underlying meaning of each translation is properly conveyed.

March, 2023

Luna Nguyen

Guide to Annotations

This book was written as a textbook for Vietnamese students who are not specializing in Marxism-Leninism, and so it is meant to be a simple and condensed survey of the most fundamental principles of dialectical materialism to be used in a classroom environment with the guide of an experienced lecturer. That said, a typical Vietnamese college student will already have been exposed to many of the concepts presented herein throughout twelve years of primary and secondary education. As such, in translating and preparing this book for a foreign audience who are likely to be reading it without the benefit of a lecturer's in-person instruction, we realized that we would need to add a significant amount of annotations to the text.

These annotations will take the following forms:

- Short annotations which we insert into the text itself [will be included in square brackets like these].

Longer annotations which add further context and background information will be included in boxes like this.

We have also added diagrams to our annotations, as well as a detailed glossary/index and appendices, which are located in the back of the book. We hope these will resources will also be of use in studying other texts which are rooted in dialectical materialist philosophy.

Original Vietnamese Publisher's Note

In 2004, under the direction of the Central Government, the Ministry of Education and Training, in collaboration with Sự Thật [Vietnamese for “The Truth,” the name of a National Political Publishing House], published a [political science and philosophy] curriculum for universities and colleges in Vietnam. This curriculum includes 5 subjects: Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, Marxist-Leninist Political Economy, Scientific Socialism, Vietnamese Communist Party History, and Ho Chi Minh Thought. This curriculum has been an important contribution towards educating our students — the young intellectuals of the country — in political reasoning, so that the next generation will be able to successfully conduct national innovation.

With the new practice of education and training, in order to thoroughly grasp the reform of the Party's ideological work and theory, and to advocate for reform in both

teaching and learning at universities and colleges in general, on September 18th, 2008, the Minister of Education and Training, in collaboration with Sự Thật, have issued a new program and published a textbook of political theory subjects for university and college students who are not specialized in Marxism — Leninism with Associate Professor and Doctor of Philosophy Nguyen Viet Thong as chief editor. There are three subjects:

Curriculum of the Basic Principles of Marxism-Leninism

Curriculum of Ho Chi Minh Thought

Curriculum of the Revolutionary Path of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

Curriculum of the Basic Principles of Marxism-Leninism was compiled by a collective of scientists and experienced lecturers from a number of universities, with Pham Van Sinh, Ph.D and Pham Quang Phan, Ph.D as co-editors. This curriculum has been designed to meet the practical educational requirements of students.

We hope this book will be of use to you.

April, 2016

NATIONAL POLITICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE — SỰ THẬT

Original Vietnamese Preface

To implement the resolutions of the Communist Party of Vietnam, especially the 5th

Central Resolution on ideological work, theory, and press, on September 18th, 2008, The Ministry of Education and Training has issued Decision Number 52/2008/QĐ-BGDĐT, issuing the subject program: The Basic Principles of Marxism-Leninism for Students Non-Specialised in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought. In collaboration with Truth — the National Political Publishing House — we published the Curriculum of the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism for Students Non-Specialised in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought.

The authors of this text have drawn from the contents of the Central Council's previous programs (Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, Marxist-Leninist Political Economy, and Scientific Socialism) and compiled them into national textbooks for Marxist-Leninist science subjects and Ho Chi Minh Thought, as well as other curriculums for the Ministry of Education and Training. The authors have received comments from many collectives, such as the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Administration, the Central Propaganda Department, as well as individual scientists and lecturers at universities and colleges throughout the country. Notably:

Associate Professor To Huy Rua, Ph.D, Professor Phung Huu Phu, Ph.D, Professor Nguyen Duc Binh, Professor Le Huu Nghia, Ph.D, Professor Le Huu Tang, Ph.D, Professor Vo Dai Luoc, Ph.D, Professor Tran Phuc Thang, Ph.D, Professor Hoang Chi Bao, Ph.D, Professor Tran Ngoc Hien, Ph.D, Professor Ho Van Thong, Associate

Professor Duong Van Thinh, Ph.D, Associate Professor Nguyen Van Oanh, Ph.D, Associate Professor Nguyen Van Hao, Ph.D, Associate Professor Nguyen Duc Bach, Ph.D. Pham Van Chin, Phung Thanh Thuy, M.A., and Nghiem Thi Chau Giang, M.A.

After a period of implementation, the contents of the textbooks have been supplemented and corrected on the basis of receiving appropriate suggestions from universities, colleges, the contingent of lecturers of political theory, and scientists. However, due to objective and subjective limitations, there are still contents that need to be added and modified, and we would love to receive more comments to make the next edition of the curriculum more complete.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Table of Contents

Introduction to The Basic Principles of Marxism-Leninism

I. Brief History of Marxism Leninism

1. Marxism and the Three Constituent Parts
2. Summary of the Birth and Development of Marxism-Leninism

II. Objects, Purposes, and Requirements for Studying the Basic Principles of Marxism-Leninism

1. Objects and Purposes of Study
2. Some Basic Requirements of the Studying Method
3. Excerpt from *Modifying the Working Style*

Chapter I: Dialectical Materialism

I. Materialism and Dialectical Materialism

1. The Opposition of Materialism and Idealism in Solving Basic Philosophical Issues
2. Dialectical Materialism — the Most Advanced Form of Materialism

II. Dialectical Materialist Opinions About Matter, Consciousness, and the Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness

1. Matter
2. Consciousness
3. The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness
4. Meaning of the methodology

Chapter 2: Materialist Dialectics

I. Dialectics and Materialist Dialectics

1. Dialectics and Basic Forms of Dialectics
2. Materialist Dialectics

II. Basic Principles of Materialist Dialectics

1. The Principle of General Relationships
2. Principle of Development

III. Basic Pairs of Categories of Materialist Dialectics

1. Private and Common

2. Reason and Result
3. Obviousness and Randomness
4. Content and Form
5. Essence and Phenomenon
6. Possibility and Reality

IV. Basic Laws of Materialist Dialectics

1. Law of Transformation Between Quantity and Quality
2. Law of Unification and Contradiction Between Opposites
3. Law of Negation of Negation

Chapter 3: Cognitive Theory of Dialectical Materialism

1. Praxis, Consciousness, and the Role of Praxis in Consciousness
2. Dialectical Path of Consciousness to Truth

Afterword

Appendices

Appendix A: Basic Pairs of Categories Used in Materialist Dialectics

Appendix B: The Two Basic Principles of Dialectical Materialism

Appendix C: The Three Universal Laws of Materialist Dialectics

Appendix D: Forms of Consciousness and Knowledge

Appendix E: Properties of Truth

Appendix F: Common Deviations from Dialectical Materialism

Glossary and Index



“Great Victory for the People and Army of South Vietnam!”

Introduction to the Basic Principles of Marxism-leninism

I. Brief History of Marxism-leninism

1. Marxism and the Three Constituent Parts

Marxism-Leninism is a system of scientific opinions and theories which were built by Karl Marx¹ and Friedrich Engels², and defended and developed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin³. Marxism-Leninism was formed and developed by interpreting reality as well as building on preceding ideas. It provides the fundamental worldview* and methodology of scientific awareness and revolutionary practice. It is a science that concerns the work of liberating the proletariat from all exploitative regimes with the ambition of liberating all of humanity from all forms of oppression.

Marxism-Leninism is made up of three basic theories which have strong relationships with each other. They are: *Philosophy of Marxism-Leninism*, *Marxist-Leninist Political Economics*, and *Scientific Socialism*.

Philosophy of Marxism-Leninism studies the basic principles of the movement and development of nature, society and human thought. It provides the fundamental worldview and methodology of scientific awareness and revolutionary practice.

Based on this philosophical worldview and methodology, *Marxist-Leninist Political Economics* studies the economic rules of society, especially the economic rules of the birth, development, and decay of the capitalist mode of production, as well as the birth and development of a new mode of production: the communist mode of production.

*Scientific Socialism*** is the inevitable result of applying the philosophical worldview and methodology of Marxism-Leninism, as well as Marxist-Leninist Political Economics, to reveal the objective rules of the socialist revolution process: the historical step from capitalism into socialism, and then communism.

¹ Karl Marx, 1818–1883 (German): Theorist, politician, dialectical materialist philosopher, political economist, founder of scientific socialism, leader of the international working class.

² Friedrich Engels, 1820–1895 (German): Theorist, politician, dialectical materialist philosopher, leader of the international working class, co-founder of scientific socialism with Karl Marx.

³ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1870–1924 (Russian): Theorist, politician, dialectical materialist philosopher, defender and developer of Marxism in the era of imperialism, founder of the Communist Party and the government of the Soviet Union, leader of Russia and the international working class.

Annotation 1

* A *worldview* encompasses the whole of an individual's or society's opinions and conceptions about the world, about ourselves as human beings, and about life and the position of human beings in the world.

** The word "science," and, by extension, "scientific" in Marxism-Leninism has specific meaning. Friedrich Engels was the first to describe the philosophy which he developed with Marx as "Scientific Socialism" in his book *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.

However, it should be noted that the English phrase "scientific socialism" comes from

Engels' use of the German phrase "wissenschaftlich sozialismus."

"Wissenschaft" is a word which can be directly translated as "knowledge craft" in German, and this word encompasses a much more broad and general concept than the word "science" as it's usually used in English.

In common usage, the word "science" in English has a relatively narrow definition, referring to systematically acquired, objective knowledge pertaining to a particular subject. But "wissenschaft" refers to a systematic pursuit of knowledge, research, theory, and understanding. "Wissenschaft" is used in any study that involves systematic investigation. And so, "scientific socialism" is only an approximate translation of "wissenschaftlich sozialismus." So, "scientific socialism" can be understood as a body of theory which analyzes and interprets the natural world to develop a body of knowledge, which must be constantly tested against reality, with the pursuit of changing the world to bring about socialism through the leadership of the proletariat.

Even though these three basic theories of Marxism-Leninism deal with different subjects, they are all parts of a unified scientific theory system: the science of liberating the proletariat from exploitative regimes and moving toward human liberation.

2. Summary of the Birth and Development of Marxism-Leninism

There have been two main stages of the birth and development of Marxism-Leninism:

1. *Stage of formation and development of Marxism*, as developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

2. *Stage of defense and developing Marxism into Marxism-Leninism*, as developed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.

a. Conditions and Premises of the Birth of Marxism

Annotation 2

The following sections will explain the conditions which led to the birth of Marxism. First, we will examine the Social-Economic conditions which lead to the birth of Marxism, and then we will examine the theoretical premises upon which Marxism was built. Later, we will also discuss the impact which 18th and 19th century advances in natural science had on the development of Marxism.

- *Social-Economical Conditions*

Marxism was born in the 1840s. This was a time when the capitalist mode of production was developing strongly in Western Europe on the foundation of the industrial revolution which succeeded first in England at the end of the 18th century. Not only did this industrial revolution mark an important step forward in changing from handicraft cottage industry capitalism into a more greatly mechanized and industrialized capitalism, it also deeply changed society, and, above all, it caused the birth and development of the proletariat.

Annotation 3

Marx saw human society under capitalism divided into classes based on their relation to the means of production.

Means of production are physical inputs and systems used in the production of goods and services, including machinery, factory buildings, tools, and anything else used in producing goods and services. *Capitalism* is a political economy defined by private ownership of the means of production.

Within the framework of Dialectical Materialism, all classes are defined by internal and external relationships [see *The Principle of General Relationships*, p. 107]; chiefly, classes are defined by their relations to the means of production and to one another.

The *proletariat* are the working class — the people who provide labor under capitalism, but who do not own their own means of production, and must therefore sell their labor to those who *do* own means of production: the *bourgeoisie*. As the owners of the means of production, the bourgeoisie are the ruling class under capitalism.

According to Marx and Engels, there are other classes within the capitalist political economy. Specifically, Marx named the *petty bourgeoisie* and the *lumpenproletariat*. Marx defined the *petty bourgeoisie* as including semi-autonomous merchants, farmers,

and so on who are self-employed, own small and limited means of production, or otherwise fall in between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx described the petty bourgeoisie as:

... fluctuating between proletariat and bourgeoisie, and ever renewing itself as a supplementary part of bourgeois society... The individual members of this class, however, are being constantly hurled down into the proletariat by the action of competition, and, as modern industry develops, they even see the moment approaching when they will completely disappear as an independent section of modern society, to be replaced in manufactures, agriculture and commerce, by overlookers, bailiffs and shopmen.

Vietnam's Textbook of History for High School Students gives this definition of the petty bourgeoisie in the specific context of Vietnamese history:

The petty bourgeois class includes: intellectuals, scientists, and small business owners, handicraftsmen, doctors, lawyers, and civil servants. The vast majority of contemporary intellectuals before the August Revolution of 1945, including students, belonged to the petty bourgeoisie. In general, they were also oppressed by imperialism and feudalism, often unemployed and uneducated.

The petty bourgeoisie were intellectually and politically sensitive. They did not directly exploit labor. Therefore, they easily absorbed revolutionary education and went along with the workers and peasants.

However, the intelligentsia and students often suffer from great weaknesses, such as: theory not being coupled with practice, contempt for labor, vague ideas, unstable stances, and erratic behavior in political action.

Some other petty bourgeoisie (scientists and small businessmen, freelancers, etc.) were also exploited by imperialism and feudalism. Their economic circumstances were precarious, and they often found themselves unemployed and bankrupt. Therefore, the majority also participated in and supported the resistance war and revolution. They are also important allies of the working class.

In general, these members of the petty bourgeoisie had a number of weaknesses: self-interest, fragmentation, and a lack of determination. Therefore, the working class has a duty to agitate and spread propaganda to such members of the petty bourgeoisie, organize them, and help them to develop their strong points while correcting their weaknesses. It is necessary to skillfully lead them, make them determined to serve the people, reform their ideology, and unite with the workers and peasants in order to become one cohesive movement. Then, they will become a great asset for the public in resistance war and revolution.

Marx defined the “lumpenproletariat” as another class which includes the segments of society with the least privilege — most exploited by capitalism — such as thieves, houseless people, etc.

In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx defined the lumpenproletariat as: “The ‘dangerous class’ (*lumpenproletariat*), the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society.” Marx did not have much hope for the revolutionary potential of the lumpenproletariat, writing that they “may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.”

Political Theories, an official journal of the Ho Chi Minh National Institute of Politics, discussed the lumpenproletariat in the specific context of Vietnamese revolutionary history:

It should be noted that Marxism-Leninism has never held that the historical mission of the working class is rooted in poverty and impoverishment. Poverty and low standards of living make workers hate the regime of capitalism, and causes disaster for workers, but the basic driving force behind the revolutionary struggle of the working class lies in the very nature of capitalist production and from the irreconcilable contradiction between the working class and the bourgeoisie.

Moreover, it should not be conceived that a class is capable of leading the revolution because it is the poorest class. In the old societies, there were classes that were extremely poor and had to go through many struggles against the ruling class, but they could never win and keep power, and did not become the ruling class of society.

History has proven that the class that represents newly emerging productive forces which are able to build a more advanced mode of production than the old ones can lead the revolution and organize society into the regime they represent. Fetishizing poverty and misery is a corruption of Marxism-Leninism...

The very existence of the lumpenproletariat is strong evidence of the inhumane nature of capitalist society, which regularly recreates a large class of outcasts at the bottom of society.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, millions of Vietnamese people were forced to leave their homes in rural farmlands to work for plantations and factories which were owned by French colonialists. These workers were functionally enslaved, being regularly physically abused by colonial masters, barred from any education whatsoever, and receiving only the bare minimum to survive. As a result, under French colonial rule, about 90% of Vietnamese were illiterate and the French aimed to indoctrinate Vietnamese people into believing that they were inferior to the French.

The French colonialists also worked with Vietnamese landlords to exploit peasants in rural areas. Those peasants received barely enough to survive and, like the plantation slaves, were prohibited from receiving education. Because Vietnamese peasants and colonial slaves composed the majority of workers while being so severely oppressed and living in conditions of such abject poverty, it was difficult to fully distinguish between the proletariat and the lumpenproletariat in Vietnam during the colonial era.

During this time, Ho Chi Minh and other Vietnamese communists developed the philosophy of “Proletarian Piety.” The word “piety,” here, is a translation of the Vietnamese word *hiếu*, which originally comes from the Confucianist philosophy of “filial piety.” Filial piety demanded children to deeply respect, honor, and obey their parents. Through the concept of Proletarian Piety, Ho Chi Minh adapted this concept to proletarian revolution, calling for communists to deeply love, respect, and tirelessly serve the oppressed masses. This philosophical concept sought to unite the proletariat, lumpenproletariat, and petty bourgeoisie into one united revolutionary class. Even some feudal landlords and capitalists — who were, themselves, oppressed by the colonizing French — were willing to fight for communist revolution and were welcomed into the revolutionary movement if they were willing to adhere to the principle of proletarian piety. The working class and peasantry would lead the revolution, the more privileged classes would follow, and all communist revolutionists would serve the oppressed masses through sacrifice and struggle.

During this period, many novels were written and circulated widely which featured main characters who were members of the lumpenproletariat or enslaved by the French, such as *Bỉ Vỏ*, a story about a beautiful peasant girl who was forced to become a thief in the city, and *Chí Phèo*, the story of a peasant who worked as a servant in a feudal landlord’s house who was sent to prison and became a destitute alcoholic after being released. The purpose of these stories was to show the cruelty of the colonialist-capitalist society of Vietnam in the 1930’s and to inspire proletarian piety, including empathy and respect for the extreme suffering and oppression of the lumpenproletariat, peasantry, and colonial slaves. These stories also presented sympathetic views of intellectuals and members of the petty bourgeoisie: for instance, in the novel *Lão Hạc*, the son of a peasant leaves to work for a French plantation and the father never sees him again. The aged peasant becomes extremely poor and sick without the support of his son, and the only person in the village who helps him is a teacher, representing the intellectual segment of the petty bourgeoisie.

The writers of these novels were communists who wanted to promote the principles of proletarian piety. Rather than looking down on the most oppressed members of society, and rather than sowing distrust and contempt for the petty bourgeoisie, Vietnamese communists inspired solidarity and collaboration between all of the oppressed peoples of Vietnam to overthrow French colonialism, feudalism, and capitalism. Proletarian piety was crucial for uniting the divided and conquered masses of Vietnam and successfully overthrowing colonialism. Note that these strategies were developed specifically for colonial Vietnam. Every revolutionary struggle will take place in unique

*material conditions*⁴, and the composition and characteristics of each class will vary over time and from one place to another. It is important for revolutionists to carefully apply the principles of dialectical materialism and materialist dialectics to accurately analyze class conditions in order to develop strategies and plans which will most suitably and efficiently lead to successful revolution.

The deep contradictions* between the socialized production force** and the capitalist relations of production*** were first revealed by the economic depression of 1825 and the series of struggles between workers and the capitalist class which followed.

Annotation 4

* See: *Definition of Contradiction and Common Characteristics of Contradiction*, p. 175.

** In Marxism, “socialization” is simply the idea that human society transforms labor and production from a solitary, individual act into a collective, social act. In other words, as human society progresses, people “socialize” labor into increasingly complex networks of social relations: from individuals making their own tools, to agricultural societies engaged in collective farming, to modern industrial societies with factories, logistical networks, etc.

The production force is the combination of the means of production and workers within any society. The “Socialized Production Force,” therefore, is a production force which has been socialized — that is to say, a production force which has been organized into collective social activity. Under capitalism, the “Socialized Production Force” consists of the proletariat, or the working class, as well as means of production which are owned by capitalists.

*** Marx and Engels defined “relations of production” as the social relationships that human beings must accept in order to survive. Relations of production are, by definition, not voluntary, because human beings must enter into them in order to receive material needs in order to survive within a given society. Under capitalism, the relations of production require the working class to rent their labor to capitalists to receive wages which they need to procure material needs like food and shelter. This is an inherent contradiction because a small minority of society (the capitalist class) own the means of production while the vast majority of society (the working class) must submit to exploitation through wage servitude in order to survive.

Examples of such early struggles include: the resistance of workers in Lyon, France in 1831 and 1834; the Chartist movement in Britain from 1835 to 1848; the workers’

⁴ Material conditions include the natural environment, the means of production and the economic base of human society, objective social relations, and other externalities and systems which affect human life and human society. See Annotation 79, p. 81.

movement in Silesia (Germany) in 1844, etc. These events prove as historical evidence that the proletariat had become an independent political force which pioneered the fight for a democratic, equal, and progressive society.

Annotation 5

Here are some brief descriptions of the early working class movements mentioned above:

Resistance of Workers in Lyon, France:

In 1831 in France, due to heavy exploitation and hardship, textile workers in Lyon revolted to demand higher wages and shorter working hours. The rebels took control of the city for ten days. Their determination to fight is reflected in the slogan: "Live working or die fighting!"

This resistance was brutally crushed by the government, which supported the factory owners. In 1834, silk mill workers in Lyon revolted again to demand the establishment of a republic. The fierce struggle went on for four days, but was extinguished in a bloody battle against the French army. About 10,000 insurgents were imprisoned or deported.

The Chartist Movement in Britain:

Chartism was a working class movement in the United Kingdom which rose up in response to anti-worker laws such as the Poor Law Amendment of 1834, which drove poor people into workhouses and removed other social programs for the working poor. Legislative failure to address the demands of the working poor led to a broadly popular mass movement which would go on to organize around the People's Charter of 1838, which was a list of six demands which included extension of the vote and granting the working class the right to hold office in the House of Commons.

In 1845, Karl Marx visited Britain for the first time, along with Friedrich Engels, to meet with the leaders of the Chartist movement (with whom Engels had already established a close relationship). After various conflicts and struggles, Chartism ultimately began to decline in 1848 as more socialist-oriented movements rose up in prominence.

Workers' Movement in Silesia, Germany:

In June, 1844, disturbances and riots occurred in the Prussian province of Silesia, a major center of textile manufacturing. In response, the Prussian army was called upon to restore order in the region. In a confrontation between the weavers and troops, shots were fired into the crowd, killing 11 protesters and wounding many others. The leaders of the disturbances were arrested, flogged, and imprisoned. This event has gained enormous significance in the history of the German labor movement.

In particular, Karl Marx regarded the uprising as evidence of the birth of a German workers' movement. The weavers' rebellion served as an important symbol for later

generations concerned with poverty and oppression of the working class in German society.

It quickly became apparent that the revolutionary practice of the proletariat needed the guidance of scientific theories. The birth of Marxism was to meet that objective requirement; in the meantime, the revolutionary practice itself became the practical premise for Marxism to continuously develop.

- *Theoretical Premises*

The birth of Marxism not only resulted from the objective requirement of history, it was also the result of inheriting the *quintessence** of various previously established frameworks of human philosophical theory such as German classical philosophy, British classical political economics, and utopianism in France and Britain.

Annotation 6

* In the original Vietnamese, the word *tin h hoa* is used, which we roughly translate to the word *quintessence* throughout this book. Literally, it means “the best, highest, most beautiful, defining characteristics” of a concept, and, unlike the English word *quintessence*, it has an exclusively positive connotation. *Quintessence* should not be confused with the universal category of *Essence*, which is discussed on p. 156.

German classical philosophy, especially the philosophies of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel⁵ and Ludwig Feuerbach⁶, had deeply influenced the formation of the Marxist worldview and philosophical methodology.

Annotation 7

German classical philosophy was a movement of *idealist* philosophers of the 18th and 19th centuries. Idealism is a philosophical position that holds that the only reliable experience of reality occurs within the human consciousness. Idealists believe that human reason is the best way to seek truth, and that consciousness is thus the only reliable source of knowledge and information.

One of Hegel’s important achievements was his critique of the metaphysical method.

⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, 1770 — 1831 (German): Philosophy professor, an objective idealistic philosopher — representative of German classical philosophy.

⁶ Ludwig Feuerbach, 1804 — 1872 (German): Philosophy professor, materialist philosopher.

Annotation 8

Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that attempts to explain the fundamental nature of reality by classifying things, phenomena, and ideas into various categories. Metaphysical philosophy has taken many forms through the centuries, but one common shortcoming of metaphysical thought is a tendency to view things and ideas in a static, abstract manner. Metaphysical positions view nature as a collection of objects and phenomena which are isolated from one another and fundamentally unchanging. Engels explained the problems of metaphysics in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

The analysis of Nature into its individual parts, the grouping of the different natural processes and objects in definite classes, the study of the internal anatomy of organized bodies in their manifold forms — these were the fundamental conditions of the gigantic strides in our knowledge of Nature that have been made during the last 400 years.

But this method of work has also left us as legacy the habit of observing natural objects and processes in isolation, apart from their connection with the vast whole; of observing them in repose, not in motion; as constraints, not as essentially variables; in their death, not in their life. And when this way of looking at things was transferred by Bacon and Locke from natural science to philosophy, it begot the narrow, metaphysical mode of thought peculiar to the last century.

Francis Bacon (1561 — 1626) is considered the father of empiricism, which is the belief that knowledge can only be derived from human sensory experience [see Annotation 10, p. 10]. Bacon argued that scientific knowledge could only be derived through inductive reasoning in which specific observations are used to form general conclusions. John Locke (1632 — 1704) was another early empiricist, who was heavily influenced by Francis Bacon. Locke, too, was an empiricist, and is considered to be the “father of liberalism.”

Engels was highly critical of the application of metaphysical philosophy to natural science. As Engels continues in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

To the metaphysician, things and their mental reflexes — ideas — are isolated, are to be considered one after the other and apart from each other, are objects of investigation fixed, rigid, given once for all. He thinks in absolutely irreconcilable antitheses... For him a thing either exists or does not exist; a thing cannot at the same time be itself and something else. Positive and negative absolutely exclude one another; cause and effect stand in a rigid antithesis one to the other.

At first sight this mode of thinking seems to us very luminous, because it is that of so-called sound common sense. Only sound common sense,

respectable fellow that he is, in the homely realm of his own four walls, has very wonderful adventures directly he ventures out into the wide world of research. And the metaphysical mode of thought, justifiable and necessary as it is in a number of domains whose extent varies according to the nature of the particular object of investigation, sooner or later reaches a limit, beyond which it becomes one-sided, restricted, abstract, lost in insoluble contradictions. In the contemplation of individual things, it forgets the connection between them; in the contemplation of their existence, it forgets the beginning and end of that existence; of their repose, it forgets their motion. It cannot see the wood for the trees.

Dialectical Materialism stands in contrast to metaphysics in many ways. Rather than splitting the world into distinct, isolated categories, Dialectical Materialist philosophy seeks to view the world in terms of relationships, motion, and change. Dialectical Materialism also refutes the hard empiricism of Bacon and Locke by describing a dialectical relationship between the material world and consciousness [see: *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*, p. 88].

For the first time in the history of human philosophy, Hegel expressed the content of dialectics in strict arguments with a system of rules and categories.

Annotation 9

Dialectics is a philosophical methodology which searches for truth by examining contradictions and relationships between things, objects, and ideas. Ancient dialecticians such as Aristotle and Socrates explored dialectics primarily through rhetorical discourse between two or more different points of view about a subject with the intention of finding truth.

In this classical form of dialectics, a thesis is presented. This thesis is an opening argument about the subject at hand. An antithesis, or counter-argument, is then presented. Finally, the thesis and antithesis are combined into a synthesis, which is an improvement on both the thesis and antithesis which brings us closer to truth.

Hegel resurrected dialectics to the forefront of philosophical inquiry for the German Idealists. As Engels wrote in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

Hegel's work's greatest merit was the taking up again of dialectics as the highest form of reasoning. The old Greek philosophers were all born natural dialecticians, and Aristotle, the most encyclopaedic of them, had already analyzed the most essential forms of dialectic thought.

Hegel's great contribution to dialectics was to develop dialectics from a simple method of examining truth based on discourse into an organized, systematic model of nature and of history. Unfortunately, Hegel's dialectics were idealist in nature. Hegel believed that the ideal served as the primary basis of reality. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels strongly rejected Hegel's idealism, as well as the strong influences of Christian theology on Hegel's work, but they also saw great potential in his system of dialectics, as Marx explained in *Capital (Volume 1)*:

The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.

Starting with a critique of the mysterious idealism of Hegel's philosophy, Marx and Engels inherited the "rational kernel" of Hegelian dialectics and successfully built materialist dialectics.

Annotation 10

In order to understand the ways in which the critique of Hegel's philosophy by Marx and Engels led to the development of dialectical materialism, some background information on materialism — and the conflicts between idealist and materialist philosophy in the era of Marx and Engels — is needed.

Materialism is a philosophical position that holds that the material world exists outside of the mind, and that human ideas and thoughts stem from observation and sensory experience of this external world. Materialism rejects the idealist notion that truth can only be sought through reasoning and human consciousness. The history and development of both idealism and materialism are discussed more in the section *The*

Opposition of Materialism and Idealism in Solving Basic Philosophical Issues on page 48.

In the era of Marx and Engels, the leading philosophical school of materialism was known as *empiricism*. Empiricism holds that we can *only* obtain knowledge through human sense perception. Marx and Engels were materialists, but they rejected empiricism (see Engels' critique of empiricism in Annotation 8, p. 8).

One reason Marx and Engels opposed the strict empiricist view was that it made materialism vulnerable to attack from idealists, because it ignored objective relations and knowledge that went beyond sense data. The empiricist point of view also provided the basis for the *subjective idealism* of George Berkeley [see Annotation 32, p. 27] and the *skepticism* of David Hume. Berkeley's Subjective Idealism is empiricist in that it supports the idea that humans can only discover knowledge through direct sense experience. Therefore, Berkeley argues, individuals are unable to obtain any real knowledge about abstract concepts such as "matter."

Similarly, David Hume's radical skepticism, which Engels called "agnosticism," denied the possibility of possessing any concrete knowledge. As Hume wrote in *A Treatise on Human Nature*: "I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another." Hume's radical skepticism lay in his empiricist belief that the only source of knowledge is sense experience; but Hume went a step further, doubting that even sense experience could be reliable, adding: "The essence and composition of external bodies are so obscure, that we must necessarily, in our reasonings, or rather conjectures concerning them, involve ourselves in contradictions and absurdities."

Later, in the appendix of the same text, Hume argues that conscious reasoning suffers from the same unreliability: "I had entertained some hopes (that) the intellectual world ... would be free from those contradictions, and absurdities, which seem to attend every explication, that human reason can give of the material world."

Engels dismissed radical skepticism as "scientifically a regression and practically merely a shamefaced way of surreptitiously accepting materialism, while denying it before the world." Engels directly refutes radical skepticism in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

... how do we know that our senses give us correct representations of the objects we perceive through them? ... whenever we speak of objects, or their qualities, of which (we) cannot know anything for certain, but merely the impressions which they have produced on (our) senses. Now, this line of reasoning seems undoubtedly hard to beat by mere argumentation. But before there was argumentation, there was action... And human action had solved the difficulty long before human ingenuity invented it. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. From the moment we turn to our own use these objects, according to the qualities we perceive in them, we put to an infallible test the correctness or otherwise of our sense-perception.

This concept of determining the truth of knowledge and perception through practical experience is fundamental to dialectical materialist philosophy and the methodology of materialist dialectics, and is discussed in further detail in Chapter 3, p. 204.

Another weakness of empiricism is that it denies the objectiveness of *social relations*, which cannot be fully and properly analyzed through sensory experience and observation alone. Marx saw that social relations are, indeed, objective in nature and can be understood despite their lack of sensory observability, and that doing so is vital in comprehending subjects such as political economy, as he observes in *Capital Volume I*:

(The true) reality of the value of commodities contrasts with the gross material reality of these same commodities (the reality of which is perceived by our bodily senses) in that not an atom of matter enters into the reality of value. We may twist and turn a commodity this way and that — as a thing of value it still remains unappreciable by our bodily senses.

In other words, Marx pointed out that no amount of sense data about a commodity will fully explain its value. One can know the size, weight, hardness, etc., of a commodity, but without analyzing the social relations and other aspects of the commodity which can't be directly observed with the senses, one can never know or understand the true value of the commodity. The materialism of Marx and Engels acknowledges the physical, material world as the *first basis* for reality, but Marx and Engels also understood that it was vital to account for other aspects of rational knowledge (such as social relations). Marx and Engels believed that empiricist materialism had roughly the same flaw as idealism: a lack of a connection between the material and consciousness. While the idealists completely dismissed sense data and relied exclusively on reasoning and consciousness, the empiricists dismissed conscious thought to focus solely on what could be sensed.

It is important to note that, while Marx and Engels rejected *empiricism*, they did not reject *empirical knowledge* nor *empirical data* which is collected from scientific observation [see Annotation 216, p. 210]. On the contrary, empirical data was key to the works of Marx and Engels in developing dialectical materialism. As Lenin explained: “(Marx) took one of the economic formations of society – the system of commodity production – and on the basis of a vast mass of data which he studied for not less than twenty-five years gave a most detailed analysis of the laws governing this formation and its development.” And so, the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels served to bridge the gap between idealism and materialism. They believed that our conscious thoughts are derived from *material* processes, but that consciousness can also influence the material world. This is discussed in more detail in the section “*Materialism and Dialectical Materialism*” on page 48.

Marx and Engels also criticized many limitations of Feuerbach's methodology and viewpoint* — especially Feuerbach's prescriptions for how to deal with social problems — but they also highly appreciated the role of Feuerbach's thought in the fight against idealism and religion to assert that nature comes first, and that nature is permanent and independent from human willpower.

Annotation 11

* Viewpoint, point of view, or perspective, is the starting point of analysis which determines the direction of thinking from which problems are considered. Marx and Engels were critical of Feuerbach's hyper-focused *humanist* viewpoint.

Feuerbach's atheism and materialism offered an important foundation for Marx and Engels to develop from an idealist worldview into a materialist worldview, which led them directly to developing the philosophical foundation of communism.

Annotation 12

Ludwig Feuerbach was one of the “Young Hegelians” who adapted and developed the ideals of Hegel and other German Idealists. Feuerbach was a humanist materialist: he focused on humans and human nature and the role of humans in the material world. Like Marx and Engels, Feuerbach dismissed the religious mysticism of Hegel. Importantly, Feuerbach broke from Hegel's religious-mystical belief that humans descended from supernatural origins, instead describing humans as originating from the natural, material world.

Feuerbach also distinguished between the objectivity of the material external world and the subjectivity of human conscious thought, and he drew a distinction between external reality as it really exists and external reality as humans perceive it. Feuerbach believed that human nature was rooted in specific, intrinsic human attributes and activities. As Feuerbach explains in *The Essence of Christianity*: “What, then, is the nature of man, of which he is conscious, or what constitutes the specific distinction, the proper humanity of man? Reason, Will, Affection.”

Feuerbach explained that the actions of “thinking, willing, and loving,” which correspond to the essential characteristics of “reason, will, and love,” are what define humanity, continuing: “Reason, Will, Love, are not powers which man possesses, for he is nothing without them, he is what he is only by them; they are the constituent elements of his nature, which he neither has nor makes, the animating, determining, governing powers — divine, absolute powers — to which he can oppose no resistance.”

In his *Collected Works*, Feuerbach further explains that materialism is supported by the fact that nature predates human consciousness:

Natural science, at least in its present state, necessarily leads us back to a point when the conditions for human existence were still absent, when nature, i.e., the earth, was not yet an object of the human eye and mind, when, consequently, nature was an absolutely non-human entity (*absolut un menschliches Wesen*). Idealism may retort: but nature also is something thought of by you (*von dir gedachte*). Certainly, but from this it does not follow that this nature did not at one time actually exist, just as from the fact that Socrates and Plato do not exist for me if I do not think of them, it does not follow that Socrates and Plato did not actually at one time exist without me.

Marx and Engels were heavily influenced by Feuerbach's materialism, but they took issue with Feuerbach's sharp focus on human attributes and activities in isolation from the external material world. As Marx wrote in *Theses on Feuerbach*: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that... reality... is conceived only in the form of the object... but not as sensuous human activity."

"Sensuous human activity" has a very specific meaning to Marx; it grew from two conflicting schools of thought:

The idealists believed the external world can only be understood through the *active* subjective thought processes of human beings, while the empiricist materialists believed that human beings are *passive* subjects of the material world. Marx synthesized these contradicting ideas into what he called "sensuous activity," which balanced idealist and materialist philosophical concepts.

According to Marx, humans are simultaneously *active* in the world in the sense that our conscious activity can transform the world, and *passive* in the sense that all human thoughts fundamentally derive from observation and sense experience of the material world (see Chapter 2, p. 53). So, Marx and Engels believed that Feuerbach was misguided in defining human nature by our traits alone, portraying "the essence of man" as isolated from the material world and from social relations. In addition, Feuerbach's humanism was based on an abstract, ideal version of human beings, whereas the humanism of Marx and Engels is firmly rooted in the reality of "real men living real lives." As Engels wrote in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*:

He (Feuerbach) clings fiercely to nature and man; but nature and man remain mere words with him. He is incapable of telling us anything definite either about real nature or real men. But from the abstract man of Feuerbach, one arrives at real living men only when one considers them as participants in history... The cult of abstract man, which formed the

kernel of Feuerbach's new religion, had to be replaced by the science of real men and of their historical development. This further development of Feuerbach's standpoint beyond Feuerbach was inaugurated by Marx in 1845 in *The Holy Family*.⁷

Marx and Engels believed that human nature could only be understood by examining the reality of actual humans in the real world through our relationships with each other, with nature, and with the external material world. Importantly, it was Marx's critique of Feuerbach which led him to define political action as the key pursuit of philosophy with these immortal words from *Theses on Feuerbach*: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."

The British classical political economics, represented by such economists as Adam Smith⁸ and David Ricardo⁹, also contributed to the formation of Marxism's historical materialist conception [see p. 23].

Smith and Ricardo were some of the first to form theories about labor value in the study of political economics. They made important conclusions about value and the origin of profit, and about the importance of material production and rules that govern economies. However, because there were still many limitations in the study methodology of Smith and Ricardo, these British classical political economists failed to recognise the historical characteristic of value*; the internal contradictions of commodity production**; and the duality of commodity production labor***.

Annotation 13

* Historical Characteristic of Value

Marx generally admired the work of Smith and Ricardo, but saw major flaws which undermined the utility of their classical economic theories. Perhaps chief among these flaws, according to Marx, was a tendency for Smith and Ricardo to uphold an *ahistoric* view of society and capitalism. In other words, classical economists see capitalism as existing in harmony with the eternal and universal laws of nature, rather than seeing capitalism as a result of historical processes of development [see Annotation 114, p. 116]. Marx did not believe that the economic principles of capitalism resulted from nature, but rather, from historical conflict between different classes. He believed that

⁷ *The Holy Family* is a book co-written by Marx and Engels which critiqued the Young Hegelians, including Feuerbach.

⁸ Adam Smith, 1723 — 1790 (British): Logic professor, moral philosophy professor, economist.

⁹ David Ricardo, 1772 — 1823 (British): Economist.

the principles of political economies changed over time, and would continue to change into the future, whereas Smith and Ricardo saw economic principles as fixed, static concepts that were not subject to change over time. As Marx explains in *The Poverty of Philosophy*:

Economists express the relations of bourgeois production, the division of labour, credit, money, etc. as fixed, immutable, eternal categories... Economists explain how production takes place in the above mentioned relations, but what they do not explain is how these relations themselves are produced, that is, the historical movement that gave them birth... these categories are as little eternal as the relations they express. They are historical and transitory products.

**** Internal Contradictions of Commodity Production**

In Marxist terms, a commodity is specifically something that has both a use value and a value-form (see Annotation 14, p. 16), but in simpler terms, a commodity is anything that can be bought or sold. Importantly, capitalism transforms human labor into a commodity, as workers must sell their labor to capitalists in exchange for wages. Marx pointed out that contradictions arise when commodities are produced under capitalism: because capitalists, who own the means of production, decide what to produce based solely on what they believe to be most profitable, the commodities that are being produced do not always meet the actual needs of society. Certain commodities are under-produced while others are over-produced, which leads to crisis and instability.

Duality of Commodity Production Labor

In *Capital*, Marx describes commodity production labor as existing in a duality — that is to say, it exists with two distinct aspects:

First, there is *abstract labor*, which Marx describes as “labor-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure.” This is simply the expenditure of human energy in the form of labor, without any regard to production or value of the labor output. Second, there is *concrete labor*, which is the aspect of labor that refers to the production of a specific commodity with a specific value through labor.

Marx argues that human labor, therefore, is simultaneously, an activity which will produce some specific kind of product, and also an activity that generates value in the abstract. Marx and Engels were the first economists to discuss the duality of labor, and their observations on the duality of labor were closely tied to their theories of the different aspects of value (use value, exchange value, etc.), which was key to their analysis of capitalism.

Smith and Ricardo also failed to distinguish between simple commodity production and capitalist commodity production*, and could not accurately analyse the form of value** in capitalist commodity production.

Annotation 14

* Commodity Production

Simple commodity production (also known as *petty commodity production*) is the production of commodities under the conditions which Marx called the “Simple Exchange” of commodities. *Simple exchange* occurs when individual producers trade the products they have made directly, themselves, for other commodities. Under simple exchange, workers directly own their own means of production and sell products which they have made with their own labor.

Simple commodity production and simple exchange use what Marx referred to as “C→M→C mode of circulation” [see Annotation 60, p. 59]. Circulation is simply the way in which commodities and money are exchanged for one another.

C→M→C stands for:

Commodity → Money → Commodity

So, with simple commodity production and simple exchange, workers produce commodities, which they then sell for money, which they use to buy other commodities which they need. For example, a brewer might make beer, which they sell for money, which they use to buy food, housing, and other commodities which they need to live.

In the C→M→C mode of circulation, the producers and consumers of commodities have a direct relationship to the commodities which are being bought and sold. The sellers have produced the commodities sold with their own labor, and they directly consume the commodities which they purchase with the money thus obtained.

Capitalist commodity production and *capitalist exchange*, on the other hand, are based on the M→C→M' mode of circulation.

M→C→M' stands for:

Money → Commodity → More Money

Under this mode of circulation, capitalists spend money to buy commodities (including the commodified labor of workers), with the intention of selling commodities for MORE MONEY than they began with. The capitalist has no direct relationship

to the commodity being produced and sold, and the capitalist is solely interested in obtaining *more money*.

Capitalist commodity production, therefore, uses the $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M'$ mode of circulation, in which capitalists own the means of production and pay wages to workers in exchange for their labor, which is used to produce commodities. The capitalists then sell these commodities for profits which are not shared with the workers who provided the labor which produced the commodities.

** Value-Form

This is one of the most important, and potentially most confusing, concepts in all of Marx's analysis of capitalism. Marx explains these principles at length in *Appendix of the 1st German Edition of Capital, Volume 1*, but here are some of the fundamentals:

One of Marx's key breakthroughs was understanding that commodities have many different properties which have different effects in political economies.

Just as Commodity Production Labor exists in a duality of Concrete Labor and Abstract Labor (see Annotation 13, p. 15), commodities themselves also exist in duality according to Marx:

Commodities have both "use-value" and "value."

Use-Value (which corresponds to Concrete Labor) is the commodity's *tangible form* of existence; it is what we can physically sense when we observe a commodity. By extension, use-value encompasses how a commodity can be used in the material world.

Value, or the Value-Form, is the *social form* of a commodity, which is to say, it represents the stable relationships intrinsic to the commodity [see *Content and Form*, p. 147].

Note that this relates to the dialectical relationship between the material and the ideal [see *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*, p. 88].

Value-forms represent relational equivalencies of commodities, i.e.: **20 yards of linen = 10 pounds of tea**

These relational equivalencies are tied to the equivalent labor value (see Annotation 15 below, and Annotation 26, p. 23) used to produce these commodities. The value-form of a commodity is the *social form* because it embodies relational equivalencies:

1. The value-form represents the relationship between the commodity and the labor which was used to produce the commodity.
2. The value-form represents the relationship between a commodity and one or more other commodities.

As Marx explains in *Appendix to the 1st German Edition of Capital*: "Hence by virtue of its value-form the (commodity) now stands also in a social relation no longer to only a single other type of commodity, but to the world of commodities. As a commodity it is a citizen of this world."

Understanding the social form of commodities — the value-form — was crucial for Marx to develop a deeper understanding of money and capitalism. Marx argued

that classical economists like Ricardo and Smith conflated economic categories such as “exchange value,” “value,” “price,” “money,” etc., which meant that they could not possibly fully understand or analyze capitalist economies.

British classical political economists like Ricardo and Smith outlined the scientific factors of the theories of labor value* and contributed many progressive thoughts which Marx adapted and further developed.

Annotation 15

* Adam Smith and David Ricardo revolutionized the labor theory of value, which held that the value of a good or service is determined by the amount of human labor required to produce it.

Thus, Marx was able to solve the contradictions that these economists could not solve and he was able to establish the theory of surplus value*, scientific evidence for the exploitative nature of capitalism, and the economic factors which will lead to the eventual fall of capitalism and the birth of socialism.

Annotation 16

* David Ricardo developed the concept of surplus value. Surplus value is the difference between the amount of income made from selling a product and the amount it costs to produce it. Marx would go on to expand on the concept of surplus value considerably.

Utopianism had been developing for a long time and reached its peak in the late 18th century with famous thinkers such as Henri de Saint-Simon¹⁰, François Marie Charles Fourier¹¹ and Robert Owen¹². Utopianism sought to elevate the humanitarian spirit and strongly criticised capitalism by calling attention to the misery of the working class under capitalism. It also offered many far-ranging opinions and analyses of the development of human history and laid out some basic foundational factors and principles for a new society. However, Utopianism could not scientifically address the nature of capitalism. It failed to detect the Law of Development of Capitalism¹³ and

¹⁰ Claude Henri de Rouvroy Saint Simon, 1760 — 1825 (French): Philosopher, economist, utopianist activist.

¹¹ Charles Fourier, 1772 — 1837 (French): Philosopher, economist, utopianist activist.

¹² Robert Owen, 1771 — 1858 (British): Utopianist activist, owner of a cotton factory.

¹³ The Law of Development of Capitalism referenced here is the Theory of Accumulation/Surplus Value, which holds that the capitalist class gains wealth by accumulating surplus value (i.e., profits) and then reinvesting it into more capital to gain even further wealth; thus the goal of the capitalist class is to accumulate more and more surplus value which leads to the development of capitalism. Over time, this deepens the contradictions of capitalism. This concept is related to the $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M$ mode of

also failed to recognise the roles and missions of the working class as a social force that can eliminate capitalism to build an equal, non-exploitative society.

Annotation 17

The early industrial working class existed in miserable conditions, and the political movement of utopianism was developed by people who believed that a better world could be built. The utopianists believed they could create “a New Moral World” of happiness, enlightenment, and prosperity through education, science, technology, and communal living. For instance, Robert Owen was a wealthy textile manufacturer who tried to build a better society for workers in New Harmony, Indiana, in the USA. Owen purchased the entire town of New Harmony in 1825 as a place to build an ideal society. Owen’s vision failed after two years for a variety of reasons, and many other wealthy capitalists in the early 19th century drew up similar plans which also failed.

Utopianism was one of the first political and industrial movements that criticized the conditions of capitalism by exposing the miserable situations of poor workers and offering a vision of a better society, and was one of the first movements to attempt to mitigate the faults of capitalism in practice.

Unfortunately, the utopianists were not ideologically prepared to replace capitalism, and all of their attempts to build a better alternative to capitalism failed. Marx and Engels admired the efforts of the utopianist movement, and studied their attempts and failures closely in developing their own political theories, concluding that the utopianists failed in large part because they did not understand how capitalism developed, nor the role of the working class in the revolution against capitalism.

As Engels wrote in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

(The) historical situation also dominated the founders of Socialism. To the crude conditions of capitalistic production and the crude class conditions correspond crude theories. The solution of the social problems, which as yet lay hidden in undeveloped economic conditions, the Utopians attempted to evolve out of the human brain. Society presented nothing but wrongs; to remove these was the task of reason. It was necessary, then, to discover a new and more perfect system of social order and to impose this upon society from without by propaganda, and, wherever it was possible, by the example of model experiments. These new social systems were foredoomed as Utopian; the more completely they were worked out in detail, the more they could not avoid drifting off into pure phantasies.

Engels is explaining, here, that — in a sense — the utopian socialists were victims of arriving *too early*. Capitalism had not yet developed enough for its opponents to formulate plans based on actual material conditions, since capitalism was only just emerging

circulation, discussed in Annotation 14, p. 16, and is discussed in detail in Part 3 of the book this text is drawn from (Political Economy) which we hope to translate in the future.

into a stable form. Without a significant objective, material basis, the utopians were forced to rely upon reasoning alone to confront capitalism.

In this sense, the early historical utopianists fell into *philosophical utopianism* in its broader sense — defined by the mistaken assertion that the ideal can determine the material [see Annotation 95, p. 94]. In believing that they could build a perfect society based on ideals and “pure fantasy” alone without a material basis for development, the utopians were, in essence, idealists. As Engels explained: “from this nothing could come but a kind of eclectic, average Socialism.” Engels concluded that in order to successfully overthrow capitalism, revolution would need to be grounded in materialism: “To make a science of Socialism, it had first to be placed upon a real basis.”

The humanitarian spirit and compassionate analysis which the utopians embodied in their efforts to lay out concrete features of a better future society became important theory premises for the birth of the scientific theory of socialism in Marxism.

- *Natural Science Premise:*

Along with social-economic conditions and theory premises, the achievements of the natural sciences were also foundational to the development of arguments and evidence which assert the correctness of Marxism’s viewpoints and methodology.

Annotation 18

Natural science is science which deals with the natural world, including chemistry, biology, physics, geology, etc.

Three major scientific breakthroughs which were important to the development of Marxism include:

- *The law of conservation and transformation of energy* scientifically proved the inseparable relationships and the mutual transformation and conservation of all the forms of motion of matter in nature.

- *The theory of evolution* offered a scientific basis for the development of diverse forms of life through natural selection.

- *Cell theory* was a scientific basis proving unity in terms of origins, physical forms and material structures of living creatures. It also explained the development of life through those relationships.

These scientific discoveries led to the rejection of theological and metaphysical viewpoints which centered the role of the “creator” in the pursuit of truth.

Annotation 19

For centuries in Europe, natural science and philosophy had been heavily dominated by theological viewpoints which centered God in the pursuit of truth. Descartes, Kant,

Spinoza, and many other metaphysical philosophers who developed the earliest theories of modern natural science centered their religious beliefs in their philosophies. These theological viewpoints varied in many ways, but all shared a characteristic of centering a “creator” in the pursuit of philosophical and scientific inquiry.

Together, the law of conservation and transformation of energy, the theory of evolution, and cell theory provided an alternative viewpoint which allowed scientists to remove the “creator” from the scientific equation. For the first time, natural scientists and philosophers had concrete theoretical explanations for the origin and development of the universe, life, and reality which did not rely on a supernatural creator.

Marx and Engels closely observed and studied the groundbreaking scientific progress of their era. They believed strongly in materialist scientific methods and the data which they produced, and based their analysis and philosophical doctrines on such observations. They recognized the importance and validity of the scientific achievements of their era, and they developed the philosophy of Dialectical Materialism into a system which would help humans study and understand the whole material world.

In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels explained that ancient Greek dialecticians had correctly realized that the world is “an endless entanglement of relations and reactions, permutations and combinations, in which nothing remains what, where and as it was, but everything moves, changes, comes into being and passes away.”

Engels goes on to explain that it was understandable for early natural scientists to break their inquiries and analysis down into specialized fields and categories of science to focus on precise, specific, narrow subject matters so that they could build up a body of empirical data. However, as data accumulated, it became clear that all of these isolated, individual fields of study must somehow be unified back together coherently and cohesively in order to obtain a deeper and more useful understanding of reality.

As Engels wrote in *On Dialectics*:

Empirical natural science has accumulated such a tremendous mass of positive material for knowledge that the necessity of classifying it in each separate field of investigation systematically and in accordance with its inner inter-connection has become absolutely imperative. It is becoming equally imperative to bring the individual spheres of knowledge into the correct connection with one another. In doing so, however, natural science enters the field of theory and here the methods of empiricism will not work, here only theoretical *thinking* can be of assistance.

As science grows increasingly complex, a necessity develops for a philosophical and cognitive framework which can be used to make sense of the influx of information from disparate fields. In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels explains how dialectical materialism is the perfect philosophical foundation for unifying scientific fields into one cohesive framework:

Dialectics divested of mysticism becomes an absolute necessity for natural science, which has forsaken the field where rigid categories sufficed, which represent as it were the lower mathematics of logic, its everyday weapons.

So, Marx and Engels developed Dialectical Materialism not in opposition to science, but as a way to make better use of scientific data, and to analyze the complex, dynamic, constantly changing systems of the world in motion. While distinct scientific discoveries and empirical data are invaluable, each data point only provides a small amount of information within a single narrow, specific field of science. Dialectical Materialism allows humans to view reality — as a whole — in motion, and to examine the interconnections and mutual developments between different fields and categories of human knowledge.

These scientific principles confirmed the correctness of the dialectical materialist view of the material world, with such features as: endlessness, self-existence, self-motivation, and self-transformation. They also confirmed the scientific nature of the dialectical materialist viewpoint in both material processes and thought processes.

Annotation 20

Endlessness refers to the infinite span of space and time in our universe. *Self-existence* means that our universe exists irrespective of human consciousness; it existed before human consciousness evolved and it will continue to exist after human consciousness becomes extinct. *Self-motivation* and *Self-transformation* refer to the fact that motion and transformation exist within the universe independent of human consciousness.

Engels wrote of the scientific nature of the dialectical materialist viewpoint in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

Nature is the proof of dialectics, and it must be said for modern science that it has furnished this proof with very rich materials increasingly daily, and thus has shown that... Nature works dialectically and not metaphysically; that she does not move in the eternal oneness of a perpetually recurring circle, but goes through a real historical evolution.

In conclusion, the birth of Marxism is a phenomenon which is compatible with scientific principles; it is the product of the social-economic conditions of its time of origin, of the human knowledge expressed in science at that time, and it is also the result of its founders' creative thinking and humanitarian spirit.

b. The Birth and Development Stage of Marxism

Marx and Engels initiated the birth and development stage of Marxism from around 1842~1843 through around 1847~1848. Later, from 1849 to 1895, Marxism was developed to be more thorough and comprehensive, but in this early period of birth and development, Marx and Engels engaged in practical activities [Marx and Engels were not just theorists, but also actively supported and participated with various revolutionary and working class organizations including the Chartists, the League of the Just, the Communist League, the International Workingmen's Association, etc.] and studied a wide range of human thought from ancient times on through to their contemporaries in order to methodically reinforce, complement and improve their ideas.

Many famous works such as *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (Marx, 1844), *The Holy Family* (Marx and Engels, 1845), *Thesis on Feuerbach* (Marx, 1845), *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1845–1846), and so on, clearly showed that Marx and Engels inherited the quintessence [see Annotation 6, p. 8] of the dialectical and materialist methods which they received from many predecessors. This philosophical heritage led to the development of the dialectical materialist viewpoint and materialist dialectics.

Annotation 21

There is a subtle, but important, distinction between Dialectical Materialism and Materialist Dialectics. This will be explained further in chapters I (p. 48) and II (p. 98).

With works such as *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Marx, 1847) and *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Marx and Engels, 1848), Marxism was presented as a complete system of fundamental views with three theoretical component parts.

Annotation 22

According to Lenin, the three component parts of Marxism (and, by extension, of Marxism-Leninism) are:

1. The Philosophy of Marxism: Including Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism
2. The Political Economy of Marxism: A system of knowledge and laws that define the production process and commodity exchange in human society.
3. Scientific Socialism: The system of thought pertaining to the establishment of the communist social economy form.

These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, p. 38.

In the book *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx proposed the basic principles of Dialectical Materialism and Scientific Socialism,* and gave some initial thoughts about surplus value. *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* laid the first doctrinal foundation of communism. In this book, the philosophical basis was expressed through the organic unity between the economical viewpoint and socio-political viewpoint.

Annotation 23

* Scientific Socialism is a series of socio-political-economic theories intended to build socialism on a foundation of science within society's current *material conditions* [see Annotation 79, p. 81]. Scientific Socialism is the topic of Part 3 of the textbook from which this entire text has been translated, which we hope to translate in the future.

The Manifesto of the Communist Party outlined the laws of movement in history,* as well as the basic theory of socio-economic forms.

Annotation 24

* The laws of movement in history are the core principles of *historical materialism*, which is the topic of Part 2 of the textbook from which this entire text has been translated, which we hope to translate in the future.

The basic theory of socio-economic forms dictates that material production plays a decisive role in the existence and development of a society, and that the material production methods decide both the political and *social consciousness* of a society.

Annotation 25

Social consciousness refers to the collective experience of consciousness shared by members of a society, including ideological, cultural, spiritual, and legal beliefs and ideas which are shared within that society. This is related to the concept of base and superstructure, which is discussed later in this chapter.

The Manifesto of the Communist Party also showed that for as long as classes have existed, the history of the development of human society is the history of class struggle. Through class struggle, the proletariat can liberate ourselves only if we simultaneously and forever liberate the whole of humanity. With these basic opinions, Marx and Engels founded Historical Materialism.

By applying Historical Materialism to the comprehensive study of the capitalist production method, Marx made an important discovery: separating workers from the ownership of the means of production through violence was the starting point of the establishment of the capitalist production method. Workers do not own the means of production to perform their labor activities for themselves, so, in order to make income and survive, workers have to sell their labor to capitalists. Labor thus becomes a special commodity, and the sellers of labor become workers for labor-buyers [the proletariat and capitalist class respectively]. The value that workers create through their labor is higher than their wage. And this is how surplus value* is formed. Importantly, this means that the surplus value belongs to people who own the means of production — the capitalists — instead of the workers who provide the labor.

Annotation 26

Surplus value is equal to labor value (the amount of value workers produce through labor) minus wages paid to workers. Under capitalism, this surplus value is appropriated as profit by capitalists after the products which workers created are sold.

So, in discovering the origin of surplus value, Marx pointed out the exploitative nature of capitalism [because capitalists essentially steal surplus labor value from workers which is then transformed into profits], though this exploitative nature is concealed by the money-commodity relationship.

Annotation 27

Under capitalism, a worker's labor is a commodity which capitalists pay for with money in the form of wages. Workers never know how much of their labor value is being withheld by employers, which conceals the nature of capitalist wage-theft.

The theory of surplus value was deeply and comprehensively researched and presented in *Capital*¹⁴ by Marx and Engels. This work not only paves the way to form a new political-economic theory system based on the working class's viewpoint, it also firmly consolidates and develops the historical-materialist viewpoint through the theory of socio-economic forms.

Annotation 28

Karl Marx explained that the goal of writing *Capital* was “to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society.” By “laws of motion,” Marx refers to the origins and motivations for change within human society. Historical materialism holds that human society develops based on internal and external relationships within and between aspects of society. Historical materialism is the topic of Part 2 of the textbook from which this entire text has been translated, which we hope to translate in the future.

According to the theory of socio-economic forms [which is the basis of historical materialism], the movements and developments of human society are natural-historical processes based on dialectical interactions between forces of production and relations of production; between infrastructure basis [commonly referred to as “base” in English] and superstructure.

Annotation 29

The forces of production consist of the combination of means of production and workers within society. Under capitalism, the production force consists of the proletariat (working class) and means of production which are owned by the bourgeoisie (capitalist class).

Marx viewed society as composed of an *economic base* and a *social superstructure*. The base of society includes the material relationships between humans and the means of productions and the material processes which humans undertake to survive and transform our environment. The superstructure of society includes all components of

¹⁴ *Das Kapital*: Karl Marx's most important contribution to political economy. It is composed of four volumes. It is the work of Marx's whole career and an important part of Engels' career, as well. Marx started writing *Das Kapital* in the 1840s and continued writing until he died (1883). *Das Kapital I* was published in 1867. After Marx's death, Engels edited and published the second volume in 1885 and the third volume in 1894. The Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the USSR edited and published *Das Kapital IV*, also known as *Theories of Surplus-Value*, in the 1950s, long after the death of Marx and Engels.

society not directly relating to production, such as media institutions, music, and art, as well as other cultural elements like religion, customs, moral standards, and everything else which manifests primarily through conscious activity and social relations.

In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx explained:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society — the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.

RELIGION GOVERNMENT EDUCATION POLITICAL ECONOMY NATURE

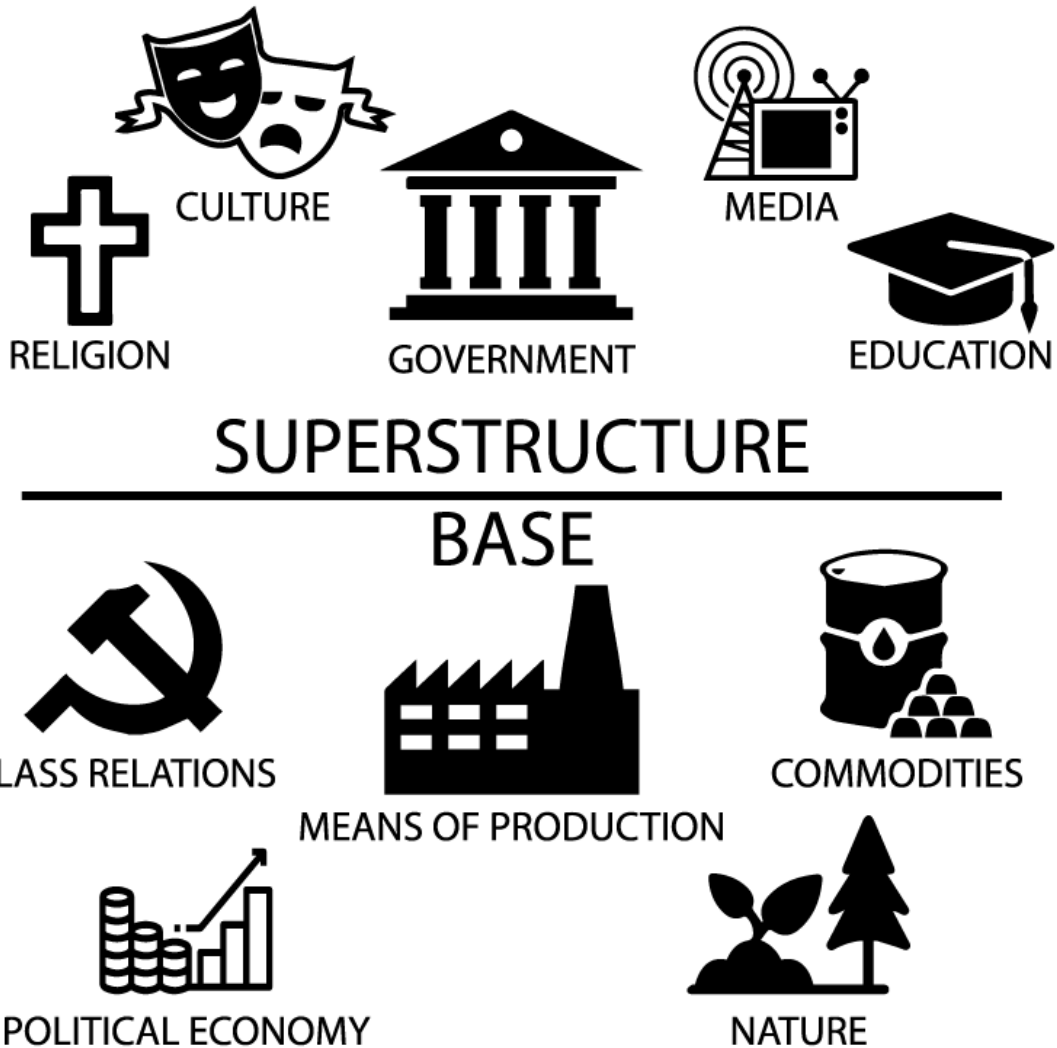
In other words, Marx argued that superstructure (which includes social consciousness) is shaped by the infrastructural basis, or base, of society. This reflects the more general dialectical relationship between matter and consciousness, in which the material, as the first basis of reality, determines consciousness, while consciousness mutually impacts the material [see *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*, p. 88]. So, the base of society — being material in nature — *determines* the superstructure, while the superstructure *impacts* the base. It couldn't possibly be the other way around, according to the dialectical materialist worldview, because the primary driving forces of conscious activity are rooted in material needs.

The theory of socio-economic forms proves that the materialist viewpoint of history is not just a hypothesis, but a scientifically-proven principle.

Annotation 30

As Lenin explains in *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*:

Now — since the appearance of Capital — the materialist conception of history is no longer a hypothesis, but a scientifically proven proposition. And until we get some other attempt to give a scientific explanation of the functioning and development of some formation of society — formation of



The base of society includes material-based elements and relations including political economy, means of production, class relations, etc. The superstructure includes human-consciousness-based elements and relations including government, culture, religion, etc.

society, mind you, and not the way of life of some country or people, or even class, etc. — another attempt just as capable of introducing order into the “pertinent facts” as materialism is, that is just as capable of presenting a living picture of a definite formation, while giving it a strictly scientific explanation -until then the materialist conception of history will be a synonym for social science. Materialism is not ‘primarily a scientific conception of history’... but the only scientific conception of it.

Capital is Marx’s main work which presents Marxism as a social science by illuminating the inevitable processes of birth, development, and decay of capitalism; the replacement of capitalism with socialism; and the historical mission of the working class — the social force that can implement this replacement. Marx’s materialist conception of history and proletarian revolution continued to be developed in *Critique of Gotha Programme* (Marx, 1875). This book discusses the dictatorship of the proletariat, the transitional period from capitalism to socialism, and phases of the communism building process, and several other premises. Together, these premises formed the scientific basis for Marx’s theoretical guidance for the future revolutionary activity of the proletariat.

Annotation 31

When Marx refers to a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” he does *not* mean “dictatorship” to mean “totalitarian” or “authoritarian.” Rather, here “dictatorship” simply refers to a situation in which political power is held by the working class (which constitutes the vast majority of society). “Dictatorship,” here, refers to full control of the means of production and government. This stands in contrast to capitalism, which is a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, in which capitalists (a small minority of society) have full control of the means of production and government.

c. The Defending and Developing Stage of Marxism

- *Historical Background and the Need for Defending and Developing Marxism*

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, capitalism developed into a new stage, called imperialism. The dominant and exploitative nature of capitalism became increasingly obvious. Contradictions in capitalist societies became increasingly serious — especially the class struggles between the proletariat and capitalists. In many

colonised countries, the resistance against imperialism created a unity between national liberation and proletarian revolution, uniting people in colonised countries with the working class in colonial countries. The core of such revolutionary struggles at this time was in Russia. The Russian proletariat and working class under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party became the leader of the whole international revolutionary movement.

During this time, both capitalist industry and natural sciences developed rapidly. Some natural scientists, especially physicists, lacked a grounding in materialist philosophical methodology and therefore fell into a viewpoint crisis. Idealist philosophers used this crisis to directly influence the perspective and activities of many revolutionary movements.

Annotation 32

Imperialism

Lenin defined imperialism as “the monopoly stage of capitalism,” listing its essential characteristics as “finance capital (serving) a few very big monopolist banks, merged with the capital of the monopolist associations of industrialists” and “a colonial policy of monopolist possession of the territory of the world, which has been completely divided up.”

Subjective and Empiricist Idealism

In the late 19th century, natural scientists were exploring various philosophical bases for scientific inquiry. One Austrian physicist, Ernst Mach, attempted to build a philosophy of natural science based on the works of German-Swiss philosopher Richard Avenarius known as “Empirio-Criticism.” Empirio-Criticism, which also came to be known as Machism, has many parallels with the philosophy of George Berkeley. Berkeley (1685 — 1753) was an Anglo-Irish philosopher whose main philosophical achievement was the formulation of a doctrine which he called “immaterialism,” and which later came to be known as “Subjective Idealism.” This doctrine was summed up by Berkeley’s maxim: “*Esse est percipi*” — “To be is to be perceived.” Subjective Idealism holds that individuals can only directly perceive and know about physical objects through direct sense experience. Therefore, individuals are unable to obtain any real knowledge about abstract concepts such as “matter”.

The philosophy of Empirio-Criticism, which was developed by Avenarius and Mach, also holds that the only reliable human knowledge we can hold comes from our sensations and experiences. Mach argued that the only source of knowledge is sense data

and “experience,” but that we can’t develop any actual knowledge of the actual external world. In other words, Mach’s conception of empirio-criticism holds all knowledge as essentially subjective in nature, and limited to (and by) human sense experience. Mach’s development of Empirio-Criticism (which can also be referred to as *empirical idealism* or *Machism*) was therefore a continuation of Berkeley’s subjective idealism. Both Berkeley’s Immaterialism and Empirio-Criticism are considered to be *subjective idealism* because these philosophies deny that the external world exists — or otherwise assert that it is unknowable — and, as such, hold that all knowledge stems from experiences which are essentially *subjective* in nature.

Mach argued that reality can only be defined by our sensual experiences of reality, and that we can never concretely know anything about the objective external world due to the limitations of sense experience. This stands in direct contradiction to dialectical materialism, which holds that we can develop accurate knowledge of the material world through observation and practice. Whereas Berkeley developed subjective idealist theological arguments to defend the Christian faith, Mach employed subjective idealism for purely secular purposes as a basis for scientific inquiry.

Note: all quotations below come from Lenin’s book: Materialism and Empirio-Criticism.

Vladimir Lenin strongly opposed Empirio-Criticism and, by extension, Machism, which was becoming popular among communist revolutionists in the late 19th century, because it pushed forward idealist principles which directly opposed the core tenets of dialectical materialism.

Lenin believed that revolutionaries should be guided not by idealism, but by dialectical materialism. He believed that Empirio-Criticism and Machism consisted of mysticism which would mislead political revolutionaries.

Lenin outlined Machian arguments against materialism:

The materialists, we are told, recognise something unthinkable and unknowable — ‘things-in-themselves’ — matter ‘outside of experience’ and outside of our knowledge [see: Annotation 72, p. 68]. They lapse into genuine mysticism by admitting the existence of something beyond, something transcending the bounds of ‘experience’... When they say that matter, by acting upon our sense-organs, produces sensations, the materialists take as their basis the ‘unknown,’ nothingness; for do they not themselves declare our sensations to be the only source of knowledge?

Lenin argued that this new form of Machist subjective idealism was, in fact, simply a rehashing of “old errors of idealism,” disguised and dressed up with new terminology. As such, Lenin simply reiterated the longstanding, bedrock dialectical materialist arguments against idealism [see Annotation 10, p. 10]. He was especially upset that

contemporary Marxists of his era were being swayed by Machist Empirio-Criticism because he found it to be in direct conflict with dialectical materialism, writing: “(These) would-be Marxists... try in every way to assure their readers that Machism is compatible with the historical materialism of Marx and Engels.”

Lenin goes on to describe the work of philosophers such as Franz Blei, who critiqued Marxism with Machist arguments, as “quasi-scientific tomfoolery decked out in the terminology of Avenarius.” He saw Empirio-Criticism as completely incompatible with communist revolution, since idealism had historically been used by the ruling class to deceive and control the lower classes. In particular, he believed that Machist idealism was being used by the capitalist class to preach bourgeois economics, writing that “the professors of economics are nothing but learned salesmen of the capitalist class.”

Lenin was deeply concerned that prominent Russian socialist philosophers were adopting Machist ideas and claiming them to be compatible with Marxism, writing:

The task of Marxists in both cases is to be able to master and adapt the achievements of these ‘salesmen’... and to be able to lop off their reactionary tendency, to pursue your own line and to combat the whole alignment of forces and classes hostile to us. And this is just what our Machians were unable to do, they slavishly follow the lead of the reactionary professorial philosophy.

Lenin further explains how Empirio-Criticism serves the interests of the capitalist class:

The empirio-critics as a whole... claim to be non-partisan both in philosophy and in social science. They are neither for socialism nor for liberalism. They make no differentiation between the fundamental and irreconcilable trends of materialism and idealism in philosophy, but endeavor to rise above them. We have traced this tendency of Machism through a long series of problems of epistemology, and we ought not to be surprised when we encounter it in sociology.

In the conclusion of the same text, Lenin explains why communists should reject Empirio-Criticism and Machism with four “standpoints,” summarized here:

1. The theoretical foundations of Empirio-Criticism can’t withstand comparison with those of dialectical materialism. Empirio-Criticism differs little from older forms of idealism, and the tired old errors of idealism clash directly with Marxist dialectical materialism. As Lenin puts it: “only utter ignorance of the nature of philosophical materialism generally and of the nature of Marx’s and Engels’ dialectical method can lead one to speak of ‘combining’ empirio-criticism and Marxism.”

2. The philosophical foundations of Empirio-Criticism are flawed. “Both Mach and Avenarius started with Kant (see: Annotation 72, p. 68) and, leaving him, proceeded

not towards materialism, but in the opposite direction, towards Hume and Berkeley (see: Annotation 10, p. 10)... The whole school of Mach and Avenarius is moving more and more definitely towards idealism.”

3. Machism is little more than a relatively obscure trend which has not been adopted by most scientists; a “reactionary (and) transitory infatuation.” As Lenin puts it: “the vast majority of scientists, both generally and in this special branch of science... are invariably on the side of materialism.”

4. Empirio-Criticism and Machism reflect the “tendencies and ideology of the antagonistic classes in modern society.” Idealism represents the interests of the ruling class in modern society, and is used to subjugate the majority of society. Idealist philosophy “stands fully armed, commands vast organizations and steadily continues to exercise influence on the masses, turning the slightest vacillation in philosophical thought to its own advantage.” In other words, idealism is used by the ruling class to manipulate our understanding of the world, as opposed to materialism (and especially dialectical materialism) which illuminates the true nature of reality which would lead to the liberation of the working class.

At this time, Marxism was widely disseminating throughout Russia, which challenged the social positions and benefits of capitalists. In reaction to Marxism, many ideological movements such as empiricism, utilitarianism, revisionism, etc. [see: Appendix F, p. 252] rose up and claimed to renew Marxism, while in fact they misrepresented and denied Marxism.

In this context, new achievements of natural science needed to be analyzed and summarized in order to continue the authentic development of Marxist viewpoints and methodologies. Theoretical principles to fight against the misrepresentation of Marxism needed to be developed in order to bring Marxism into the new era. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin would fulfill this historical requirement with his theoretical developments.

- *The Role of Lenin in Defending and Developing Marxism.*

Lenin’s process of defending and developing Marxism can be separated into three periods: first, from 1893 to 1907; next, from 1907 to 1917; and finally from the success of the October socialist revolution in 1917 until Lenin’s death in 1924.

From 1893 to 1907, Lenin focused on fighting against populists¹⁵. His book *What the Friends of the People are and How They Fight Against the Social Democrats (1894)* criticized the serious mistakes of this faction in regards to socio-historical issues and also exposed their scheme of distorting Marxism by erasing the boundaries between Marxism’s materialist dialectics and Hegel’s idealist dialectics. In the same book, Lenin

¹⁵ Populist faction: A faction within the Russian revolution which upheld an idealist capitalist ideology with many representatives such as Mikhailovsky, Bakunin, and Plekhanov. Populists failed to recognise the important roles of the people, of the farmers and workers alliance, and of the proletariat. Instead, they completely centered the role of the individual in society. They considered the rural communes as the nucleus of “socialism.” They saw farmers under the leadership of intellectuals as the main force of the revolution. The populists advocated individual terrorism as the primary method of revolutionary struggle.

also shared many thoughts about the important roles of theory, reality, and the relationship between the two.

Annotation 33

The *populist* philosophy was born in Russia in the 19th century with roots going back to the Narodnik agrarian socialist movement of the 1860s and 70s, composed of peasants who rose up in a failed campaign against the Czar. In the late 19th century, a new political movement emerged rooted in Narodnik ideas and a new party called the Socialist Revolutionary Party was formed. The political philosophy of this movement, now commonly translated into English as “populism,” focused on an agrarian peasant revolution led by intellectuals with the ambition of going directly from a feudal society to a socialist society built from rural communes. This movement overtly opposed Marxism and dialectical materialism and was based on subjective idealist utopianism (see Annotation 95, p. 94).

With the book *What is to be Done?* (1902), Lenin developed Marxist viewpoints on the methods for the proletariat to take power. He discussed economic, political, and ideological struggles. In particular, he emphasized the ideological formation process of the proletariat.

Annotation 34

In *What is to be Done?*, Lenin argues that the working class will not spontaneously attain class consciousness and push for political revolution simply due to economic conflict with employers and spontaneous actions like demonstrations and workers’ strikes. He instead insists that a political party of dedicated revolutionaries is needed to educate workers in Marxist principles and to organize and push forward revolutionary activity. He also pushed back strongly against the ideas of what he called “economism,” as typified by the ideas of Eduard Bernstein, a German political theorist who rejected many of Marx’s theories.

Bernstein opposed a working class revolution and instead focused on reform and compromise. He believed that socialism could be achieved within the capitalist economy and the system of bourgeois democracy. Lenin argued that Bernstein and his economist philosophy was opportunistic, and accused economists of seeking positions within bourgeois democracies to further their own personal interests and to quell revolutionary tendencies. As Lenin explained in *A Talk With Defenders of Economism*:

The Economists limited the tasks of the working class to an economic struggle for higher wages and better working conditions, etc., asserting that the political struggle was the business of the liberal bourgeoisie. They denied the leading role of the party of the working class, considering that the party should merely observe the spontaneous process of the movement and

register events. In their deference to spontaneity in the working-class movement, the Economists belittled the significance of revolutionary theory and class-consciousness, asserted that socialist ideology could emerge from the spontaneous movement, denied the need for a Marxist party to instill socialist consciousness into the working-class movement, and thereby cleared the way for bourgeois ideology. The Economists, who opposed the need to create a centralized working-class party, stood for the sporadic and amateurish character of individual circles. Economism threatened to divert the working class from the class revolutionary path and turn it into a political appendage of the bourgeoisie.

The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Vietnam, published by the National Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, defines opportunism, in this context, as “a system of political opinions with no direction, no clear path, no coherent viewpoint, leaning on whatever is beneficial for the opportunist in the short term.”

Lenin critiques opportunist socialism — referring to it as a “critical” trend in socialism — in *What is to be Done?*:

He who does not deliberately close his eyes cannot fail to see that the new “critical” trend in socialism is nothing more nor less than a new variety of opportunism. And if we judge people... by their actions and by what they actually advocate, it will be clear that “freedom of criticism” means “freedom for an opportunist trend in Social-Democracy, freedom to convert Social-Democracy into a democratic party of reform, freedom to introduce bourgeois ideas and bourgeois elements into socialism.”

The first revolution of the Russian working class, from 1905 to 1907, failed. Lenin summarized the reality of this revolution in the book *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905). In this book, Lenin explains that the capitalist class in Russia was actively engaged in its own revolution against Czarist feudalism. In this context of this ongoing bourgeois revolution, Lenin deeply developed Marxist concepts related to revolutionary methodologies, objective and subjective factors that will affect the working class revolution, the role of the people, the role of political parties etc.

Annotation 35

From 1905 to 1907, Russia was beset by political unrest and radical activity including workers’ strikes, military mutinies, and peasant uprisings. Russia had just suffered

a humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese war which cost tens of thousands of Russian lives without any benefits to the Russian people. In addition, the economic and political systems of Czarist Russia placed a severe burden on industrial workers and peasant farmers.

In response, the Russian proletariat rose up in various uprisings, demonstrations, and clashes against government forces, landlords, and factory owners. In the end, this revolutionary activity failed to overthrow the Czar's government, and the Czar remained firmly in power until the communist revolution of 1917.

Lenin wrote *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* in 1905 in

Geneva, Switzerland. In it, he argues forcefully against the political faction within the Russian socialist movement that came to be known as the "Mensheviks." The Mensheviks, as well as the Bolsheviks (Lenin's contemporary faction) emerged from a dispute within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party which took place in 1903.

In the same text, Lenin argued that the Mensheviks misunderstood the forces that were driving revolutionary activity in Russia. While the Mensheviks believed that the situation in Russia would develop along similar lines to previous revolutionary activity in Western Europe, Lenin argued that Russia's situation was unique and that Russian Marxists should therefore adopt different strategies and activities which reflected Russia's unique circumstances and material conditions.

Specifically, the Mensheviks believed that the working class should ally with the bourgeoisie to overthrow the Czar's feudalist regime, and then allow the bourgeoisie to build a fully functioning capitalist economy before workers should attempt their own revolution.

Lenin, on the other hand, presented a completely different analysis of class forces in Russia. He believed the bourgeoisie would seek a compromise with the Czar, as both feudal and bourgeois classes in Russia feared a proletarian revolution.

It's important to note that Russia's industrial workforce was very small at this time, and most Russians were peasant farmers. The Mensheviks believed Russian peasants would not be useful in a proletarian revolution, which is why they argued for allowing capitalism to be fully established in Russia before pushing for a working class revolution. They believed it was prudent to wait until the working class became larger and more dominant in Russia before attempting to overthrow capitalism. They believed that the peasant class would not be useful in any such revolution.

In contrast, Lenin believed that the peasants and industrial workers would have to work together to have any hope of a successful revolution. He further argued that an uprising of armed peasants and workers, fighting side by side, would be necessary for overthrowing the Czar.

From 1907 to 1917, there was a viewpoint crisis among many physicists. This strongly affected the birth of many idealist ideologies following Mach's Positivism that attempted to negate Marxism [See: Annotation 32, p. 27]. Lenin summarized the achievements of natural science as well as historical events of the late 19th century and

early 20th century in his book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909). By giving the classical definitions of matter, proving the relationships between matter and consciousness and between social existence and social consciousness, and pointing out the basic rules of consciousness, etc., Lenin defended Marxism and carried it forward to a new level. Lenin clearly expressed his thoughts on the history, nature, and structure of Marxism in the book *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism* (1913). He also talked about dialectics in *Philosophical Notebooks* (1914–1916) and expressed his thoughts about the proletarian dictatorship, the role of the Communist Party, and the path to socialism in his book *The State and Revolution* (1919).

The success of the October revolution in Russia in 1917 brought about a new era: the transitional period from capitalism to socialism on an international scale. This event presented new theoretical requirements that had not existed in the time of Marx and Engels' time.

In a series of works including: “*Left-Wing*” *Communism: an Infantile Disorder* (1920),

Once Again on the Trade Unions, The Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bukharin (1921), *The Tax in Kind* (1921), etc., Lenin summarized the revolutionary practice of the people, continued defending Marxist dialectics, and uncompromisingly fought against eclecticism and sophistry.

Annotation 36

In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels identifies the historical missions of the working class as:

1. Becoming the ruling class by establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat.
2. Seizing the means of production from the ruling class to end class society.

Eclecticism is an incoherent approach to philosophical inquiry which attempts to draw from various different theories, frameworks, and ideas to attempt to understand a subject, applying different theories in different situations without any consistency in analysis and thought. Eclectic arguments are typically composed of various pieces of evidence that are cherry picked and pieced together to form a perspective that lacks clarity. By definition, because they draw from different systems of thought without seeking a clear and cohesive understanding of the totality of the subject and its internal and external relations and its development over time, eclectic arguments run counter to the *comprehensive* and *historical* viewpoints [see p. 116]. Eclecticism bears superficial resemblance to dialectical materialism in that it attempts to consider a subject from many different perspectives, and analyzes relationships pertaining to a subject, but the major flaw of eclecticism is a lack of clear and coherent systems and principles, which leads to a chaotic viewpoint and an inability to grasp the true nature of the subject at hand.

Sophistry is the use of falsehoods and misleading arguments, usually with the intention of deception, and with a tendency of presenting non-critical aspects of a subject matter as critical, to serve a particular agenda. The word comes from the Sophists, a

group of professional teachers in Ancient Greece, who were criticized by Socrates (in Plato's dialogues) for being shrewd and deceptive rhetoricians. This kind of bad faith argument has no place in materialist dialectics. Materialist dialectics must, instead, be rooted in a true and accurate understanding of the subject, material conditions, and reality in general.

Simultaneously, Lenin also developed his Marxist viewpoint of the factors deciding the victory of a social regime, about class, about the two basic missions of the proletariat, about the strategies and tactics of proletarian parties in new historical conditions, about the transitional period, and about the plans of building socialism following the New Economic Policy (NEP), etc.

Annotation 37

The early 1920s were a period of great internal conflict in revolutionary Russia, with various figures and factions wanting to take the revolution in different directions. As such, Lenin wrote extensively on the direction he believed the revolution should be carried forth to ensure lasting victory against both feudalism and capitalism. He believed that the October, 1917 revolution represented the complete defeat of the Czar, however he believed the proletarian victory over the bourgeoisie would take more time. Russia was a poor, agrarian society. The vast majority of Russians under the Czar were poor peasants. Industry — and thus, the proletariat — was highly undeveloped compared to Western Europe. According to Lenin, a full and lasting proletarian victory over the bourgeoisie could only be won after the means of production were properly developed. In *Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution*, Lenin wrote:

This first victory [the October, 1917 revolution] is not yet the final victory, and it was achieved by our October Revolution at the price of incredible difficulties and hardships... We have made the start... The important thing is that the ice has been broken; the road is open, the way has been shown.

So, Lenin knew that the victory over the Czar and feudalism was only a partial victory, and that more work needed to be done to defeat the bourgeoisie entirely. He believed the key to this victory over the capitalist class would be economic development, since Russia was still a largely agrarian society with very little industrial or economic development compared to Western Europe:

Our last, but most important and most difficult task, the one we have done least about, is economic development, the laying of economic foundations for the new, socialist edifice on the site of the demolished feudal edifice and the semi-demolished capitalist edifice.

Lenin's plan for rapidly developing the means of production was his New Economic Policy, or the NEP. The New Economic Policy was proposed to be a temporary economic system that would allow a market economy and capitalism to exist within Russia, alongside state-owned business ventures, all firmly under the control of the working-class-dominated state. As Lenin explains in *Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution*:

At this very moment we are, by our New Economic Policy, correcting a number of our mistakes. We are learning how to continue erecting the socialist edifice in a small-peasant country.

He continues later in the text:

The proletarian state must become a cautious, assiduous and shrewd “businessman,” a punctilious wholesale merchant — otherwise it will never succeed in putting this small-peasant country economically on its feet. Under existing conditions, living as we are side by side with the capitalist (for the time being capitalist) West, there is no other way of progressing to communism. A wholesale merchant seems to be an economic type as remote from communism as heaven from earth. But that is one of the contradictions which, in actual life, lead from a small-peasant economy via state capitalism to socialism. Personal incentive will step up production; we must increase production first and foremost and at all costs. Wholesale trade economically unites millions of small peasants: it gives them a personal incentive, links them up and leads them to the next step, namely, to various forms of association and alliance in the process of production itself. We have already started the necessary changes in our economic policy and already have some successes to our credit; true, they are small and partial, but nonetheless they are successes. In this new field of “tuition” we are already finishing our preparatory class. By persistent and assiduous study, by making practical experience the test of every step we take, by not fearing to alter over and over again what we have already begun, by correcting our mistakes and most carefully analyzing their significance, we shall pass to the higher classes. We shall go through the whole “course,” although the present state of world economics and world politics has made that course much longer and much more difficult than we would have liked. No matter at what cost, no matter how severe the hardships of the transition period may be — despite disaster, famine and ruin — we shall not flinch; we shall triumphantly carry our cause to its goal.

With these great works dedicated to the three component parts of Marxism [see Annotation 42, p. 38], the name Vladimir Ilyich Lenin became an important part of Marxism. It marked a comprehensive developing step from Marxism to Marxism-Leninism.

d. Marxism-Leninism and the Reality of the International Revolutionary Movement

The birth of Marxism greatly affected both the international worker movements and communist movements. The revolution in March 1871 in France could be considered as a great experiment of Marxism in the real world. For the first time in human history, a new kind of state — the dictatorship of the proletariat state (Paris Commune) was established.

Annotation 38

The Paris Commune was an important but short-lived revolutionary victory of the working class which saw a revolutionary socialist government controlling Paris from March 18 to May 28, 1871.

During the brief existence of the Paris Commune, many important policies were set forth, including a separation of church and state, abolishment of rent, an end to child labor, and the right of employees to take over any business which had been abandoned by its owner. Unfortunately, the Paris Commune was brutally toppled by the French army, which killed between 6,000 and 7,000 revolutionaries in battle and by execution. The events of the Paris Commune heavily influenced many revolutionary thinkers and leaders, including Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and was referenced frequently in their works.

In August 1903, the very first Marxist proletariat party was established — the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. It was a true Marxist party that led the revolution in Russia in 1905. In October 1917, the victory of the socialist revolution of the proletariat in Russia opened a new era for human history.

In 1919, the Communist International* was held; in 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic was established. It marked the alliance of the proletariat of many countries. With the power of this alliance, the fight against Fascism not only protected the achievements of the proletariat's revolution, but also spread socialism beyond the borders of Russia. Following the lead of the Soviet Union, a community of socialist countries was built, with revolutions leading to the establishment of socialism in the following countries [and years of establishment]: Mongolia [1921], Vietnam [1945], the Democratic People's Republic of Korea [1945], Yugoslavia [1945], Albania [1946], Romania [1947], Czechoslovakia [1948], East Germany [1949], China [1949], Hungary [1949], Poland [1956], and Cuba [1959].

Annotation 39

* The First International, also known as the International Workingmen's Association, was founded in London and lasted from 1864–1876. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were key figures in the foundation and operation of this organization, which sought better conditions and the establishment of rights for workers.

The Second International was founded in Paris in 1889 to continue the work of the First International. It fell apart in 1916 because the members from different nations could not maintain solidarity through the outbreak of World War I.

The Third International, also known as the Communist International (or the Com-Intern for short), was founded in Moscow in 1919 (though many nations didn't join until later in the 1920s). Its goals were to overthrow capitalism, build socialism, and establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. It was dissolved in 1943 in the midst of the German invasion of Russia in World War II.

These great historical events strongly enhanced the revolutionary movement of the working class all around the whole world. The people awakened and encouraged the liberation resistance of many colonised countries. The guiding role of Marxism-Leninism brought many great results for a world of peace, independence, democracy, and social progress.

However, because of many internal and external factors, in the late 1980s, the socialist alliance faced a crisis and fell into a recession period. Even though the socialist system fell into crisis and was weakened, the socialist ideology still survived internationally. The determination of successfully building socialism was still very strong in many countries and the desire to follow the socialist path still spread widely in South America.

Nowadays, the main feature of our modern society is fast and varied change in many social aspects caused by technology and scientific revolution. But, no matter how quickly and diversely our society changes, the nature of the capitalist production method never changes. So, in order to protect the socialist achievements earned by the flesh and blood of many previous generations; and in order to have a tremendous development step in the career of liberating human beings, it is very urgent to protect, inherit and develop Marxism-Leninism and also innovate the work of building socialism in both theory and practice.

The Communist Party of Vietnam declared: "Nowadays, capitalism still has potential for development, but in nature, it's still an unjust, exploitative, and oppressive regime. The basic and inherent contradictions of capitalism, especially the contradictions between the increasing socialization of the production force and the capitalist private ownership regime, will never be solved and will even become increasingly serious. The feature of the current period of our modern society is: countries with different social regimes and different development levels co-exist, co-operate, struggle and compete fiercely for the interests of their own nations. The struggles for peace, independence, democracy, development, and social progress of many countries will still have

to cope with hardship and challenges but we will achieve new progress. *According to the principles of historical development, human beings will almost certainly go forward to socialism.*”¹⁶

Annotation 40

Historical materialism is the application of dialectical materialist philosophy and materialist dialectical methodology to the analysis of human history, society, and development. The principles of historical materialism, as developed by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, indicate that human society is moving towards socialism and will almost certainly — in time — develop into socialism, and then proceed towards a stateless, classless form of society (communism). These principles of historical materialism were initially formulated and discussed in several books by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, including:

- *The German Ideology*, by Marx and Engels
- *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, by Marx and Engels
- *Karl Marx*, by Lenin

The Communist Party of Vietnam has also declared:

“In the opinion of the Vietnam Communist Party, using Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought as the foundation for our ideology, the guideline for our actions is an important developmental step in cognition and logical thinking¹⁷. Achievements that the Vietnamese people have gained in the war to gain our independence, in peace, and in the renovation era, are all rooted in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought. Therefore, we have to ‘creatively apply and develop Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought in the Party’s activities. We have to regularly summarise reality, complement and develop theory, and soundly solve the problems of our society.’”¹⁸

Annotation 41

Ho Chi Minh Thought refers to a system of ideas developed by Ho Chi Minh and other Vietnamese communists which relate to the application of Marxist-Leninist philosophy and methodology to the specific material conditions of Vietnam during the revolutionary period.

¹⁶ *Delegate Document of the 11th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam.*

¹⁷ *Delegate document of the 9th national congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam.*

¹⁸ *Delegate document of the 10th national congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam.*

There is no universal road map for applying the principles of Marxism-Leninism. How the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism should be applied will vary widely from one time and place to another. This is why Ho Chi Minh and other Vietnamese communists had to develop Ho Chi Minh Thought: so that scientific socialism could be developed within the unique context of Vietnam's particular historical development and material conditions.

It is the duty of every revolutionary to study Marxism-Leninism as well as specific applied forms of Marxism-Leninism developed by revolutionaries for their own specific times and places, such as: Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam), Mao Zedong (China), Fidel Castro and Che Guevera (Cuba), etc. However, it must be recognized that the ideas, strategies, methodologies, and philosophies developed in such particular circumstances can't be applied in exactly the same way in other times and places, such as our own contemporary material conditions.

The Renovation Era refers to the period of time in Vietnam from the 1980s until the early 2000s during which the Đổi Mới (renovation) policies were implemented. These policies restructured the Vietnamese economy to end the previous subsidizing model (which was defined by state ownership of the entire economy). The goals of the Renovation Era were to open Vietnam economically and politically and to normalize relations with the rest of the world. The Đổi Mới policies were generally successful and paved the way to *the Path to Socialism Era* which Vietnam exists in today. The goals of the Path to Socialism Era are to develop Vietnam into a modern, developed country with a strong economy and wealthy people, which will allow us to transition towards the lower stage of communism, which Lenin called "socialism."

And, finally: "We have to be consistent with Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought. We have to creatively apply and develop the ideology correspondingly with the reality in Vietnam. We have to firmly aim for national independence and socialism."

II. Objects, Purposes, and Requirements for Studying the Basic Principles of Marxism-leninism

1. Objects and Purposes of Study

The objects of study of this book, *The Basic Principles of Marxism-Leninism*, are the fundamental viewpoints of Marxism-Leninism in its three component parts.

Annotation 42

Remember that a viewpoint is the starting point of analysis which determines the direction of thinking and the perspective from which problems are considered. Also remember that Marxism-Leninism has three component parts:

1. The Philosophy of Marxism:

Including Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism

2. The Political Economy of Marxism:

A system of knowledge and laws that define the production process and commodity exchange in human society.

3. Scientific Socialism

The system of thought pertaining to the establishment of the communist social economy form.

These objects of study stand as the viewpoints — the starting points of analysis — of Marxist-Leninist philosophy and the three component parts of which it's composed.

In the scope of **Marxist-Leninist Philosophy** [the first component part of Marxism-Leninism], these objects of study are:

- Dialectical Materialism — the fundamental and most universal worldview and methodologies which form the theoretical core of a scientific worldview*. [See Part 1, p. 44]
 - Materialist Dialectics — the science of development, of common relationships, and of the most common rules of motion and development of nature, society and human thought. [See Chapter 2, p. 98]
 - Historical Materialism — the application and development of Materialism and Dialectics in studying social aspects. [Historical materialism is the topic of Part 2 of the textbook from which this entire text has been translated, which we hope to translate in the future.]
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Annotation 43

* Remember that *Scientific* in Marxism-Leninism refers to a systematic pursuit of knowledge, research, theory, and understanding [see Annotation 1, p. 1]. Note, also, that *Worldview* refers to the whole of an individual's or society's opinions and conceptions about the world, about humans ourselves, and about life and the position of human beings in the world. This is discussed in more detail on page 44.

Thus, a *scientific worldview* is a worldview that is expressed by a systematic pursuit of knowledge of definitions and categories that generally and correctly reflect the relationships of things, phenomena, and processes in the objective material world, including relationships between humans, as well as relationships between humans and the world.

In the scope of **Marxist-Leninist Political Economics** [the second component part of Marxism-Leninism], the objects of study are:

- The theory of value and the theory of surplus value.
 - Economic theory about monopolist capitalism and state monopolist capitalism.
 - General economic rules about capitalist production methods, from the stage of formation, to the stage of development, to the stage of perishing, which will be followed by the birth of a new production method: the communist production method.
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Annotation 44

Marxist-Leninist political economics is the topic of Part 3 of the textbook from which this entire text has been translated, which we hope to translate in the future.

In the scope of **Scientific Socialism** [the third component part of Marxism-Leninism], the objects of study are:

- The historical mission of the working class and the progression of a socialist revolution.
- Matters related to the future formation and development periods of the communist socio-economic form.
- Guidelines for the working class in implementing our historical mission.

*The purposes of studying *The Basic Principles of Marxism-Leninism* are: to master Marxist-Leninist viewpoints of science, revolution, and humanism*; to thoroughly understand the most important theoretical foundation of Ho Chi Minh Thought, the revolutionary path, and the ideological foundation of the Vietnam Communist Party. Based on that basis, we can build a scientific worldview and methodology and a revolutionary worldview; build our trust in our revolutionary ideals; creatively apply them in our cognitive and practical activities and in practicing and cultivating morality to meet the requirements of Vietnamese people in the cause of building a socialist Vietnam.*

Annotation 45

* The humanism of Marxism-Leninism differs greatly from the humanism of Feuerbach discussed in Annotation 12, p. 13. Marxist-Leninist humanism concerns itself with the liberation of all humans. As Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*: “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”

2. Some Basic Requirements of the Studying Method

There are some basic requirements for studying the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism:

First, Marxist-Leninist theses were conceptualized under many different circumstances in order to solve different problems, so the expressions of thought of Marxist-Leninists can vary. Therefore, students studying the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism must correctly understand its spirit and essence and avoid theoretical purism and dogmatism.

Annotation 46

Marxism-Leninism should be understood as an applied science, and application of this science will vary based on material conditions. As Engels wrote in a personal letter in 1887, remarking on the socialist movement in the USA: “Our theory is a theory of evolution, not a dogma to be learned by heart and to be repeated mechanically. The less it is drilled into the Americans from outside and the more they test it with their own experience... the deeper will it pass into their flesh and blood.”

As an example, Lenin tailored his actions and ideas specifically to suit the material conditions of Russia under the Czar and in the early revolutionary period. Russia’s material conditions were somewhat unique during the time of Lenin’s revolutionary activity, since Russia was an agrarian monarchy with a large peasant population and a relatively undeveloped industrial sector. As such, Lenin had to develop strategies, tactics, and ideas which suited those specific material conditions, such as determining that the industrial working class and agricultural peasants should work together. As Lenin explained in *The Proletariat and the Peasantry*:

Thus the red banner of the class-conscious workers means, first, that we support with all our might, the peasants’ struggle for full freedom and all the land; secondly, it means that we do not stop at this, but go on further. We are waging, besides the struggle for freedom and land, a fight for socialism.

Obviously, this statement would not be specifically applicable to a society with highly developed industry and virtually no rural peasants (such as, for instance, the modern-day USA), just as Lenin’s remarks about the Czar would not be specifically applicable to any society that does not have an institution of monarchy.

As another example, take the works of Ho Chi Minh. Ho Chi Minh Thought is defined by the Communist Party of Vietnam as “a complete system of thought about the fundamental issues of the Vietnam revolution.” In other words, Ho Chi Minh Thought is a specific application of the principles of Marxism-Leninism to the material conditions of Vietnam.

One unique aspect of Vietnam’s revolution which Ho Chi Minh focused on was colonization. As a colonized country, Ho Chi Minh realized that Vietnam had unique challenges and circumstances that would need to be properly addressed through revolutionary struggle. Another unique aspect of Vietnam’s material conditions was the fact that the colonial administration of Vietnam changed hands throughout the revolution: from France, to Japan, back to France, then to the USA. Ho Chi Minh was able to dynamically and creatively apply Marxism-Leninism to these shifting material

conditions. For instance, in *Founding of the Indochinese Communist Party*, written in 1930, Ho Chi Minh explains some of the unique problems faced by the colonized people of Indochina (modern day Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) and proposes solutions specific to these unique material conditions:

On the one hand, they (the French) use the feudalists and comprador bourgeoisie (of Vietnam) to oppress and exploit our people. On the other, they terrorize, arrest, jail, deport, and kill a great number of Vietnamese revolutionaries. If the French imperialists think that they can suppress the Vietnamese revolution by means of terror, they are grossly mistaken. For one thing, the Vietnamese revolution is not isolated but enjoys the assistance of the world proletariat in general and that of the French working class in particular. Secondly, it is precisely at the very time when the French imperialists are frenziedly carrying out terrorist acts that the Vietnamese Communists, formerly working separately, have united into a single party, the Indochinese Communist Party, to lead the revolutionary struggle of our entire people.

During this period, the nations of Indochina were predominantly agricultural, prompting Ho Chi Minh to suggest in the same text that it would be necessary “to establish a worker-peasant-soldier government” and “to confiscate all the plantations and property belonging to the imperialists and the Vietnamese reactionary bourgeoisie and distribute them to the poor peasants.” Obviously all of these considerations are specific to the material conditions of Indochina under French colonial rule in 1930.

By 1939, the situation was changing rapidly. Ho Chi Minh was operating from China, which was being invaded by fascist Japan. He knew that it was only a matter of time before the Japanese imperial army would come to threaten Vietnam and the rest of Indochina. As such, Ho Chi Minh wrote a letter to the Indochinese Communist Party outlining recommendations, strategies, and goals pertaining to the precipitating material conditions. At that time, France had not yet been invaded by Germany, but Ho Chi Minh was very aware of the looming threat of fascism both in Europe and in Asia. He realized that rising up in revolutionary civil war against the French colonial administration would give fascist Japan the opportunity to quickly conquer all of Indochina, which is why he made the following recommendations in a letter to the Communist Party of Indochina in 1939:

Our party should not strive for demands which are too high, such as total independence, or establishing a house of representatives. If we do that, we will fall into the trap of fascist Japan. For now, we should only ask for democracy, freedom to organize, freedom to hold meetings, freedom of speech, and for the release of political prisoners. We should also fight for our party to be organized and to operate legally.

Once France fell to Germany in 1940, Indochina was immediately handed over to Japanese colonial rule. The Japanese army was brutal in its occupation of Vietnam, and the French colonial administrators surrendered entirely to the Japanese empire and helped the Japanese to administer all of Indochina. Ho Chi Minh returned to Vietnam in January of 1941 and participated directly with the resistance struggle against Japan until 1945, when the situation once again changed dramatically due to the Japanese military's surrender to allied forces and withdrawal from Vietnam. He immediately took advantage of this situation and held a successful revolution against both the Japanese and French administrators. In the Declaration of Independence for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh wrote:

After the Japanese had surrendered to the Allies, our whole people rose to regain our national sovereignty and to found the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The truth is that we have wrested our independence from the Japanese and not from the French. The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the chains which for nearly a century have fettered them and have won independence for the homeland.

As France began to make their intentions clear that they would be resuming their colonialist claim to Indochina, Ho Chi Minh began preparing the country for a new chapter in revolutionary struggle. In his 1946 letter to the people of Vietnam, entitled *A Nationwide Call for Resistance*, Ho Chi Minh wrote:

We call everyone, man and woman, old and young, from every ethnic minority, from every religion, to stand up and fight to save our country. If you have guns, use guns. If you have swords, use swords. If you have nothing, use sticks. Everyone must stand up and fight.

As these historical developments illustrate, Ho Chi Minh was able to creatively and dynamically apply the principles of Marxism-Leninism to suit the shifting material conditions of Vietnam, just as Lenin had to creatively and dynamically apply these principles to the emerging situation in Russia in the early 20th century. So is the task of every student of Marxism-Leninism: to learn to apply these principles creatively and dynamically to the material conditions at hand.

Second, the birth and development of Marxist-Leninist theses is a process. In that process, all Marxist-Leninist theses have strong relationships with each other. They complement and support each other. Thus, students studying each Marxist-Leninist thesis need to put it in proper relation and context with other theses found within each different component part of Marxism-Leninism in order to understand the unity

in diversity [see: Annotation 107, p. 110], the consistency of every thesis in particular, and the whole of Marxism-Leninism in general.

Third, an important goal of studying the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism is to understand clearly the most important theoretical basis of Ho Chi Minh Thought, of the Vietnam Communist Party and its revolutionary path. Therefore, we must attach Marxist-Leninist theses to Vietnam's revolutionary practice and the world's practice in order to see the creative application of Marxism-Leninism that President Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnam Communist Party implemented in each period of history.

Fourth, we must study the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism to meet the requirements for a new Vietnamese people in a new era. So, the process of studying is also the process of self-educating and practicing to improve ourselves step-by-step in both individual and social life.

Fifth, Marxism-Leninism is not a closed and immutable theoretical system. On the contrary, it is a theoretical system that continuously develops based on the development of reality. Therefore, the process of studying Marxism-Leninism is also a process of reflection: summarizing and reviewing your own practical experiences and sharing what you've learned from these experiences in order to contribute to the scientific and humanist development of Marxism-Leninism. In addition, when studying the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism, we need to consider these principles in the proper context of the history of the ideological development of humanity. Such context is important because Marxism-Leninism is quintessentially¹ the product of that history.

These requirements have strong relationships with each other. They imbue the studying process with the quintessence of Marxism-Leninism. And more importantly, they help students apply that quintessence into cognitive and practical activities.

Part I: The Worldview and Philosophical Methodology of Marxism — Leninism

Worldview refers to the whole of an individual's or society's opinions and conceptions about the world, about humans ourselves, and about life and the position of human beings in that world. Our worldview directs and orientates our life, including our cognitive and practical activities, as well as our self-awareness. Our worldview defines our ideals, our value system, and our lifestyle. So, a proper and scientific worldview serves as a foundation to establish a constructive approach to life. One of the basic criteria to evaluate the growth and maturity of an individual or a whole society is the degree to which worldview has been developed.

Methodology is a system of reasoning: the ideas and rules that guide humans to research, build, select, and apply the most suitable methods in both perception and practice. Methodologies can range from very specific to broadly general, with *philosophical methodology* being the most general scope of methodology.

¹ See Annotation 6, p. 8.

Annotation 47

Tran Thien Tu, the vice-dean of the Department of Marxist-Leninist Theoretical Studies at the Le Duan Political Science University in Quang Tri, Vietnam, defines three degrees of scopes of Methodology. They are, from most specific to most general:

1. Field Methodology

The most specific scope of methodology; a field methodology will apply only to a single specific scientific field.

2. General Methodology

A more general scope of methodology; a general methodology will be shared by various scientific fields.

3. Philosophical Methodology

The most general scope of methodology, encompassing the whole of the material world and human thought.

Worldview and philosophical methodology are the fundamental knowledge-systems* of Marxism-Leninism.

Annotation 48

* In the original Vietnamese, the word *lý luận* is used, which we roughly translate to the phrase “knowledge-system” throughout this book. Literally, *lý luận* is a combination of the words *lý lẽ*, which means “argument,” and *bàn luận*, which means “to infer.”

The full meaning of *lý luận* is: a system of ideas that reflect reality expressed in a system of knowledge that allows for a complete view of the fundamental laws and relationships of objective reality.

The Worldview and Philosophical Methodology of Marxism-Leninism

Marxist-Leninist worldview and philosophical methodology emerge from the quintessence [see Annotation 6, p. 8] of dialectical materialism, which itself developed from other forms of dialectics, which in turn developed throughout the history of the ideological development of humanity.

Materialism is foundational to Marxism-Leninism in two important ways:

Dialectical Materialism is the ideological core of a scientific worldview.

Historical Materialism is a system of dialectical materialist opinions about the origin of, motivation of, and the most common rules that dominate the movement and development of human society.

Dialectics are also foundational to Marxism-Leninism, specifically in the form of *Materialist Dialectics*, which Lenin defined as “the doctrine of development in its fullest, deepest and most comprehensive form, the doctrine of the relativity of human knowledge.”² Lenin also defined Materialist Dialectics as “what is now called theory of knowledge or epistemology.”³ [Note: Epistemology is the theoretical study of knowledge; for more information see *Cognitive Theory of Dialectical Materialism*, p. 204.]

Annotation 49

For beginning students of Marxism-Leninism, distinguishing between *Dialectical Materialism* and *Materialist Dialectics* may at first be confusing. Here is an explanation of each concept and how they relate to one another:

Dialectical Materialism is a scientific understanding of matter, consciousness and the relationship between the two. Dialectical Materialism is used to understand the world by studying such relationships.

Materialist Dialectics is a science studying the general laws of the movement, change, and development of nature, society and human thought.

And so, we use Dialectical Materialism to understand the fundamental nature of reality. This understanding is used as a basis for changing the world, using Materialist Dialectics to guide our activities. We can then reflect on the results of our activities, using Dialectical Materialism, to further develop our understanding of the world.

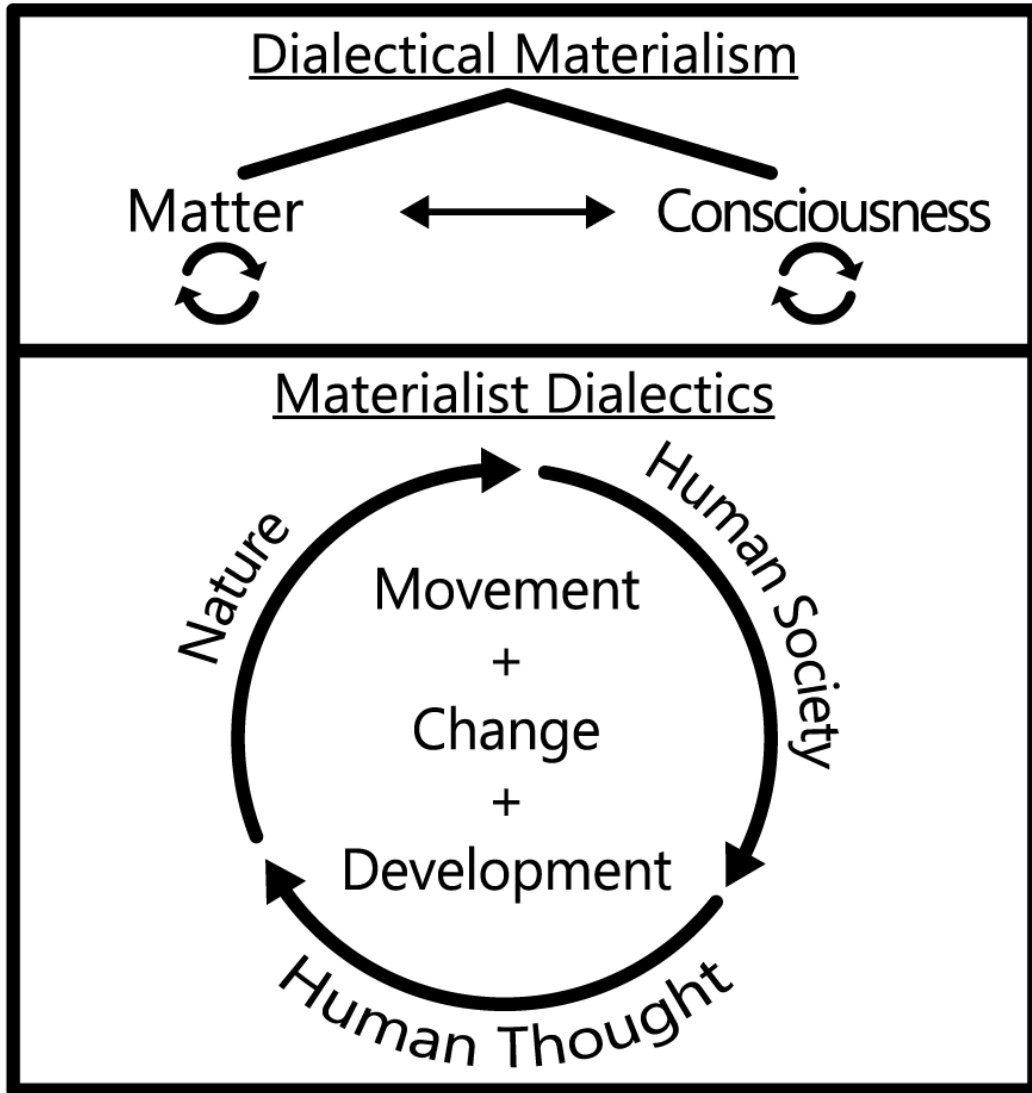
As Marxist-Leninists, we utilize this continuous cycle between studying and understanding the world through Dialectical Materialism and affecting change in the world through Materialist Dialectics with the goal of bringing about socialism and freeing humanity.

It is also important to understand the nature of *dialectical relationships*.

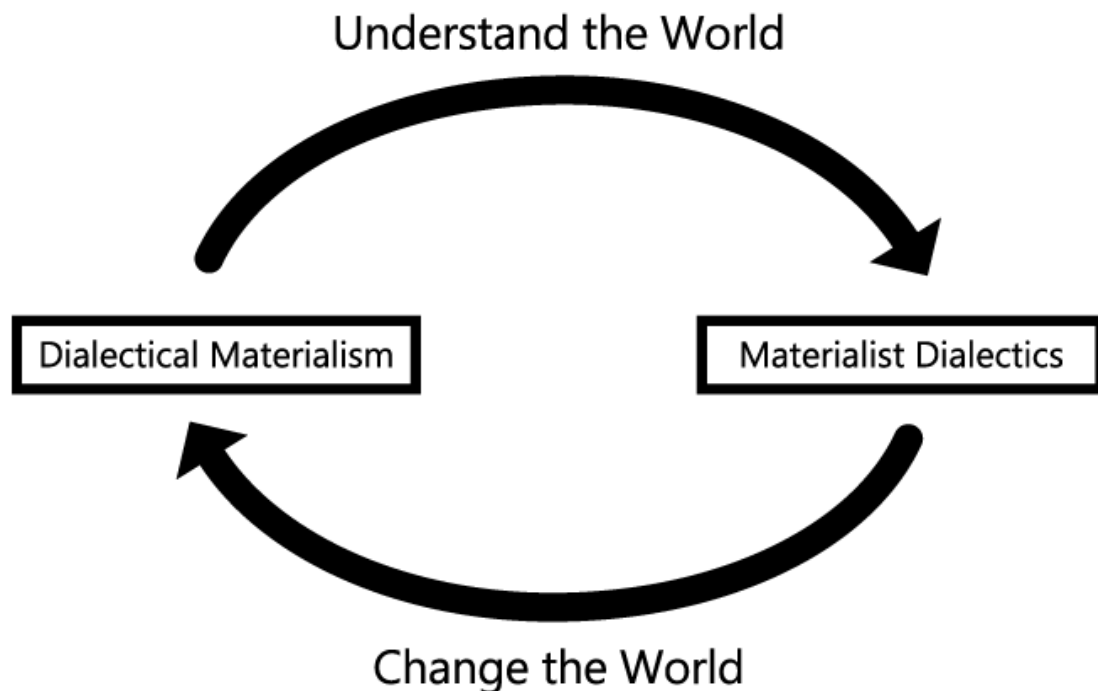
A dialectical relationship is a relationship in which two things mutually impact one another. Dialectical materialism perceives all things in *motion* [see *Mode and Forms of Existence of Matter*, p. 59] and in a constant state of *change*, and this motion and change originates from relationships in which all things mutually move and change each other through interaction, leading to development over time.

² *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1913.

³ *Karl Marx*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1914.



Dialectical Materialism and Materialist Dialectics.



Relationship between Dialectical Materialism and Materialist Dialectics.

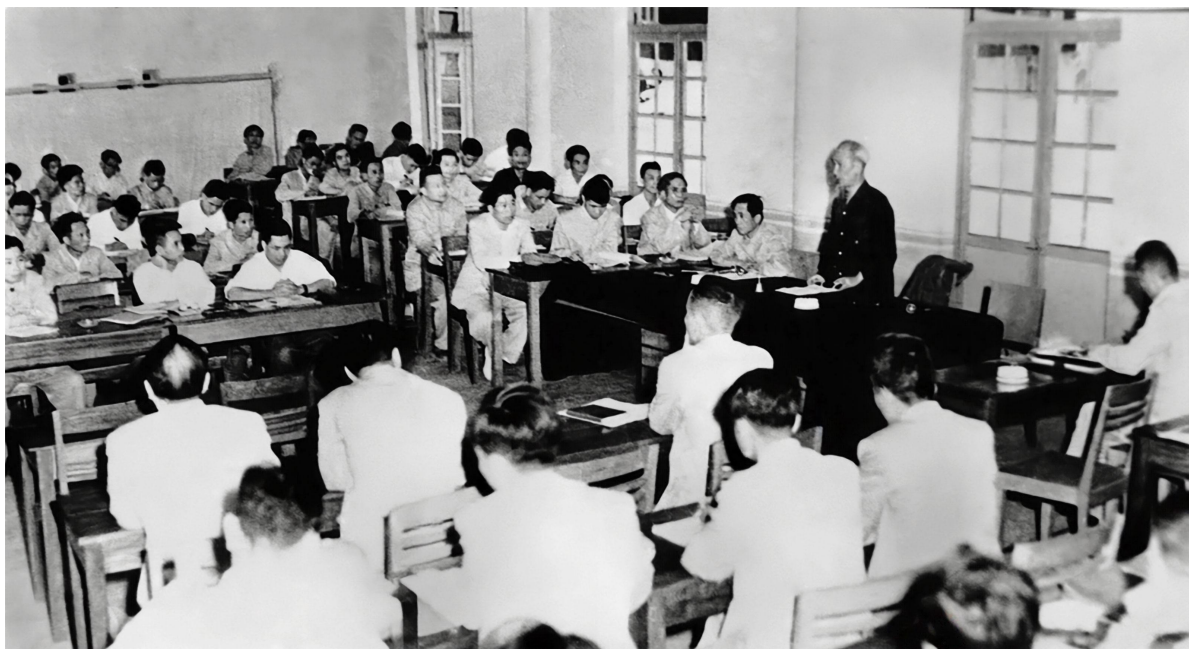
Thoroughly understanding the basic content of the worldview and methodology of Marxism-Leninism is the most important requirement in order to properly study the whole theory system of Marxism-Leninism and to creatively apply it into cognitive and practical activities in order to solve the problems that our society must cope with.

3. Excerpt From *Modifying the Working Style* By Ho Chi Minh

Training is a must. There is a proverb: “without a teacher, you can never do well;” and the expression: “learn to eat, learn to speak, learn to pack, learn to unpack.”

Even many simple subjects require study, let alone revolutionary work and resistance work. How can you perform such tasks without any training?

But training materials must be aimed at the needs of the masses. We must ask: after people receive their training, can they apply their knowledge immediately? Is it possible to practice right away?



Ho Chi Minh training cadres in 1959.

If training is not immediately practical, then years of training would be useless.

Unfortunately, many of our trainers do not understand this simple logic. That's why there are cadres who train rural people in the uplands in the field of "economics!"

In short, our way of working, organizing, talking, propagandizing, setting slogans, writing newspapers, etc., must all take this sentence as a model:

"From within the masses, back into the masses."

No matter how big or small our tasks are, we must clearly examine and modify them to match the culture, living habits, level of education, struggling experiences, desire, will, and material conditions of the masses. On that basis we will form our ways of working and organizing. Only then can we have the masses on our side.

Otherwise, if you just do as you want, following your own thoughts, your subjectivity, and then force your personal thoughts upon the masses, it is just like "cutting your feet to fit your shoes." Feet are the masses. Shoes are our ways of organizing and working.

Shoes are made to fit people's feet, not the other way around.

Chapter 1: Dialectical Materialism

Dialectical Materialism, one of the materialist foundations of Marxism-Leninism, uses the materialist worldview and dialectical methods to study fundamental philosophical issues. Dialectical Materialism is the most advanced form of Materialism, and serves as the *theoretical core of a scientific worldview*. Therefore, thoroughly understanding the basic content of Dialectical Materialism is the essential prerequisite to study both the component principles of Marxism-Leninism in particular, and the whole of Marxism-Leninism in general.

I. Materialism and Dialectical Materialism

1. The Opposition of Materialism and Idealism in Solving Basic Philosophical Issues

Philosophy is a system of the most general human theories and knowledge about our world, about ourselves, and our position in our world.

Philosophy has existed for thousands of years. Philosophy has different objects of study depending on different periods of time. Summarizing the whole history of philosophy, Engels said: “The great basic question of all philosophy, especially of more modern philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being¹.”

So, philosophy studies the relations between consciousness and matter, and between humans and nature.

In philosophy, there are two main questions:

Question 1: The question of consciousness and matter: which came first; or, to put it another way, which one determines which one?

In attempting to answer this first question, philosophy has separated into two main schools: *Materialism*, and *Idealism*.

Question 2: Do humans have the capacity to perceive the world as it truly exists?

In answer to this second question, two schools: *Intelligibility* — which admits the human cognitive capacity to truly perceive the world — and *unintelligibility* — which denies that capacity.

Materialism is the belief that the nature of the world is matter; that matter comes first; and that matter determines consciousness. People who uphold this belief are called materialists. Throughout human history, many different factions of materialists with various schools of materialist thought have evolved.

Idealism is the belief that the nature of the world is consciousness; consciousness precedes matter; consciousness decides matter. People who uphold this belief are called idealists. Like materialism, various factions of idealists with varying schools of idealist thought have also evolved throughout history.

Idealism has cognitive origins and social origins.

¹ *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Friedrich Engels, 1886.

Annotation 50

Cognitive origin refers to origination from the human consciousness of individuals.

Social origin refers to origination from social relations between human beings.

So, idealism originates from both the conscious activity of individual humans as well as social activity between human beings.

These origins are *unilateral consideration* and *absolutization* of only one aspect or one characteristic of the whole cognitive process.

Annotation 51

Unilateral consideration is the consideration of a subject from one side only.

Absolutization occurs when one conceptualizes some belief or supposition as *always* true in *all* situations *without* exception.

Both unilateral consideration and absolutization fail to consider the dynamic, constantly changing, and interconnected relations of all things, phenomena, and ideas in our reality.

Idealism originates from unilateral consideration because idealists ignore the material world and consider reality *only* from the perspective of the human mind. It also originates from absolutism because idealists *absolutize* human reasoning as the *only* source of truth and knowledge about our world *without exception*.

As Lenin wrote in *On the Question of Dialectics*: “Philosophical idealism is a unilateral development, an overt development, of one out of many attributes, or one out of many aspects, of consciousness.”

Historically, idealism has typically benefitted the oppressive, exploitative class of society. Idealism and religions usually have a close relation with each other, and support each other to co-exist and co-develop.

Annotation 52

Idealists, in absolutizing human consciousness, have a tendency to only give credence to the work of the mind and ignore the value of physical labor. This has been used to justify class structures in which religious and intellectual laborers are given authority and privilege over manual laborers.

This situation has also led to the idea that mental factors play a decisive role in the development of human society in particular and the whole world in general. This idealist view was supported by the ruling class and used to justify its own power and privilege in society. The dominant class has historically used such idealist philosophy as the justifying foundation for their political-social beliefs in order to maintain their ruling positions.

Marx discusses this tendency for rulers to idealistically justify their own rule in *The German Ideology*:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. For instance, in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy, and bourgeoisie are contending for mastery and where, therefore, mastery is shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant idea and is expressed as an 'eternal law.'

Marx goes on to explain how the idealist positions of the ruling class tend to get embedded in historical narratives:

Whilst in ordinary life every shopkeeper is very well able to distinguish between what somebody professes to be and what he really is, our historians have not yet won even this trivial insight. They take every epoch at its word and believe that everything it says and imagines about itself is true. This historical method which reigned in Germany, and especially the reason why, must be understood from its connection with the illusion of ideologists in general, e.g. the illusions of the jurist, politicians (of the practical statesmen among them, too), from the dogmatic dreamings and distortions of these fellows; this is explained perfectly easily from their practical position in life, their job, and the division of labour.

In history, there are two main forms of idealism: *subjective* and *objective*.

Subjective idealism asserts that *consciousness* is the primary existence. It asserts that all things and phenomena can only be experienced as subjective sensory perceptions while denying the objective existence of material reality altogether.

Objective idealism also asserts the ideal and consciousness as the primary existence, but also posits that the ideal and consciousness are objective, and that they exist independently of nature and humans. This concept is given many names, such as “absolute concept”, “absolute spirit,” “rationality of the world,” etc.

Annotation 53

Primary existence is existence which precedes and determines other existences.

Idealists believe that consciousness has primary existence over matter, that the nature of the world is ideal, and that the ideal defines existence.

Materialists believe the opposite: that matter has primary existence over the ideal, and that matter precedes and determines consciousness.

Dialectical Materialism holds that matter and consciousness have a dialectical relationship, in which matter has primary existence over the ideal, though consciousness can impact the material world through willful conscious activity.

The primary existence of matter within Dialectical Materialism is discussed further in *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*, p. 88.

Willful activity (*willpower*) is discussed in *Nature and Structure of Consciousness*, p. 79.

The key difference between *subjective* and *objective* idealists is this:

Subjective idealists believe that there is no external material world whatsoever — that what we imagine as the material world is merely illusory — and that all reality is created by consciousness, whereas objective idealists believe that there *is* a material world outside of human consciousness, but it exists independently of human consciousness; therefore (according to objective idealists), since humans can only observe the world through conscious experience, the material world can never be truly known or observed by our consciousness.

In opposition to Idealism, Materialism originated through practical experience and the development of science. Through practical experience and systematic development of human knowledge, Materialism has come to serve as a universally applicable theoretical system which benefits progressive social forces and which also orients the activities of those forces in both perception and practice.

Annotation 54

Materialism benefits progressive social forces by showing reality as it is, by dispelling the idealist positions of the ruling class, and by revealing that society and the world can be changed through willful activity.

Materialism guides progressive social forces by grounding thought and activity in material reality, enabling strategies and outcomes that line up with the realities of the material world. For instance, we must avoid utopianism [see Annotation 17, p. 18] in which emphasis is placed on working out ideal forms of society through debate, conjecture, and conscious activity alone. Revolution against capitalism must, instead, focus on affecting material relations and processes of development through willful activity.

As Engels pointed out in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*: “The final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men’s brains, not in men’s better insights into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange.”

2. Dialectical Materialism — the Most Advanced Form of Materialism

In human history, as human society and scientific understanding have developed, materialism has also developed through three forms: *Primitive Materialism*, *Metaphysical Materialism*, and *Dialectical Materialism*.

Primitive Materialism is the primitive form of materialism. Primitive materialism recognizes that matter comes first, and holds that the world is composed of certain elements, and that these were the first objects, the origin, of the world, and that these elements are the essence of reality. These Primitive Materialist concepts can be found in many ancient materialist theories in such places as China, India, and Greece. [These Primitive Materialist elemental philosophies are discussed more in *Matter*, p. 53] Although it has many shortcomings, Primitive Materialism is partially correct at the most fundamental level, because it uses the material of nature itself to explain nature.

Metaphysical Materialism is the second basic form of Materialism. This form of materialism was widely discussed and developed in Western Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. During this time, the metaphysical method of perceiving the world was applied to materialist philosophy. Although Metaphysical Materialism does not accurately reflect the world in terms of universal relations [see p. 108] and development, it was an important step forward in the fight against idealist and religious worldviews,

especially during the transformational period from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance in many Western European countries.

Annotation 55

Metaphysical materialism was strongly influenced by *mechanical philosophy*, a scientific and philosophical movement popular in the 17th century which explored mechanical machines and compared natural phenomena to mechanical devices. Mechanical philosophy led to a belief that all things — including living organisms — were built as (and could theoretically be built by humans as) mechanical devices. Influenced by this philosophy, metaphysical materialists came to see the world as a giant mechanical machine composed of parts, each of which exists in an essentially isolated and static state.

Metaphysical materialists believed that all change can exist only as an increase or decrease in quantity, brought about by external causes. Metaphysical materialism contributed significantly to the struggle against idealistic and religious worldviews, especially during the historical transition period from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance in Western European countries. Metaphysical materialism also had severe limitations; especially in failing to understand many key aspects of reality, such as the nature of development through change/motion and relationships.

Dialectical Materialism is the third basic form of materialism. It was founded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and defended and developed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin as well as many of his successors. By inheriting the quintessence of previous theories and thoroughly integrating contemporary scientific achievements, Dialectical Materialism immediately solved the shortcomings of the Primitive Materialism of ancient times as well as the Metaphysical Materialism of modern Western Europe. It reaches the highest development level of materialism so far in history.

By accurately reflecting objective reality with universal relations and development*, Dialectical Materialism offers humanity a great tool for scientific cognitive activities and revolutionary practice. The Dialectical Materialist system of thought was built on the basis of scientific explanations about matter, consciousness, and the relationship between the two.

Annotation 56

* Materialist Dialectical methodology explains the world in terms of relationships and development. This is discussed in *Basic Principles of Materialist Dialectics*, p. 106.

II. Dialectical Materialist Opinions About Matter, Consciousness, and the Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness

1. Matter

a. Category of “Matter”

Matter is a philosophical subject which has been examined for more than 2,500 years. Since ancient times, there has been a relentless struggle between materialism and idealism around this subject. Idealism asserts that the world’s nature, the first basis of all existence, is consciousness, and that matter is only a product of that consciousness. Conversely, materialism asserts that nature, the entirety of the world, is composed of matter, that this material world exists indefinitely, and that all things and phenomena are composed of matter.

Before dialectical materialism was born, materialist philosophers generally believed that matter was composed of some self-contained element or elements; that is to say some underlying substance from which everything in the universe is ultimately derived. In ancient times, the five elements theory of Chinese philosophy held that those self-contained substances were *metal — wood — water — fire — earth*; in India, the Samkhya school believed that they were *Pradhana* or *Prakriti*¹; in Greece, the Milesian school believed they were *water* (Thales’s² conception) or *air* (Anaximene’s³ conception); Heraclitus⁴ believed the ultimate element was *fire*; Democritus⁵ asserted that it was something called an “atom,” etc. Even as recently as the 17th-18th centuries, conceptions about matter belonging to modern philosophers such as Francis Bacon⁶,

¹ According to the Samkhya school, Pradhana is the original form of matter in an unmanifested, indifferentiated state; *Prakriti* is manifested matter, differentiated in form, which contains potential for motion.

² Thales, ~642 — ~547 B.C. (Greek): Philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, politician.

³ Anaximene, ~585 — ~525 B.C. (Greek): Philosopher.

⁴ Heraclitus, ~540 — ~480 B.C. (Greek): Philosopher, founder of ancient dialectics.

⁵ Democritus, ~460 — ~370 B.C. (Greek): Philosopher, naturalist, a founder of atom theory.

⁶ Francis Bacon, 1561 — 1626 (British): Philosopher, novelist, mathematician, political activist.

Renes Descartes⁷, Thomas Hobbes⁸, Denis Diderot⁹, etc., still hadn't changed much. They continued following the same philosophical tendency as ancient philosophers by focusing their studies of the material world through elemental phenomena.

These conceptions of matter which were developed by philosophers before Marx's time laid a foundation for a tendency to use nature to explain nature itself, but that tendency still had many shortcomings, such as: oversimplification of matter into fictitious "elements;" failure to understand the nature of consciousness as well as the relationships between matter and consciousness; failure to recognize the significance of matter in human society, leading to a failure to solve social issues based on a materialist basis, etc.

Annotation 57

Here are further explanations of these shortcomings of early materialists:

Oversimplification of matter into fictitious "elements"

Due to a lack of understanding and knowledge of matter, metaphysical materialists created erroneous conceptions of "elements" which do not accurately describe the nature of matter. By using such an erroneously conceived system of non-existing elements to describe nature, metaphysical materialists were prevented from gaining real insights into the material world which delayed and hindered scientific progress.

Failure to understand the nature of consciousness as well as the relationships between matter and consciousness

Many early materialists believed that consciousness was simply a mechanical byproduct of material processes, and that mental events (thoughts, consciousness) could not affect the material world, since these events were simply mechanically determined *by* the material world.

As a first principle, Dialectical Materialism does hold that consciousness is *created by* matter. However, Dialectical Materialism also holds that consciousness can *influence* the material world through conscious action. This constitutes a dialectical relationship.

As Lenin explains in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*: "Consciousness in general *reflects* being—that is a general principle of *all* materialism... social consciousness *reflects* social being."

Whereas early materialists erroneously held that consciousness is simply an "accidental" byproduct of matter, Dialectical Materialism holds that consciousness is a characteristic of the *nature* of matter. As Engels wrote in the notation of *Dialectics of Nature*:

⁷ Rene Descartes, 1596 — 1650 (Fench): Philosopher, mathematician, physicist.

⁸ Thomas Hobbes, 1588 — 1679 (British): Political philosopher, political activist.

⁹ Denis Diderot, 1713 — 1784 (French): Philosopher, novelist.

That matter evolves out of itself the thinking human brain is for mechanism a pure accident, although necessarily determined, step by step, where it happens. But the truth is that it is the nature of matter to advance to the evolution of thinking beings, hence this always necessarily occurs wherever the conditions for it (not necessarily identical at all places and times) are present.

Dialectical materialism also breaks from early materialism by positing that consciousness has a dialectical relationship with matter. Consciousness arises from the material world, but can also influence the material world through conscious action. In other words, mental events can trigger physical actions which affect the material world.

As Marx explains in *Theses on Feuerbach*:

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated. Hence this doctrine is bound to divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change [Selbstveränderung] can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice... Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.

Put more simply, we as humans are capable of “revolutionary practice” which can “change the world” because our consciousness allows us to “change circumstances.” This is discussed further in *Nature and Structure of Consciousness*, p. 79.

Failure to recognize the significance of matter in human society, leading to a failure to solve social issues based on a materialist basis

Dialectical materialists believe that matter exists in many forms, and that human society is a special form of existence of matter. Lenin referred to the material existence of human society as *social being*, which stood in contrast with human society’s *social consciousness*. Social being encompasses all of the material existence and processes of human society.

As Lenin wrote in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*:

Social being is independent of the social consciousness of men. The fact that you live and conduct your business, beget children, produce products and exchange them, gives rise to an objectively necessary chain of events, a chain of development, which is independent of your social consciousness, and is never grasped by the latter completely. The highest task of humanity is to comprehend this objective logic of economic evolution (the evolution of social life) in its general and fundamental features, so that it may be possible to adapt to it one's social consciousness and the consciousness of the advanced classes of all capitalist countries in as definite, clear and critical a fashion as possible.

Early materialists failed to recognise the relationship between matter and consciousness — as Lenin puts it, specifically, between *social being* and *social consciousness*. Thus in contemplating social issues, these early materialists were unable to find proper materialist solutions.

These shortcomings resulted in a non-thorough materialist viewpoint: when dealing with questions about nature, the early materialists had a strong materialist viewpoint but when dealing with social issues, they “slipped” into an idealist viewpoint.

Annotation 58

Lenin explains this concept of “slipping into” idealism through a non-thorough materialist viewpoint in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*: “Once you deny objective reality, given us in sensation, you have already lost every one of your weapons against fideism, for you have slipped into agnosticism or subjectivism — and that is all fideism wants.”

Note: fideism is a form of idealism which holds that truth and knowledge are received through faith or revelation. Subjectivism is the centering of one's own self in conscious activities and perspective; see Annotation 222, p. 218.

In the same work, Lenin upholds that objective reality can be known through sense perception:

We ask, is a man given objective reality when he sees something red or feels something hard, etc., or not? [...] If you hold that it is not given, you... inevitably sink to subjectivism... If you hold that it is given, a philosophical concept is needed for this objective reality, and this concept has

been worked out long, long ago. This concept is matter. Matter is a philosophical category denoting the objective reality which is given to man by his sensations, and which is copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them.

Lenin also explains that proper materialism must recognize objective/absolute truth:

To be a materialist is to acknowledge objective truth, which is revealed to us by our sense-organs. To acknowledge objective truth, i.e., truth not dependent upon man and mankind, is, in one way or another, to recognise absolute truth.

A failure to recognize the existence of such objective, absolute truth, according to Lenin, constitutes “relativism,” a position that all truth is relative and can never be absolutely, objectively knowable.

It is unconditionally true that to every scientific ideology (as distinct, for instance, from religious ideology), there corresponds an objective truth, absolute nature. You will say that this distinction between relative and absolute truth is indefinite. And I shall reply: yes, it is sufficiently ‘indefinite’ to prevent science from becoming a dogma in the bad sense of the term, from becoming something dead, frozen, ossified; but it is at the same time sufficiently ‘definite’ to enable us to dissociate ourselves in the most emphatic and irrevocable manner from fideism and agnosticism, from philosophical idealism and the sophistry of the followers of Hume and Kant. Here is a boundary which you have not noticed, and not having noticed it, you have fallen into the swamp of reactionary philosophy. It is the boundary between dialectical materialism and relativism.

In other words, while proper materialism must contain a degree of relativistic thinking sufficient to challenge assumptions and reexamine perceived truth periodically, materialists must not fall into complete relativism (such as that espoused by Hume and Kant) lest they fall into idealist positions. Ultimately, Absolute Truth — according to Lenin — constitutes the alignment of conscious understanding with objective reality (not to be confused with Hegel’s notion of Absolute Truth; see Annotation 232, p. 228).

Lenin recognized the development of Marx and Engels as “*modern materialism*, which is immeasurably richer in content and in comparably more consistent than all preceding forms of materialism,” in large part because Marx and Engels were able to apply materialism properly to social sciences by taking the “direct materialist road as against idealism.” He goes on to describe would-be materialists who fall to idealist positions due to relativism and other philosophical inadequacies as “a contemptible

middle party in philosophy, who confuse the materialist and idealist trends on every question.”

Lenin warned that a failure to hold a thoroughly materialist viewpoint leads philosophers to become “ensnared in idealism, that is, in a diluted and subtle fideism; they became ensnared from the moment they took ‘sensation’ not as an image of the external world but as a special ‘element.’ It is nobody’s sensation, nobody’s mind, nobody’s spirit, nobody’s will — this is what one inevitably comes to if one does not recognise the materialist theory that the human mind reflects an objectively real external world.”

In other words, idealist conceptions of sensation inject mysticism into philosophy by conceiving of sensation as otherworldly, supernatural, and detached from material human beings with material experiences in the material world.

The development of natural sciences in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries (especially the inventions of Roentgen¹⁰, Becquerel¹¹, Thomson¹² etc.), disproved the theories of “classical elements” such as fire, water, air, etc. [see *Primitive Materialism*, p. 52]. These innovations led to a viewpoint crisis in the field of physical science. Many idealists used this opportunity to affirm the non-material nature of the world, ascribing the roles of supernatural forces to the birth of the world.

Annotation 59

Lenin discussed this viewpoint crisis extensively in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Here Lenin discusses relativist reactions to new breakthroughs in natural science, which led even scientists (who proclaimed to be materialists) to take idealist positions:

We are faced, says Poincaré [a French scientist], with the “ruins” of the old principles of physics, “a general debacle of principles.” It is true, he remarks, that all the mentioned departures from principles refer to infinitesimal magnitudes; it is possible that we are still ignorant of other infinitesimals counteracting the undermining of the old principles... But at any rate we have reached a “period of doubt.” We have already seen what epistemological deductions the author draws from this “period of doubt:” “it is not nature which imposes on [or dictates to] us the concepts of space and time, but we who impose them on nature;” “whatever is not thought, is pure nothing.” These deductions are idealist deductions. The breakdown of the most fundamental principles shows (such is Poincaré’s trend of thought) that these

¹⁰ Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen, 1845–1923 (German): Physicist.

¹¹ Henri Becquerel, 1852–1908 (French): Physicist.

¹² Sir Joseph John Thomson, 1856–1940 (British): Physicist, professor at London Royal Institute.

principles are not copies, photographs of nature, not images of something external in relation to man's consciousness, but products of his consciousness. Poincaré does not develop these deductions consistently, nor is he essentially interested in the philosophical aspect of the question.

Lenin concludes by stating that the non-thorough materialist position has lead directly to these idealist positions of relativism:

The essence of the crisis in modern physics consists in the breakdown of the old laws and basic principles, in the rejection of an objective reality existing outside the mind, that is, in the replacement of materialism by idealism and agnosticism.

With this historical background, in order to fight against the distortions of many idealists and to protect the development of the materialist viewpoint, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin simultaneously summarized all the natural scientific achievements in late 19th and early 20th century and built upon Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' thought to develop this definition of matter:

“Matter is a philosophical category denoting objective reality which is given to man in his sensations, and which is copied, photographed, and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them.”

Lenin's definition of matter shows that:

First, we need to distinguish between the definition of “matter” as a philosophical category (the category that summarizes the most basic and common attributes of all material existence, and which was defined with the objective of solving the basic issues of philosophy) from the definition of “matter” that was used in specialized sciences (specific and sense-detectable substance).

Second, the most basic, common attribute of all kinds of matter [and under both definitions listed in the previous paragraph] is *objective existence*, meaning matter exists outside of human consciousness, independently of human consciousness, no matter whether humans can perceive it with our senses or not.

Third, matter, with its specific forms, can cause and affect mental events in humans when it directly or indirectly impacts the human senses; human consciousness is the reflection of matter; matter is the thing that is reflected by human consciousness.

Lenin's definition of matter played an important role in the development of materialism and scientific consciousness.

First, by pointing out that the most basic, common attribute of matter is objective existence, Lenin successfully distinguished the basic difference between the definition of matter as a philosophical category and the definition of matter as a category of specialized sciences. It helped solve the problems of defining matter in the previous forms of materialism; it offered scientific evidence to define what can be considered matter; it layed out a theoretical foundation for building a materialist viewpoint of history, and overcame the shortcomings of idealist conceptions of society.

Second, by asserting that matter was “objective reality,” “given to man in his sensations,” and “copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations,” Lenin not only confirmed the primary existence of matter and the secondary existence of consciousness [see *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*, p. 88] but he also affirmed that humans had the ability to be aware of objective reality through the “copying, photographing and reflection of our sensations” [in other words, sense perceptions].

b. Mode and Forms of Existence of Matter

According to the dialectical materialist viewpoint, *motion* is the mode of existence of matter; *space* and *time* are the forms of existence of matter.

Annotation 60

Mode refers to the way or manner in which something occurs or exists. You can think of mode as pertaining to the “how,” as opposed to the “what.” For example, the *mode* of circulation refers to *how* commodities circulate within society [see Annotation 14, p. 16]; *mode* of production refers to *how* commodities are produced in society. So, mode of existence of matter refers to *how* matter exists in our universe.

Form comes from the category pair [see *Basic Pairs of Categories of Materialist Dialectics*, p. 126] of Content and Form [see p. 147]. Form refers to how we perceive objects, phenomena, and ideas. So, form of existence of matter refers to the ways in which we perceive the existence of matter [explained below] in our universe.

- *Motion is the Mode of Existence of Matter*

As Friedrich Engels explained: “*Motion, in the most general sense, conceived as the mode of existence, the inherent attribute of matter, comprehends all changes and processes occurring in the universe, from mere change of place right up to thinking.*”

According to Engels, motion encompasses more than just positional changes. Motion embodies “all the changes and processes happening in this universe;” matter is always associated with motion, and matter can only express its existence through motion.

Annotation 61

In Dialectical Materialist philosophy, “motion” is also known as “change” and it refers to the changes which occur as a result of the mutual impacts which occur in or between subjects through the negation of contradictions. Motion is a constant attribute of all things, phenomena, and ideas (see Characteristics of Development, p. 124).

Because matter is inseparable from motion (and vice versa), Engels defined motion as the *mode* of matter — the way or manner in which matter exists. It is impossible for matter in our universe to exist in completely static and unchanging state, isolated from the rest of existence; thus matter exists in the *mode* of motion. Over time, motion leads to *development* as things, phenomena, and ideas transition through various stages of quality change [see Annotation 117, p. 119].

Matter exists objectively, therefore motion also exists objectively. The motion of matter is self-motion¹³.

Annotation 62

It is important to note that “matter,” in the philosophical sense as used in dialectical materialist philosophy, includes all that is “objective” (external) to individual human consciousness. This includes objective phenomena which human senses are unable to detect, such as objective social relations, objective economic values, etc. Objectiveness is discussed more in Annotation 108, p. 112; objective social relations are discussed more in Annotation 10, p. 10.

In *Dialectics of Nature*, Friedrich Engels discussed the properties of motion and explained that motion can neither be created nor destroyed. Therefore, motion can only change form or transfer from one object to another. In this sense, all objects are dynamically linked together through motion:

The whole of nature accessible to us forms a system, an interconnected totality of bodies, and by bodies we understand here all material existence extending from stars to atoms... In the fact that these bodies are interconnected is already included that they react on one another, and it is precisely this mutual reaction that constitutes motion. It already becomes evident here that matter is unthinkable without motion. And if, in addition, matter confronts us as something given, equally uncreatable as indestructible, it follows that motion also is as uncreatable as indestructible. It became impossible to reject this conclusion as soon as it was recognised that the universe is a system, an interconnection of bodies.

¹³ In the original Vietnamese, the word tự vận động is used here, which we roughly translate to the word *self-motion* throughout this book. Literally, tự vận động means: “it moves itself.”

In other words, every body of matter is in motion relative to other bodies of matter, and thus matter is inseparable from motion. Motion results from the interaction of bodies of matter. Because motion and matter define each other, and because motion can only exist in relation to matter and matter can only exist in relation to motion, the motion of matter can be described as “self-motion,” because the motion is not created externally but exists only within and in relation to matter itself. Engels further explains that if this were not true — if motion were external to matter — then motion itself would have had to have been created external to matter, which is impossible:

To say that matter during the whole unlimited time of its existence has only once, and for what is an infinitesimally short period in comparison to its eternity, found itself able to differentiate its motion and thereby to unfold the whole wealth of this motion, and that before and after this remains restricted for eternity to mere change of place — this is equivalent to maintaining that matter is mortal and motion transitory. The indestructibility of motion cannot be merely quantitative, it must also be conceived qualitatively; matter whose purely mechanical change of place includes indeed the possibility under favourable conditions of being transformed into heat, electricity, chemical action, or life, but which is not capable of producing these conditions from out of itself, such matter has forfeited motion; motion which has lost the capacity of being transformed into the various forms appropriate to it may indeed still have dynamis but no longer *energeia*, and so has become partially destroyed. Both, however, are unthinkable.

So, motion can change forms and can transfer from one material body to another, but it can never be created externally from matter, and neither motion nor matter can be created or destroyed in our universe. Thus, matter exists in a state of “self-motion;” motion can never externally be created nor externally applied to matter.

To put it another way, motion results from the fact that all things, phenomena, and ideas exist as assemblages of relationships [see *The Principle of General Relationships*, p. 107], and these relationships contain opposing forces. As Lenin explained in his *Philosophical Notebooks*:

The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world in their ‘self-movement,’ in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites. Development is the ‘struggle’ of opposites.

Based on the scientific achievements which occurred in his lifetime, Engels classified motion into 5 basic forms: *mechanical motion* (changes in positions of objects in space);

physical motion (movements of molecules, electrons, fundamental particles, thermal processes, electricity...); *chemical motion* (changes of organic and inorganic substances in combination and separation processes...); *biological motion* (changes of living objects, or genetic structure...); *social motion* (changes in economy, politics, culture, and social life).

These basic forms of motion are arranged into levels of advancement based on the level of complexity of matter that is affected.

Engels' Basic Forms of Motion in Relation to Matter			
	Basic Form of Motion	Material Effects	
<p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Less Advanced</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Advancement of Motion</p> <p style="text-align: center;">More Advanced</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	Mechanical Motion	Changes in positions of objects in space	<p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Less Complex</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Complexity of Matter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">More Complex</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
	Physical Motion	Movements of molecules, electrons, fundamental particles, thermal processes, electricity, etc.	
	Chemical Motion	Changes of organic and inorganic substances in combination and separation processes, etc.	
	Biological Motion	Changes of living objects, or genetic structure, etc.	
	Social Motion	Changes in economy, politics, culture, social life, etc.	

The basic forms of motion each affect different forms of matter, but these forms of motion do not exist independently from each other; they actually have strong relationships with each other, in which the more advanced forms of motion develop from lower forms of motion; the more advanced forms of motion also internally include lower forms of motion. [I.e., biological motion contains chemical motion; chemical motion contains physical motion; etc.]

Every object exists with many forms of motion, but any given object is defined by its most advanced form of motion. [I.e., living creatures are defined in terms of biological motion, societies are defined in terms of social motion, etc.]

By classifying the basic forms of motion, Engels laid out the foundation for classification and synthesization of science. The basic forms of motion differ from one another, but they are also unified with each other into one continuous system of motion. Understanding this dialectical relationship between different forms of motion helped to overcome misunderstandings and confusion about motion.

Annotation 63

In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels clears up a great deal of confusion and addresses many misconceptions about matter, motion, forces, energy, etc. which existed in both science and philosophy at the time by defining and explaining the dialectical nature of matter and motion.

When Dialectical Materialism affirmed that motion was the mode of existence — the natural attribute of matter — it also confirmed that motion is absolute and eternal. This does not mean that Dialectical Materialism denies that things can become *frozen*; however, according to the dialectical materialist viewpoint, *freezing is a special form of motion, it is motion in equilibrium* and *freezing is relative and temporary*.

Motion in equilibrium is motion that has not changed the positions, forms, and/or structures of things.

Freezing is a *relative* phenomenon because freezing only occurs in some forms of motion and in some specific relations, it does not occur in all forms of motion and all kinds of relations. Freezing is a temporary phenomenon because freezing only exists for a limited period of time, it cannot last forever.

Annotation 64

Equilibrium can exist at any advancement of motion. Lenin discussed *equilibrium* as it pertains to the social form of motion in discussing an equilibrium of forces existing in Russia in 1905 in this article, *An Equilibrium of Forces*:

- 1) The result to date (Monday, October 30) is an equilibrium of forces, as we already pointed out in Proletary, No. 23.
- 2) Tsarism is no longer strong enough, the revolution not yet strong enough, to win.
- 3) Hence the tremendous amount of vacillation. The terrific and enormous increase of revolutionary happenings (strikes, meetings, barricades, committees of public safety, complete paralysis of the government, etc.), on the other hand, the absence of resolute repressive measures. The troops are wavering.
- 4) The Tsar's Court is wavering (The Times and the Daily Telegraph) between dictatorship and a constitution.

The Court is wavering and biding its time. Strictly speaking, these are its correct tactics: the equilibrium of forces compels it to bide its time, for power is in its hands.

The revolution has reached a stage at which it is disadvantageous for the counter-revolution to attack, to assume the offensive.

For us, for the proletariat, for consistent revolutionary democrats, this is not enough. If we do not rise to a higher level, if we do not manage to launch an independent offensive, if we do not smash the forces of Tsarism, do not destroy its actual power, then the revolution will stop half way, then the bourgeoisie will fool the workers.

5) Rumour has it that a constitution has been decided upon. If that is so, then it follows that the Tsar is heeding the lessons of 1848 and other revolutions: he wants to grant a constitution without a constituent assembly, before a constituent assembly, apart from a constituent assembly. What kind of constitution? At best (for 'the Tsar) a Constitutional-Democratic constitution.

This implies: achievement of the Constitutional-Democrats' ideal, skipping the revolution; deceiving the people, for all the same there will be no complete and actual freedom of elections.

Should not the revolution skip this granted constitution?

- *Space and Time are Forms of Existence of Matter*

Every form of matter exists in a specific position, with specific space particularity (height, width, length, etc.), in specific relation (in front or behind, above or under, to the left or right, etc.) with other forms of matter. These positional relations exist in what we call *space*. [Space is defined by positional relations of matter.]

On the other hand, the existence of matter is also expressed in the speed of change and the order in which changes occur. These changes occur in what we call *time*. As Engels wrote: "For the basic forms of all existence are space and time, and a being outside of time is as absurd as an existence outside space." Matter, space, and time are not separable; there is no matter that exists outside of space and time; there is also no space and time that exist outside of matter's motion.

Annotation 65

Space and time, as the forms of matter, i.e.: the ways in which we perceive the existence of matter. We are only able to perceive and understand material objects as they exist within space and time.

Space and time, as forms of existence of matter, exist objectively [see Annotation 108, p. 112], and are defined by matter. [Space is defined by the positional relations between material objects; time is defined by the speed of change of material objects and the order in which these changes occur.] Space has three dimensions: height, width, length; time has one direction: from the past to the future.

c. The Material Unity of the World

Dialectical Materialism affirms that the nature of the world is matter, and the world is unified in its material properties. [In other words: the entire universe, in all its diversity, is made of matter, and the properties of matter are the same throughout the known universe.]

The material nature of the world is proven on the following basis:

First, there is only one world: the material world; the material world is the first existence [i.e., it existed before consciousness], it exists objectively, and independently, of human consciousness.

Second, the material world exists eternally, endlessly, infinitely; it has no known beginning point and there is no evidence that it will ever disappear.

Third, all known objects and phenomena of the material world have objective relations with each other and all objects and phenomena exist in unity with each other. All of them are specific forms and structures of matter, or have material origin which was born from matter, and all are governed by the objective rules of the material world. In the material world, there is nothing that exists outside of the changing and transforming processes of matter; all of these processes exist as causes and effects of each other.

Annotation 66

The most important thing to understand here is that every object and phenomenon in the universe arises as matter, all material objects and phenomena are dynamically linked to one another in an infinite chain of causes and effects and changes and transformations, all governed by the material laws of our reality. This understanding is the material foundation of dialectical materialism.

2. Consciousness

a. The Source of Consciousness

According to the materialist viewpoint, consciousness has natural and social sources.

Annotation 67

Consciousness arises from *nature*, and from *social* activities and relations.

Natural refers to the material world. Without the material world of matter, material processes, and the evolution of material systems — up to and including the human brain — consciousness would never have formed.

Social activities and relations also contributed to the development of consciousness. The social processes of labor and language were also prerequisites for the development of conscious activity in human beings.

- *Natural Source of Consciousness*

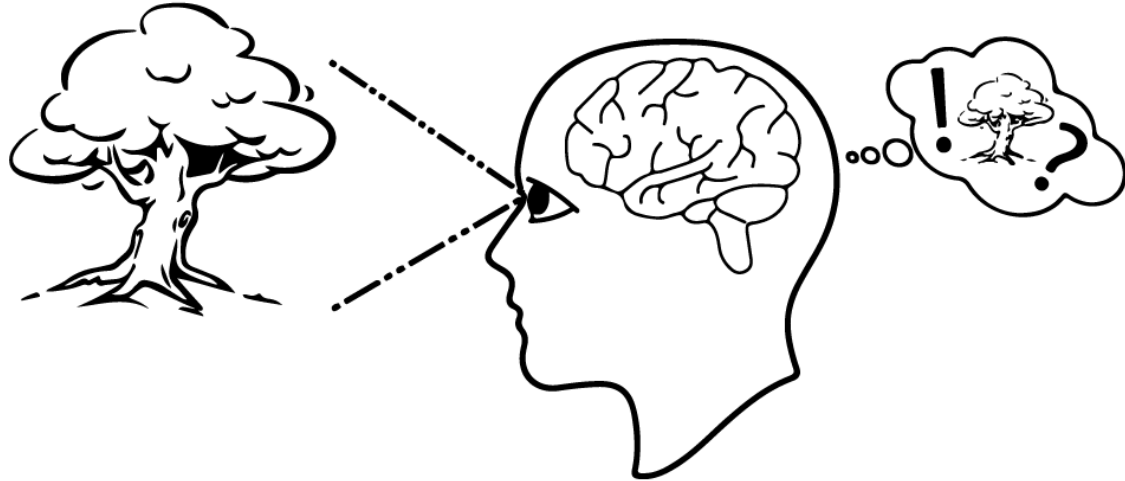
There are many factors that form the natural sources for consciousness, but the two most basic factors are *human brains* and *the relationship between humans and the objective world which makes possible creative and dynamic reflection*.

About human brains: consciousness is an attribute of a highly organized form of matter, which is the brain. Consciousness is the function and the result of the neurophysiological activities of human brains. As human brains evolved and developed over time, their neurophysiological activities became richer, and, as these activities progressed, consciousness developed further and further over time. This explains why the human evolution process is also a process of developing the capacity for perception and thinking. Whenever human neurophysiological activities don't function normally because of damaged brains, our mental life is also disturbed.

About the relationship between humans and the objective world which made possible creative and dynamic reflection: The relationship between humans and the objective world has been essential for as long as humans have existed. In this relationship, the objective world is reflected through human senses which interact with human brains and then form our consciousness.

Reflection is the re-creation of the features of one form of matter in a different form of matter which occurs when they mutually impact each other through interaction. Reflection is a characteristic of all forms of matter.

There are many forms and levels of reflection such as [from more simple to more complex]: physical and chemical reflection, biological reflection, mental reflection, creative and dynamic reflection, etc.



MATERIAL WORLD + HUMAN SENSES + HUMAN BRAIN = CONSCIOUSNESS

Consciousness exists as a dynamic set of relationships between the external material world, human sense perception, and the functions of the human brain.

Annotation 68

Change is driven by mutual impacts between or within things, phenomena, and/or ideas. Any time two such subjects impact one another, *traces* of some form or another are left on both interacting subjects. This characteristic of change is called *reflection*.

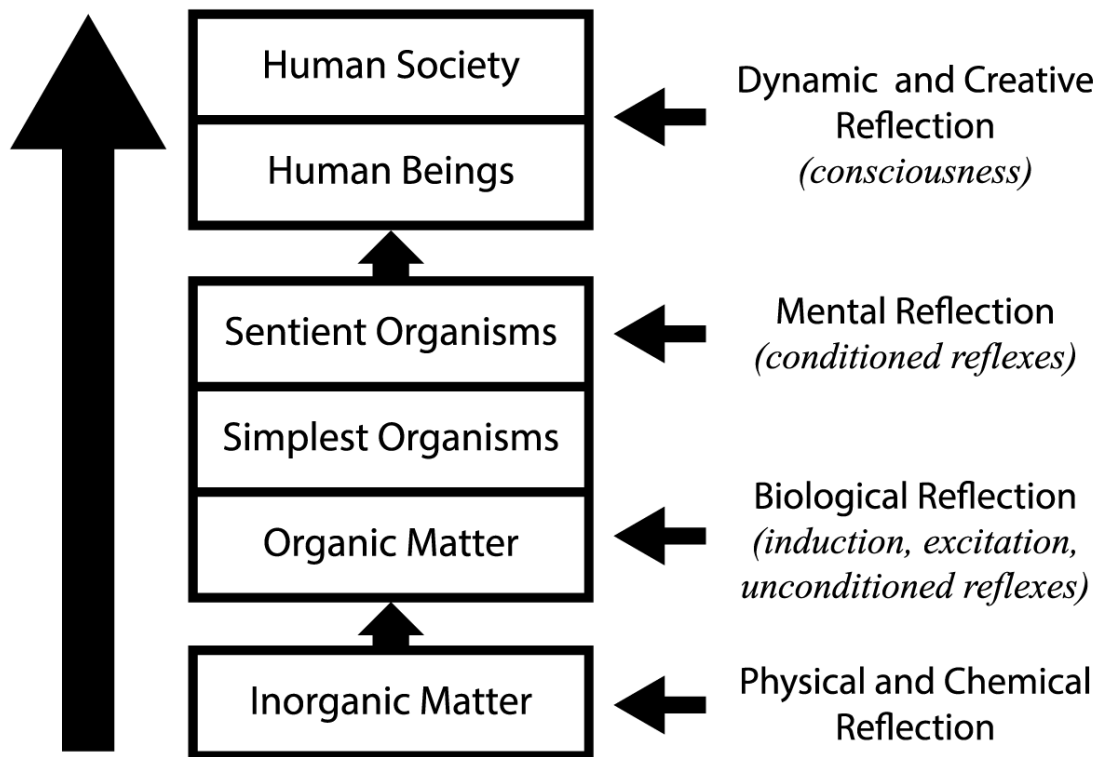
The concept of reflection, first proposed by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, has been advanced through the work of various Soviet psychologists, philosophers, and scientists (including Ivan Pavlov, Todor Pavlov, Aleksei Leontiev, Lev Vygotsky, Valentin Voloshinov, and others), and is used as a basis for scientific inquiry up to this day by mainstream researchers in Cuba, Vietnam, China, and Laos. The information provided below is somewhat simplified and generalized to give the reader a basic familiarity with the theory of reflection and the development of reflection in nature.

Dialectical materialist scientists have developed a theory of the development of evolution of forms of reflection, positing that forms of reflection have become increasingly complex as organic processes and life have evolved and grown more complex over time.

The chart below gives an idea of how different forms of reaction have evolved over time:

Obviously, not all subjects develop completely along the path outlined above. Thus far, to our knowledge, only human beings have developed entirely to the level of consciousness and society. It is also unknown whether, or how, human society may develop into some future, as-yet-unknown, form.

Development of Forms of Reflection



This chart outlines the basic development tendency of Forms of Reflection in matter which lead from inorganic matter, to life, to human consciousness and society.

Physical and chemical reflection is the simplest form of reflection, dealing with the ways in which inorganic matter is reflected in human consciousness. Physical and chemical reflection is the reflection of mechanical, physical, and chemical changes and reactions of inorganic matter (i.e., changes in structures, positions, physical-chemical properties, and the processes of combining and dissolving substances). Physical and chemical reactions are passive: when two objects interact with each other physically or chemically, they do not do so consciously.

Annotation 69

Reflection occurs any time two material objects interact and the features of the object are transferred to each other. Below are some very simplified illustrations to relate the basic idea of the physical reflection of material objects.

Reflection as Change in Position:

1. Round Object moves towards Square Object.
2. Round Object impacts Square Object.
3. Square Object changes position; Round Object “bounces” and reverses direction.
4. Thus, Square Object’s change in position *reflects* the motion of Round Object (and vice-versa). Traces of both contradicting objects are reflected in the respective motion and position of each object.

Reflection as Change in Structure:

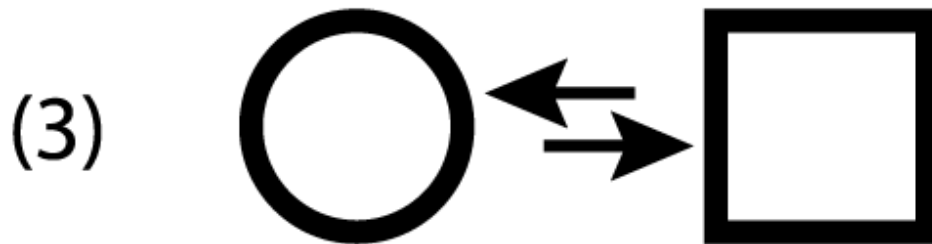
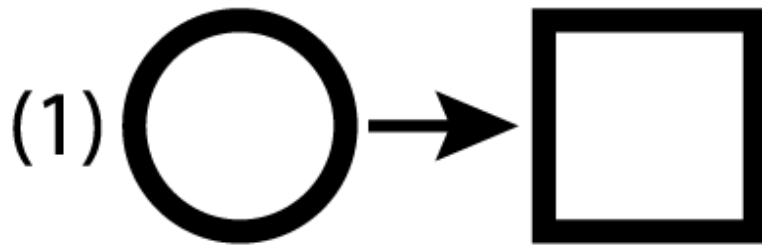
1. Round Object moves toward Square Object.
2. Round Object impacts Square Object.
3. Structural changes (traces) occur in both Round and Square Object as a result of impact.
4. These changes constitute structural, physical *reflection*.

Chemical Reflection:

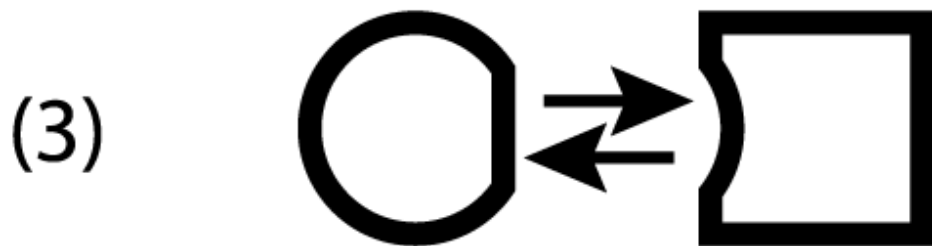
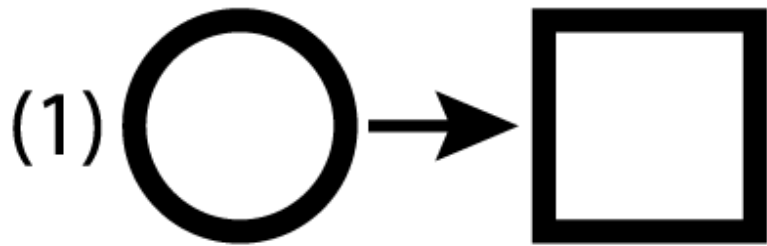
1. Atom C is attached to Atom B.
2. Atom C detaches from Atom B and transfers to attach to Atom A.
3. This is a process of *chemical reflection*, in which both molecules mutually reflect one another after $A \text{ }_C\text{B}$ a process of chemical reaction (one molecule loses Atom C while the other gains Atom C).

As dialectical materialists, we must strive to develop our understanding of the reflections of physical and chemical changes and reactions so that our conceptions reflect the material world as accurately as possible. For example: we must not ascribe consciousness to physical processes. Example: a gambler who comes to believe that a pair of dice is “spiteful” or “cursed” is attributing conscious motivation to unconscious physical processes, which is an inaccurate ideological reflection of reality.

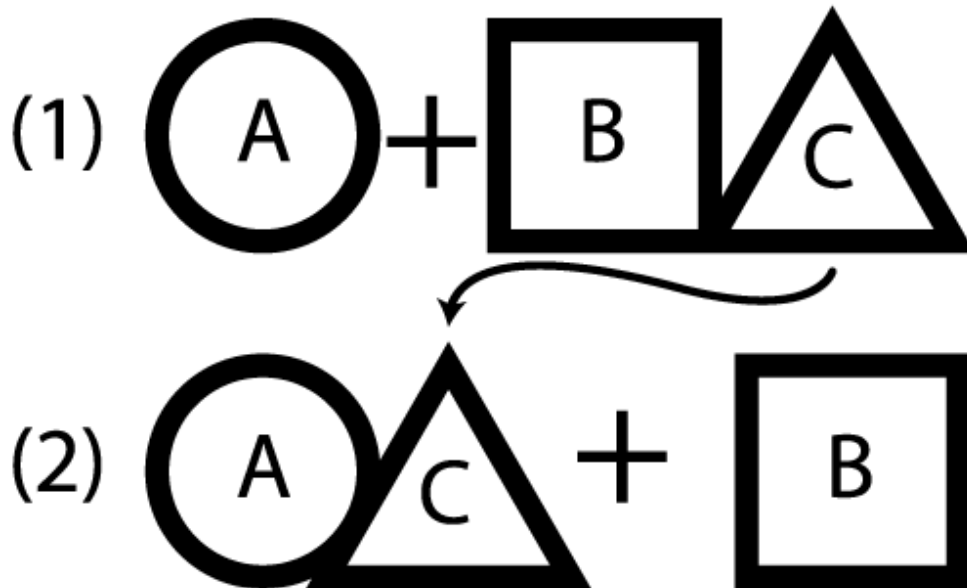
Physical Reflection: Change in Position



Physical Reflection: Change in Structure



Chemical Reflection: Single Replacement



Biological reflection is a higher, more complex form of reflection [compared to physical reflection]. It deals with reflection of organic material in the natural world. As our observations of biological processes have become more sophisticated and complex [through developments in natural science, the development of better tools for observation such as microscopes and other technologies, and so on], our conscious reflections of the natural world have also become more complex.

Biological reflection is expressed through *excitation*, *induction*, and *reflexes*.

Excitation is the reaction of simple plant and animal life-forms which occurs when they change position or structure as a direct result of physical changes to their habitat [i.e., a plant which moves toward the sun throughout the day].

Induction is the reaction of animals with simple nerve systems which can sense or feel their environments. Induction occurs through unconditioned reflex mechanisms.

Annotation 70

Unconditioned reflexes are characterized by permanent connections between sensory perceptions and reactions. Such reactions are not learned, but simply occur automatically based on physiological mechanisms occurring within the organism. An example of an unconditioned reflex response would be muscles in the leg twitching at the response of a tap on the knee. Such responses are purely physiological and are never learned (“conditioned” into us) — these reactions are simply *induced* physiologically.

Mental reflections are reactions which occur in animals with central nervous systems. Mental reflections occur through conditioned reflex mechanisms.

Annotation 71

Conditioned reflexes are reactions which are learned by organisms. These responses are acquired as animals learn to associate previously unrelated neural stimuli to elicit a particular reaction. The Russian psychologist Ivan Pavlov famously developed our understanding of conditioned responses by ringing a dinner bell shortly before giving dogs food. After a few repetitions, dogs would begin to salivate upon hearing the dinner bell being rung, even before any food was offered. Any dog which did not receive this conditioning would not salivate upon hearing a dinner bell. This is what makes it a learned, conditioned response — a type of mental reflection.

Dynamic and creative reflection is the most advanced form of reflection. It only occurs in matter that has the highest structural level, such as the human brain. Dynamic and creative reflection is done through the human brain’s nervous physiological activities whenever the objective world impacts human senses. This is a kind of reflection that actively selects and processes information to create new information and to understand the meaning of that information. This dynamic and creative reflection is called consciousness.

Annotation 72

Remember Lenin’s definition of matter from *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*: “Matter is a philosophical category denoting objective reality which is given to man in his sensations, and which is copied, photographed, and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them.”

An intrinsic property of matter is that it can be sensed by human beings, and through this sensation, *reflected* in human consciousness. Thus, all forms of matter share the characteristic of being able to be reflected in the human mind.

Criticizing Karl Pearson, who said that it was not logical to maintain that all matter had the property of being conscious, Lenin wrote in brackets: “But it is logical to suppose that all matter possesses a property which is essentially kindred to sensation: the property to reflect.” Understanding the concept of dynamic and creative reflection is critical to understanding the role of consciousness and the ideal in Dialectical Materialism. In particular, reflection differentiates Dialectical Materialism from the idealist form of dialectics used by Hegel [see Annotation 9, p. 10]. As Marx famously wrote in *Capital Volume I*:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of ‘the Idea,’ he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos [craftsman/artisan/creator] of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of ‘the Idea.’ With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.

In other words, Hegelian idealism saw human consciousness as defining the material world. Dialectical Materialism inverts this relationship to recognize that what we conceive in our minds is only a reflection of the material world. As Marx explains in *The German Ideology*, all conscious thought stems from life processes through reflection:

Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.

Marx and Engels argued that consciousness arose from the *life-processes* of human beings. Life-processes are processes of motion and change which occur within organisms to sustain life, and these processes have a dialectical relationship with consciousness: the processes of life, therefore, reflect consciousness, just as consciousness reflects human life-processes. Conscious activities (such as being able to hunt, gather, and cook food, build shelter, and so on) improve the life-processes of human beings (by improving our health, extending our life-spans, etc.); and as our life-processes improved, our consciousness was able to develop more fully. As a concrete example of the dialectic between life processes and consciousness, it is now widely believed by scientists that the advent of cooking and preparing food (conscious activity) improved the functioning of the human brain¹⁴ (a life process) which, in turn, developed human consciousness,

¹⁴ Source: “Food for Thought: Was Cooking a Pivotal Step in Human Evolution?” by Alexandra Rosati, *Scientific American*, February 26, 2018.

and so on. Life-processes thus determine *how* consciousness reflects reality, while consciousness impacts back on life-processes, reflecting the dialectical relationship between matter and consciousness [see p. 88] and between practical activities and consciousness [see Annotation 230, p. 226].

Because consciousness arose from life-processes of human beings in the material world, we know that the material world is reflected in our consciousness. However, these reflections do not *determine* the material world, and do not mirror the material world exactly [see Annotation 77, p. 79]. It is also important to understand that, since life-processes in the material world predate and determine consciousness, consciousness can never be a first basis of seeking truth about our world. As Marx further explains in *The German Ideology*:

Since the Young Hegelians consider conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness, to which they attribute an independent existence, as the real chains of men (just as the Old Hegelians declared them the true bonds of human society) it is evident that the Young Hegelians have to fight only against these illusions of consciousness. Since, according to their fantasy, the relationships of men, all their doings, their chains and their limitations are products of their consciousness, the Young Hegelians logically put to men the moral postulate of exchanging their present consciousness for human, critical or egoistic consciousness, and thus of removing their limitations. This demand to change consciousness amounts to a demand to interpret reality in another way, i.e. to recognise it by means of another interpretation.

In other words, Hegelian idealism makes the critical mistake of believing that the ideal — consciousness — is the first basis of reality, and that anything and everything can be achieved through mere conscious activity. Marx, on the other hand, argues that “life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life,” and that we must understand the ways in which reality is reflected in consciousness before we can hope to affect change in the material conditions of human beings:

In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here [in the materialist perspective] we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have

no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach the starting-point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second method, which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness.

So, the work of the Dialectical Materialist is not to try to develop Utopian conceptions of reality first, to then proceed to try and force such purely ideal conceptions onto reality (see Annotation 17, p. 18).

Rather, we must understand the material basis of reality, as well as the material processes of change and motion which govern reality, and only then can we search for ways in which human beings can influence material reality through conscious activity. As Marx explains, the revolutionary must not be fooled into believing we can simply conceive of an ideal world and then replicate it into reality through interpretation and conscious thought alone. Instead, we must start with a firm understanding of material conditions and, from that material basis, determine how to build our revolutionary movement through conscious impact of material relations and processes of development in the material world.

As Marx wrote in *The German Ideology*: “Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.” This distinction may seem subtle at first, but it has massive implications for how Marx suggests we go about participating in revolutionary activity. For Marx, purely-idealist debates and criticisms are an unproductive waste of time:

The Young-Hegelian ideologists, in spite of their allegedly ‘world-shattering’ statements, are the staunchest conservatives. The most recent of them have found the correct expression for their activity when they declare they are only fighting against ‘phrases.’ They forget, however, that to these phrases they themselves are only opposing other phrases, and that they are in no way combating the real existing world when they are merely combating the phrases of this world. The only results which this philosophic criticism could achieve were a few (and at that thoroughly one-sided) elucidations of Christianity from the point of view of religious history; all the rest of their assertions are only further embellishments of their claim to have furnished, in these unimportant elucidations, discoveries of universal importance.

Marx also discusses the uselessness of idealist conjecture:

Moreover, it is quite immaterial what consciousness starts to do on its own: out of all such muck we get only the one inference that these three moments, the forces of production, the state of society, and consciousness, can and must come into contradiction with one another, because the division of labour implies the possibility, nay the fact that intellectual and material activity — enjoyment and labour, production and consumption — devolve on different individuals, and that the only possibility of their not coming into contradiction lies in the negation in its turn of the division of labour. It is self-evident, moreover, that ‘spectres,’ ‘bonds,’ ‘the higher being,’ ‘concept,’ ‘scruple,’ [terms for idealist conceptions] are merely the idealistic, spiritual expression, the conception apparently of the isolated individual, the image of very empirical fetters and limitations, within which the mode of production of life and the form of intercourse coupled with it move.

What Marx means by this is that we should focus on the material processes and conditions of society if we intend to change society, because idealist speculation, conjecture, critique, and thought alone, at the individual level, will never be capable of affecting revolutionary change in our material world.

Instead, we must focus on the material basis of reality, the material conditions of society, and seek revolutionary measures which are built upon materialist foundations. Only by understanding material processes of development, as well as the dialectical relationship between consciousness and matter, can we reliably and effectively begin to impact reality through conscious activity. This begins with the recognition that conscious thought itself is a *reflection* of material reality which developed and results from *life-processes* of material motion and processes of change within the human brain.

This concept of reflection, pioneered by Marx and Engels, was significantly developed by V. I. Lenin in his response to Machian positivists who posited that what we perceive is not truly reality [see Annotation 32, p. 27]. In his *Philosophical Notebooks*, Lenin wrote: “Life gives rise to the brain. Nature is reflected in the human brain.”

In *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin further defined the relationship between matter and consciousness through reflection.

LENIN’S PROOF OF THE THEORY OF REFLECTION

In *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin offered the following arguments to back up the theory of reflection.

- 1) Things exist independently of our consciousness, independently of our perceptions, outside of us, for it is beyond doubt that alizarin [a chemical substance which was newly discovered at time of writing] existed in coal tar yesterday and it is equally beyond doubt that yesterday we knew nothing of the existence of this alizarin and received no sensations from it.

Lenin is saying that the material world must exist outside of and independent from our consciousness. He cites as evidence the discovery of a chemical substance which until recently we had no sensory perception of, noting that this substance must have existed long before we became aware of it through sensory observation.

2) There is definitely no difference in principle between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself, and there can be no such difference. The only difference is between what is known and what is not yet known. And philosophical inventions of specific boundaries between the one and the other, inventions to the effect that the thing-in-itself is “beyond” phenomena (Kant) or that we can or must fence ourselves off by some philosophical partition from the problem of a world which in one part or another is still unknown but which exists outside us (Hume) — all this is the sheerest nonsense, [unfounded belief], trick, invention.

Lenin is referencing a centuries-old debate about whether or not human beings are capable of having real knowledge of a “thing-in-itself,” or if we can only perceive *phenomena* of things (characteristics observable to our senses). The “thing-in-itself” refers to the actual material object which exists outside of our consciousness. So the question being posed is: can we REALLY have knowledge of material objects outside of our consciousness, or does consciousness itself act as a barrier to ever REALLY knowing anything about material objects and the material world outside of our consciousness?

Immanuel Kant argued that we can never know the true nature of the material world, writing: “we indeed, rightly considering objects of sense as mere appearances, confess thereby that they are based upon a thing-in-itself, though we know not this thing as it is in itself, but only know its appearances, viz., the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown something.” This idea that the senses could not be trusted to deliver accurate knowledge — and thus, the “thing-in-itself” is essentially unknowable — was carried forward by later empiricists such as Bacon and Hume [see Annotation 10, p. 10]. In *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Marx and Engels refute this notion, arguing that *practice* allows us to discover truth about “things-in-themselves:”

The most telling refutation of this as of all other philosophical crotchets is practice — namely, experiment and industry. If we are able to prove the correctness of our conception of a natural process by making it ourselves, bringing it into being out of its conditions and making it serve our own purposes into the bargain, then there is an end to the Kantian ungraspable “thing-in-itself”.

Lenin expanded on this argument, explaining that the phenomena of objects which we observe with our senses *do* accurately reflect material objects, even though we might

not know everything about these objects at once. Over time, as we learn more and more about material objects and the material world through practice and repeated observation, we more fully and accurately come to understand “things-in-themselves, as he writes in *Empirio-Criticism and Materialism*:

3) In the theory of knowledge, as in every other branch of science, we must think dialectically, that is, we must not regard our knowledge as readymade and unalterable, but must determine how knowledge emerges from ignorance, how incomplete, inexact knowledge becomes more complete and more exact.

Here, Lenin further elaborates on the dialectical nature of knowledge: we must simultaneously accept that our knowledge is never perfect and unchanging, but we must also recognize that we are capable of making our knowledge more exact and complete over time. To further defend his ideas about reflection, Lenin cited Czech philosopher Karl Kautsky’s argument against Kant:

That I see green, red and white is grounded in my faculty of sight. But that green is something different from red testifies to something that lies outside of me, to real differences between the things... The relations and differences between the things themselves revealed to me by the individual space and time concepts are real relations and differences of the external world, not conditioned by the nature of my perceptive faculty... If this were really so [i.e., if Kant’s doctrine of the ideality of time and space were true], we could know nothing about the world outside us, not even that it exists.

Lenin followed from Marx and Engels that, in order to further develop our understanding and knowledge of the material world, it was necessary to engage in *practice* [see Annotation 211, p. 205]. Engels wrote in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. From the moment we [use] these objects, according to the qualities we perceive in them, we put to an infallible test the correctness or otherwise of our sense-perceptions. If these perceptions have been wrong, then our estimate of the use to which an object can be turned must also be wrong, and our attempt must fail. But if we succeed in accomplishing our aim, if we find that the object does agree with our idea of it, and does answer the purpose we intended it for, then that is positive proof that our perceptions of it and of its qualities, so far, agree with reality outside ourselves.

Notice that Engels is careful to use the words *so far*: “its qualities, *so far*, agree with reality outside ourselves.” Engels does not argue that human understanding of the material world is infallible: mistakes are often made. But over time, as such mistakes

are discovered and our understanding improves, our knowledge of the material world develops. This is only possible if the phenomena of objects which we observe — the reflections within our consciousness — do actually and accurately represent material reality. Lenin elaborated on this necessity to constantly update and improve dialectical materialist philosophy as new information and knowledge became available:

Engels, for instance, assimilated the, to him, new term, energy, and began to employ it in 1885 (Preface to the 2nd ed. of *Anti-Dühring*) and in 1888 (Ludwig Feuerbach), but to employ it equally with the concepts of ‘force’ and ‘motion,’ and along with them. Engels was able to enrich his materialism by adopting a new terminology.

Engels provided further elaborations on how practical experience and mastery of the material world refutes the notion that it is impossible to have real knowledge of the material world in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*:

The most telling refutation of this as of all other philosophical fancies is practice, viz., experiment and industry. If we are able to prove the correctness of our conception of a natural process by making it ourselves, bringing it into being out of its conditions and using it for our own purposes into the bargain, then there is an end of the Kantian incomprehensible or ungraspable... The chemical substances produced in the bodies of plants and animals remained just such things-in-themselves until organic chemistry began to produce them one after another, whereupon the thing-in-itself became a thing for us, as for instance, alizarin [a dye which was originally plant-based], which we no longer trouble to grow in in the field, but produce much more cheaply and simply from coal tar.

So, dialectical materialism holds that there is a material world external from our consciousness; that conscious thoughts are reflections of this material world; that we can have real knowledge of the material world through sensory observation; and that our knowledge and understanding of the material world is best advanced through *practice* in the material world.

- *Social Sources of Consciousness*

There are many factors that constitute the social sources of consciousness. The most basic and direct factors are *labor* and *language*.

Labor is the process by which humans interact with the natural world in order to make products for our needs of existing and developing. Labor is also the process that changes the human body’s structure [i.e., muscles developing through exercise].

Annotation 73

In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels describes the dialectical relationship between labor and human development:

Labour is the source of all wealth, the political economists assert. And it really is the source — next to nature, which supplies it with the material that it converts into wealth. But it is even infinitely more than this. It is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labour created man himself.

Before the first flint could be fashioned into a knife by human hands, a period of time probably elapsed in comparison with which the historical period known to us appears insignificant. But the decisive step had been taken, the hand had become free and could henceforth attain ever greater dexterity; the greater flexibility thus acquired was inherited and increased from generation to generation.

Thus the hand is not only the organ of labour, it is also the product of labour. Only by labour, by adaptation to ever new operations, through the inheritance of muscles, ligaments, and, over longer periods of time, bones that had undergone special development and the ever-renewed employment of this inherited finesse in new, more and more complicated operations, have given the human hand the high degree of perfection required to conjure into being the pictures of a Raphael, the statues of a Thorwaldsen, the music of a Paganini.

But the hand did not exist alone, it was only one member of an integral, highly complex organism. And what benefited the hand, benefited also the whole body it served.

Labor also allows us to discover the attributes, structures, motion laws, etc., of the natural world, via observable phenomena.

Annotation 74

We discover truth about the natural world through labor — through physical *practice* in the material world. See the discussion of *practice* in Annotation 211, p. 205.

All of these phenomena, through our human senses, impact our human brains. And through brain activity, knowledge and consciousness of the objective world are formed and developed.

Language is a system of material signals that carries information with cognitive content. Without language, consciousness could not exist and develop.

The birth of language goes hand in hand with labor. From the beginning, labor was social. The relationships between people who perform labor processes require them to have means to communicate and exchange thoughts. This requirement caused language to arise and develop along with the working processes. With language, humans not only communicate, but also summarise reality and convey experience and thoughts from generation to generation.

Annotation 75

From *Dialectics of Nature*:

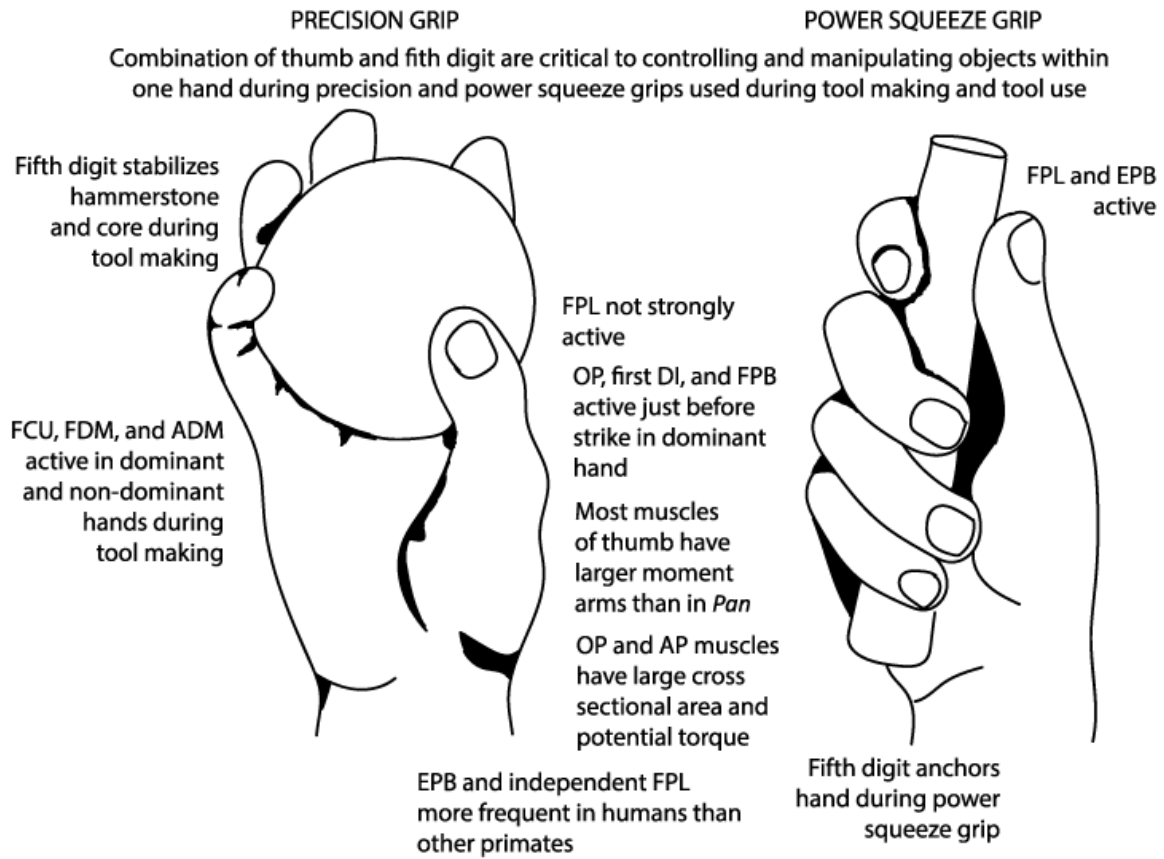
It has already been noted that our simian ancestors were gregarious; it is obviously impossible to seek the derivation of man, the most social of all animals, from non-gregarious immediate ancestors. Mastery over nature began with the development of the hand, with labour, and widened man's horizon at every new advance. He was continually discovering new, hitherto unknown properties in natural objects. On the other hand, the development of labour necessarily helped to bring the members of society closer together by increasing cases of mutual support and joint activity, and by making clear the advantage of this joint activity to each individual. In short, men in the making arrived at the point where they had something to say to each other. Necessity created the organ; the undeveloped larynx of the ape was slowly but surely transformed by modulation to produce constantly more developed modulation, and the organs of the mouth gradually learned to pronounce one articulate sound after another.

Comparison with animals proves that this explanation of the origin of language from and in the process of labour is the only correct one. The little that even the most highly-developed animals need to communicate to each other does not require articulate speech. In its natural state, no animal feels handicapped by its inability to speak or to understand human speech. It is quite different when it has been tamed by man. The dog and the horse, by association with man, have developed such a good ear for articulate speech that they easily learn to understand any language within their range of concept. Moreover they have acquired the capacity for feelings

such as affection for man, gratitude, etc., which were previously foreign to them. Anyone who has had much to do with such animals will hardly be able to escape the conviction that in many cases they now feel their inability to speak as a defect, although, unfortunately, it is one that can no longer be remedied because their vocal organs are too specialised in a definite direction. However, where vocal organs exist, within certain limits even this inability disappears. The buccal organs of birds are as different from those of man as they can be, yet birds are the only animals that can learn to speak; and it is the bird with the most hideous voice, the parrot, that speaks best of all. Let no one object that the parrot does not understand what it says. It is true that for the sheer pleasure of talking and associating with human beings, the parrot will chatter for hours at a stretch, continually repeating its whole vocabulary. But within the limits of its range of concepts it can also learn to understand what it is saying. Teach a parrot swear words in such a way that it gets an idea of their meaning (one of the great amusements of sailors returning from the tropics); tease it and you will soon discover that it knows how to use its swear words just as correctly as a Berlin costermonger. The same is true of begging for titbits.

First labour, after it and then with it speech — these were the two most essential stimuli under the influence of which the brain of the ape gradually changed into that of man, which, for all its similarity is far larger and more perfect. Hand in inevitably accompanied by a corresponding refinement of the organ of hearing, so the development of the brain as a whole is accompanied by a refinement of hand with the development of the brain went the development of its most immediate instruments — the senses. Just as the gradual development of speech is all the senses. The eagle sees much farther than man, but the human eye discerns considerably more in things than does the eye of the eagle. The dog has a far keener sense of smell than man, but it does not distinguish a hundredth part of the odours that for man are definite signs denoting different things. And the sense of touch, which the ape hardly possesses in its crudest initial form, has been developed only side by side with the development of the human hand itself, through the medium of labour.

So, the most basic, direct and important source that decides the birth and development of language is labor. Language appeared later than labor but always goes with labor. Language and labor were the two main stimulations affecting the brains of the primates which evolved into humans, slowly changing their brains into human brains and transforming animal psychology into human consciousness.



*This diagram is based on work from an article titled “Evidence in Hand: Recent Discoveries and the Early Evolution of Human Manual Manipulation¹⁵.” Modern research has discovered strong evidence¹⁶ that the human hand evolved along with tool use, in line with Engels’ analysis in *Dialectics of Nature*.*

Annotation 76

It is also worth noting that, just as human consciousness derived from labor and language *and* social activity, so too did society itself arise from language and labor, as Engels explained in *Dialectics of Nature*:

The reaction on labour and speech of the development of the brain and its attendant senses, of the increasing clarity of consciousness, power of abstraction and of conclusion, gave both labour and speech an ever-renewed impulse to further development. This development did not reach its conclusion when man finally became distinct from the ape, but on the whole made further powerful progress, its degree and direction varying among different peoples and at different times, and here and there even being interrupted by local or temporary regression. This further development has been strongly urged forward, on the one hand, and guided along more definite directions, on the other, by a new element which came into play with the appearance of fully-fledged man, namely, society.

In other words, these factors of human's physical nature and human society have a dialectical relationship with one another. Elements of human nature — in particular labor and language — led to the development of human society, which in turned played a key role in the development of human language and labor.

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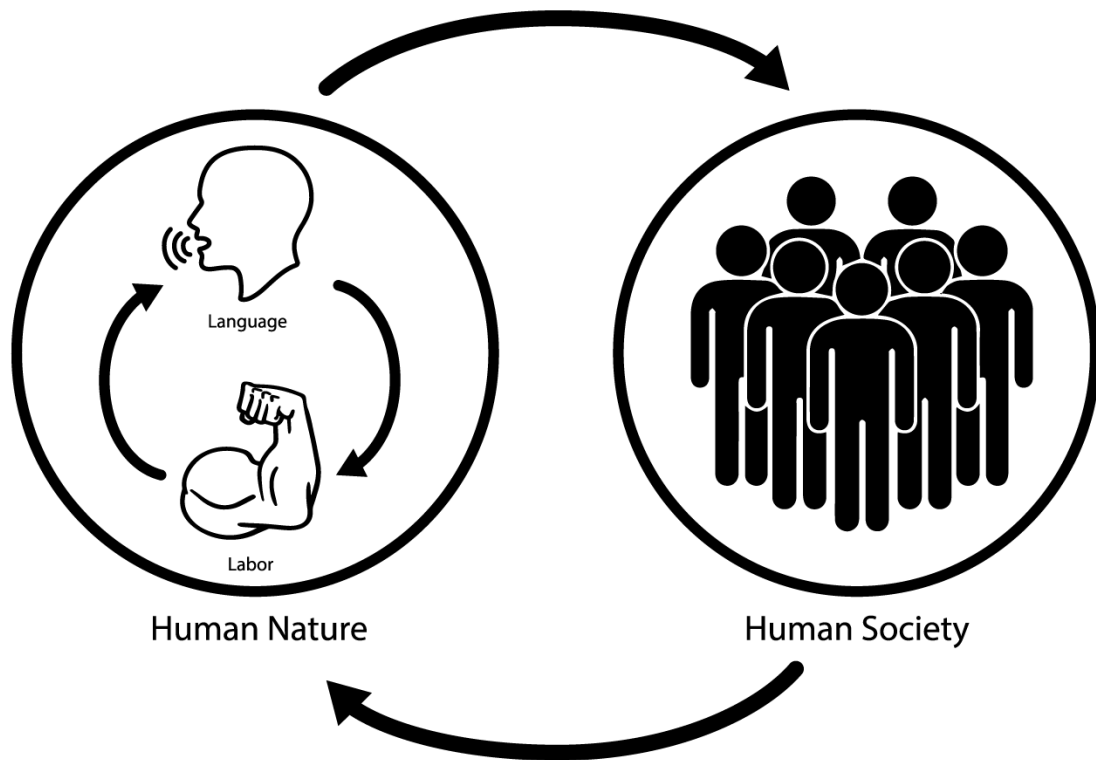
b. Nature and Structure of Consciousness

- *Nature of Consciousness*

Consciousness is the dynamic and creative reflection of the objective world in human brains; it is the subjective image of the objective world. [See discussion of dynamic and creative reflection on p. 68]

The dynamic and creative nature of reflection is expressed in human psychophysiological activities when we receive, select, process, and save data in our brains. Within the human brain, we are able to collect data from the external material world. Based on this information, our brain is capable of creating new information, and we are able to analyze, interpret, and understand all of this information collectively within our consciousness.

The dynamic and creative nature of reflection is also expressed in several human processes:



Human language and human labor mutually develop one another through a dialectical process to develop human nature. Simultaneously, human nature and human society mutually develop one another through a dialectical process.

- The creation of ideas, hypotheses, stories, etc.
- The ability to summarize nature and to comprehend the objective laws of nature.
- The ability to construct models of ideas and systems of knowledge to guide our activities.

Consciousness is the subjective image of the objective world. Consciousness is defined by the objective world in both Content and Form [see Annotation 150, p. 147]. However, consciousness does not perfectly reflect the objective world. It modifies information through the subjective lenses (thoughts, feelings, aspirations, experiences, knowledge, needs, etc.) of humans. According to Marx and Engels, ideas are simply “sublimates [transformations] of [the human brain’s]... material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises.”¹⁷

Annotation 77

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels refer to ideas somewhat poetically as “the phantoms formed in the human brain,” and explains that ideas arise directly from material human life processes [see Annotation 72, p. 68]. Lenin makes it very clear in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* that consciousness is not a *mirror image*, or *exact* reproduction of reality, quoting Engels:

The great basic question of all philosophy,” Engels says, “especially of modern philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being,” of “spirit and nature.” Having divided the philosophers into “two great camps” on this basic question, Engels shows that there is “yet another side” to this basic philosophical question, viz., “in what relation do our thoughts about the world surrounding us stand to this world itself? Is our thinking capable of the cognition of the real world? Are we able in our ideas and notions of the real world to produce a correct reflection of reality?” “The overwhelming majority of philosophers give an affirmative answer to this question,” says Engels, “including under this head not only all materialists but also the most consistent idealists.

Of extra importance is Lenin’s footnote to the above passage, regarding what he purports to be Viktor Chernov’s mistranslation of Engels:

¹⁷ *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 1846.

Fr. Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach, etc., 4th Germ. ed., S. 15. Russian translation, Geneva ed., 1905, p. 12–13. Mr. V. Chernov translates the word Spiegelbild literally (a mirror reflection) accusing Plekhanov of presenting the theory of Engels “in a very weakened form” by speaking in Russian simply of a “reflection” instead of a “mirror reflection”. This is mere cavilling. Spiegelbild [mirror reflection] in German is also used simply in the sense of Abbild [reflection, image].

Here, Lenin reaffirms and clarifies Engels’ idea that consciousness is not a perfect, exact duplicate of reality; not a “mirror image.” This, however, does not contradict the fact that we can obtain real knowledge of the real world in our consciousness, and that this knowledge improves over time through practice and observation. Indeed, Lenin’s passage on practice cited first in this annotation directly follows the above passage in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.

See: Natural Source of Consciousness, p. 64, and Annotation 32, 27.

Consciousness is a social phenomenon and has a social nature. Consciousness arose from real life activities. Consciousness is always ruled by natural law and by social law.

Annotation 78

Natural law includes the laws of physics, chemistry, and other natural phenomena which govern the material world. Consciousness itself can never violate natural law as it arises from the natural processes of the natural world.

Social law includes the objective and universal relationships between social phenomena and social processes. Human society was created through labor, and this labor was performed in very specific material relations between humans and the natural world.

Note: social law is a key concept of historical materialism, which is the topic of Part 2 of the textbook from which this entire text has been translated, which we hope to translate in the future.

In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx explains how social existence and social laws govern the consciousness of individuals:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the

economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.

Consciousness is determined by the social communication needs of human beings as well as the material conditions of reality.

Annotation 79

The term *material conditions* refers to the external environment which humans inhabit. Material conditions include the natural environment, the means of production and the economic base¹⁸ of human society, and other objective externalities and systems which affect human life and society. Note that material conditions don't refer to physical matter alone, but also include objective social relations and phenomena. In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx argues that "neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life."

Consciousness is dynamic in nature, constantly learning and changing flexibly. Consciousness guides humans to transform the material world to suit our needs.

Annotation 80

Consciousness and material conditions have a dialectical relationship with one other, just as the base of society and the superstructure have a dialectical relationship with one other [see Annotation 29, p. 24]. Consciousness arises from material conditions, though conscious activity can affect material conditions.

As Marx explains in *Capital Volume I*:

¹⁸ See Annotation 3, p. 2 and Annotation 29, p. 24.

At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will. And this subordination is no mere momentary act. Besides the exertion of the bodily organs, the process demands that, during the whole operation, the workman's will be steadily in consonance with his purpose.

In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx explains how the development of material conditions eventually leads to conscious activity which will in turn lead to changes in society:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or — this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms — with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.

As Marx further explains, material conditions must first be met before such revolutionary social changes can be made through conscious activity:

No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.

- *Structure of Consciousness*

Consciousness has a very complicated structure, including many factors which have strong relationships with each other. The most basic factors are *knowledge*, *sentiment* and *willpower*.

Annotation 81

As with the concept of reflection (see Annotation 68, p. 65), the analysis of the structure of consciousness which follows is rooted in ideas first proposed by Marx, Engels and Lenin, and later developed through the work of various Soviet psychologists, philosophers, and scientists including Ivan Pavlov, Todor Pavlov, Aleksei Leontiev, Lev Vygotsky, Valentin Voloshinov, and others, and is used as a basis for scientific inquiry and development up to this day. According to *Where is Marx in the Work and Thought of Vygotsky?* by Lucien Sève (2018), much of this work, such as the groundbreaking work of Lev Vygotsky, has been heavily “de-Marxized,” stripped of all aspects of Marxism and, by extension, dialectical materialism, in translation to English.

Knowledge constitutes the understanding of human beings, and is the result of the cognitive process. Knowledge is the re-created image of perceived objects which takes the form of language. Knowledge is the mode of existence of consciousness and the condition for consciousness to develop.

Annotation 82

Marx and Engels discussed the relationship between language and consciousness extensively in *The German Ideology*, explaining that language — the form of knowledge which exists in human consciousness — evolved dialectically with and through social activity, and that consciousness also developed along with and through the material processes that gave rise to speech:

From the start the ‘spirit’ is afflicted with the curse of being ‘burdened’ with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men.”So, language, physical speech organs, and human society all developed in dialectic relations with one another. Since language is the form of knowledge in human consciousness, this means that knowledge arose directly from these dialectical processes:

Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all. Consciousness is at first, of course, merely consciousness concerning the immediate sensuous environment and consciousness of the limited connection with other persons and things outside the individual who is growing self-conscious.

The fact that knowledge has a language-form in human consciousness is also important to understand because it shows that consciousness arose dialectically as, and through, social activity, and indeed, language and social activity gave rise to consciousness as a replacement for animal instinct in our relations with nature.

Man's consciousness of the necessity of associating with the individuals around him is the beginning of the consciousness that he is living in society at all. This beginning is as animal as social life itself at this stage. It is mere herd-consciousness, and at this point man is only distinguished from sheep by the fact that with him consciousness takes the place of instinct or that his instinct is a conscious one.

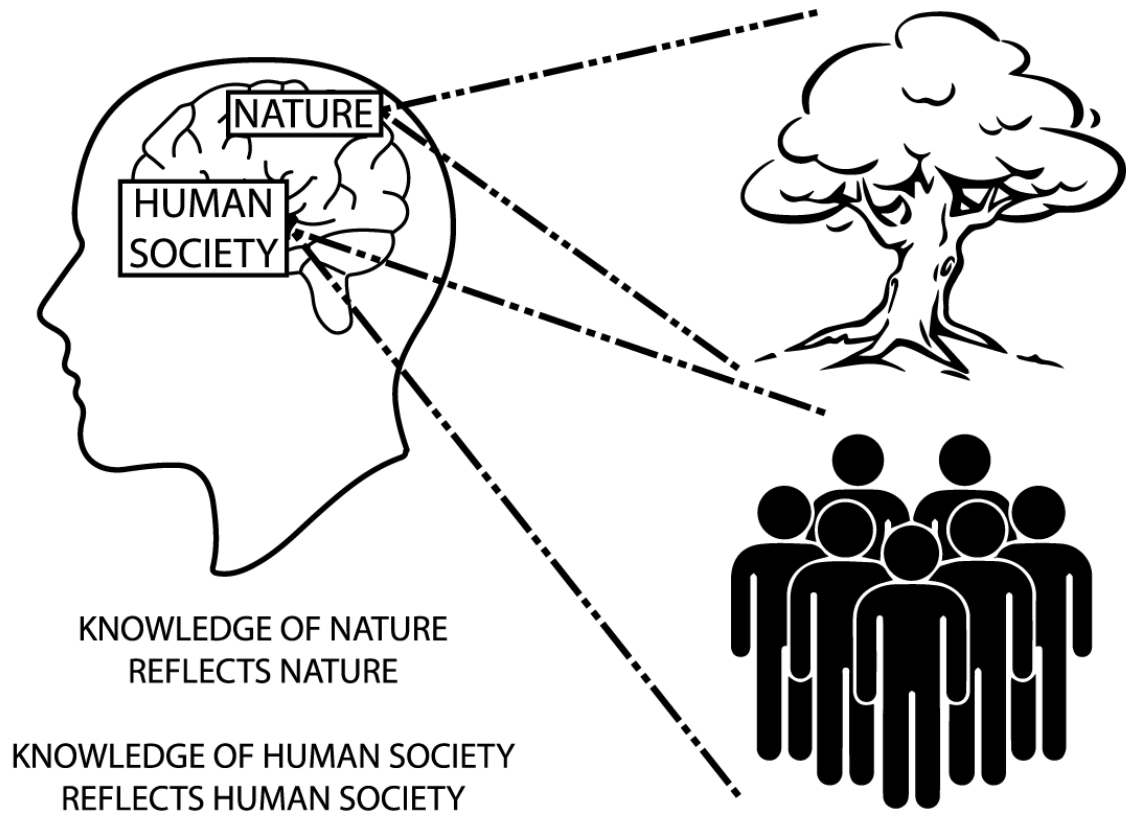
And, as language and social activity dialectically developed through one another, human society became complex enough to give rise to human societies and human economies:

This sheep-like or tribal consciousness receives its further development and extension through increased productivity, the increase of needs, and, what is fundamental to both of these, the increase of population. With these there develops the division of labour...

Knowledge can be separated into two broad categories: knowledge of nature, and knowledge of human society. Each of these categories of knowledge reflects its corresponding entity in the external world.

Annotation 83

It's also important to note that human society and nature have a dialectical relationship with each other and mutually impact one another, and, by extension, knowledge of nature and knowledge of human society also dialectically influence one another. So these categories of knowledge are not isolated from one another but rather dynamically shape and influence each other continuously through time.



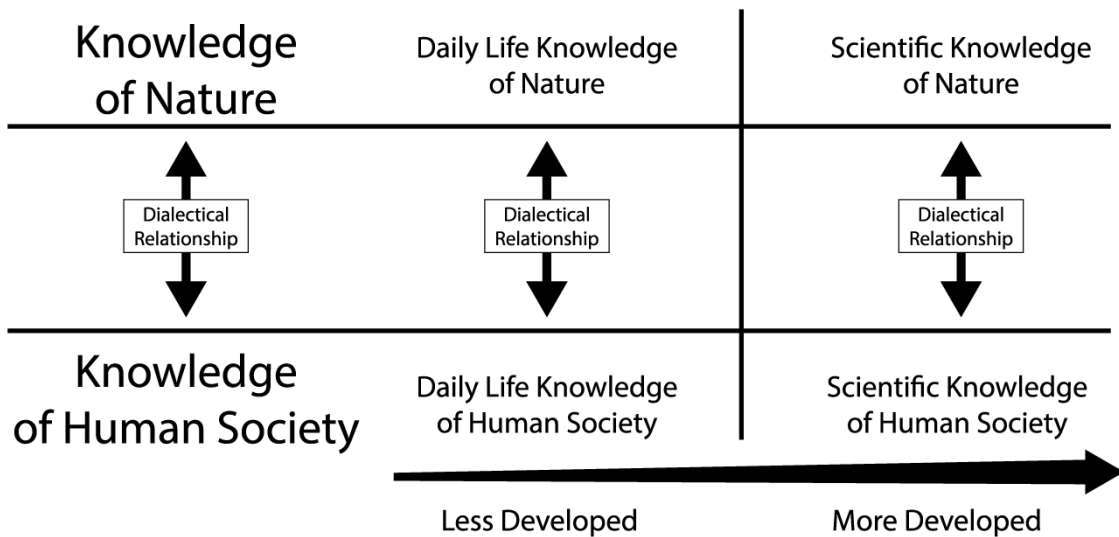
Each category of knowledge reflects a corresponding entity in the external world.

Based on levels of cognitive development, we can also classify knowledge into categories of: daily life knowledge and scientific knowledge, experience knowledge and theory knowledge, emotional knowledge and rational knowledge.

Annotation 84

The following information is from the *Marxism-Leninism Textbook of Students Who Specialize in Marxism-Leninism*, released by Vietnam’s Ministry of Education and Training:

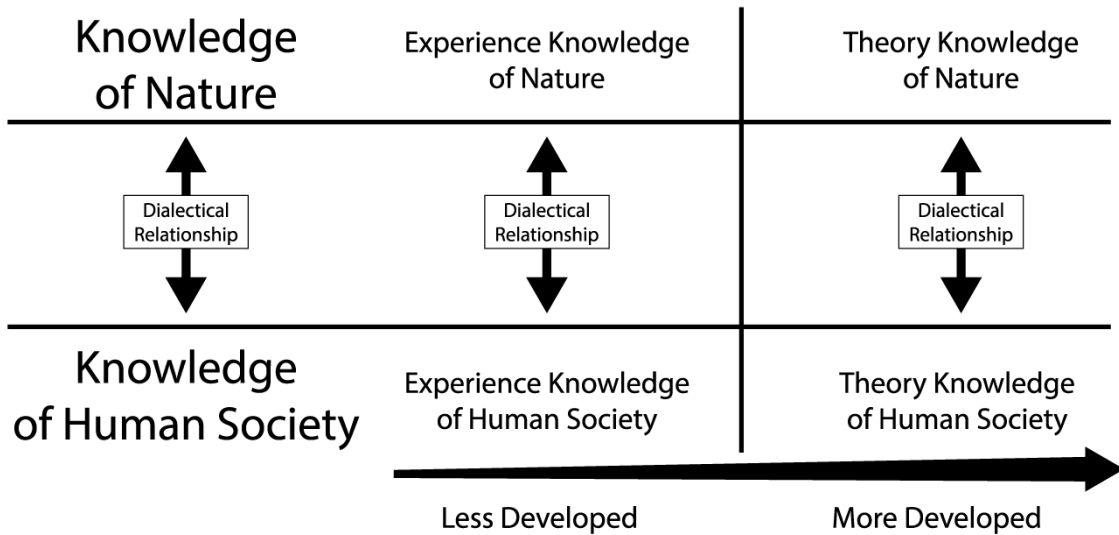
Daily Life and Scientific Knowledge



Daily Life Knowledge is the knowledge we acquire in our daily lives to deal with our daily tasks. From our interactions with nature and human society, we cultivate life experience and our understanding of every aspect of our daily lives in relation to human society and nature.

Scientific Knowledge arises from Daily Life Knowledge: as our daily lives become more complex, we develop a need to understand the material world and human society more deeply and comprehensively. Scientific Knowledge is thus a developed system of knowledge of nature and human society. Scientific Knowledge can be tested and can be applied to human life and activity in useful ways.

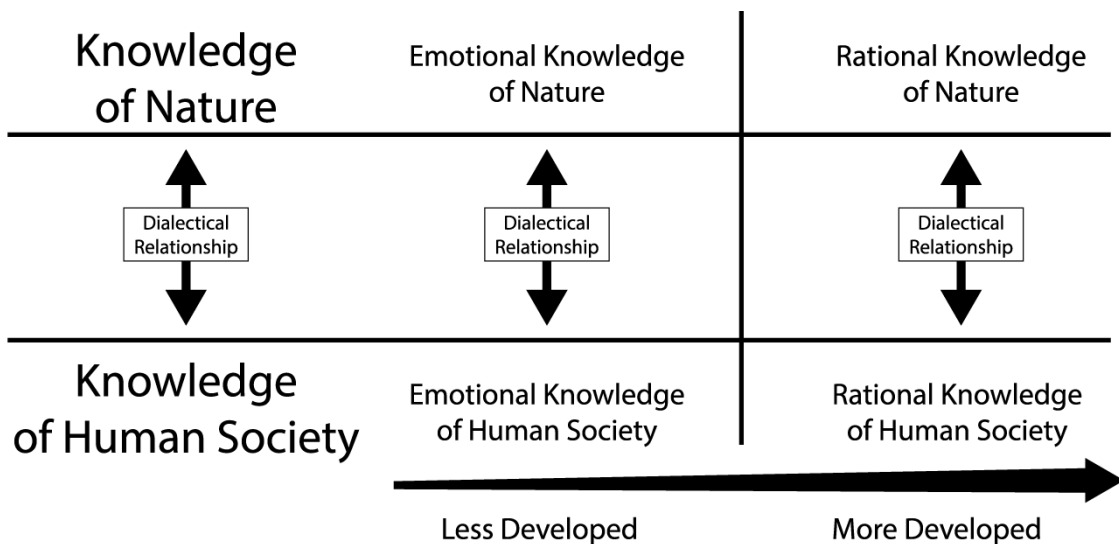
Experience and Theory Knowledge:



Experience Knowledge is cultivated from direct observation of nature and human society. This kind of knowledge is extremely diverse, and we can apply this kind of knowledge to guide our daily activities.

Theory Knowledge arises from Experience Knowledge. Theory Knowledge is composed of abstract generalizations of Experience Knowledge. Theory Knowledge is more profound, accurate, and systematically organized than Experience Knowledge and gives us an understanding of the laws and dynamics of nature and human society.

Emotional and Rational Knowledge:



Less Developed More Developed

Emotional Knowledge is the earlier stage of cognitive processing. Emotional Knowledge comes directly to us from our human senses. We obtain emotional knowledge when we use our human senses to directly learn things about nature and human society. Emotional Knowledge is usually manifested as immediate cognitive responses such as pleasure, pain, and other such impulses.

Rational Knowledge arises from Emotional Knowledge. It is a higher stage of cognitive processing, involving abstract thought and generalization of emotional knowledge.

Rational Knowledge is usually manifested as definitions, conjectures, judgments, etc.

See also: Principle of Development, p. 119; Cognitive Theory of Dialectical Materialism, p. 204.

Sentiment is the resonant manifestation of human emotions and feelings in our relationships. Sentiment is a special form of reality reflection [see Annotation 68, p. 65]. Whenever reality impacts human beings, we feel specific sensations and emotional reactions to those impacts. Over time, these specific sensations and emotions combine and dialectically develop into generalized human feelings, and we call these generalized feelings *sentiment*. Sentiment expresses and develops in every aspect of human life; it is a factor that improves and promotes cognitive and practical activities.

Annotation 85

As Marx explains in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: “Man as an objective, sensuous being is therefore a suffering being — and because he feels that he suffers, a passionate being. Passion is the essential power of man energetically bent on its object.” Marx further elaborates that sentimental emotion is essential to human nature: “The domination of the objective essence within me, the sensuous eruption of my essential activity, is emotion which thereby becomes the activity of my nature.”

Depending on the subjects that are perceived, as well as our human emotions about them, sentiments can be manifested in many different forms such as: moral emotion, aesthetic emotion, religious emotion, etc.

Annotation 86

Moral Emotion is the basic manifestation of moral consciousness at an emotional level. For example: when we see people helping other people, we have positive emotional responses, yet when we see people harming other people, we have negative emotional responses. (Source: *Nguyen Thi Khuyen of the National Institute of Administration of Vietnam*)

Aesthetic Emotion refers to the the resonant feelings which arise from our interaction with beauty, sadness, comedy, etc., in life and in art. For example: when humans encounter beauty, we feel positive emotional responses. When humans encounter ugliness, we feel negative emotional responses. When we witness pain, we feel sympathetic feelings of pain and a desire to help. When we witness comedy, we feel humorous emotions ourselves. (Source: *Textbook of General Aesthetic Studies from the Ministry of*

Education and Training of Vietnam)

Religious Emotion is the human belief in supernatural or spiritual forces which can't be tested or proved through material practice or observation. However, belief in these forces can give human beings emotional responses such as hope, love, etc. (Source: *Pham Van Chuc, Doctor of Philosophy, Central Theoretical Council of the Communist Party of Vietnam*)

These are just a few illustrative examples; there are many other ways in which human emotion and sentiment can manifest.

Willpower is the manifestation of one's own strength used to overcome obstacles in the process of achieving goals. Willpower is a dynamic aspect of consciousness, a manifestation of human consciousness in the material world.

Annotation 87

An unnamed poem by Ho Chi Minh, written in 1950 for the Revolutionary Youth Pioneers, addresses the phenomenon of willpower:

Nothing in this world must be difficult

The only thing that we should fear is having a waivering heart

We can dig up mountains and fill the sea

Once we've willfully made a firm decision

Today, this poem serves as the lyrics for anthem of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union (formerly the Revolutionary Youth Pioneers).

Willpower arises from human self-awareness and awareness of the purposes of our actions. Through this awareness and through willpower, we are able to struggle against ourselves and externalities to successfully achieve our goals. We can consider willpower to be the power of conscious human activity; willpower controls and regulates human behaviors in order to allow humans to move towards our goals voluntarily; willpower also allows humans to exercise self-restraint and self-control, and to be assertive in our actions according to our views and beliefs.

Annotation 88

In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels explains how willpower developed in human beings as we separated from animals through the development of consciousness: “The further removed men are from animals, however, the more their effect on nature assumes the character of premeditated, planned action directed towards definite preconceived ends.”

In *Capital Volume I*, Marx explains how willpower uniquely allows humans to consciously change our own material conditions to suit our needs according to preconceived plans:

Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature’s productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway. We are not now dealing with those primitive instinctive forms of labour that remind us of the mere animal. An immeasurable interval of time separates the state of things in which a man brings his labour-power to market for sale as a commodity, from that state in which human labour was still in its first instinctive stage. We pre-suppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own that gives the

law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will. And this subordination is no mere momentary act. Besides the exertion of the bodily organs, the process demands that, during the whole operation, the workman's will be steadily in consonance with his purpose. This means close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of the work, and the mode in which it is carried on, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as something which gives play to his bodily and mental powers, the more close his attention is forced to be.

The true value of willpower is not only manifested in strength or weakness, but is also expressed in the content and meaning of the goals that we try to achieve through our willpower. Lenin believed that willpower is one of the factors that will create revolutionary careers for millions of people in the fierce class struggles to liberate ourselves and mankind.

Annotation 89

In "*Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*", Lenin explains how revolutions are born from the collective willpower of thousands of people:

History as a whole, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more multiform, more lively and ingenious than is imagined by even the best parties, the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes. This can readily be understood, because even the finest of vanguards express the class-consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of thousands, whereas at moments of great upsurge and the exertion of all human capacities, revolutions are made by the class-consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of millions, spurred on by a most acute struggle of classes. Two very important practical conclusions follow from this: first, that in order to accomplish its task the revolutionary class must be able to master all forms or aspects of social activity without exception (completing after the capture of political power — sometimes at great risk and with very great danger — what it did not complete before the capture of power); second, that the revolutionary class must be prepared for the most rapid and brusque replacement of one form by another.

All of these factors [knowledge, sentiment, and willpower] which, together, create consciousness, have dialectical relationships with each other. Of these factors, knowledge is the most important, because it is the mode of existence of consciousness, and also the factor which guides the development of all the other factors, and it also determines how the other factors manifest.

3. The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness

The relationship between matter and consciousness is dialectical. In this relationship, *matter comes first, and matter is the source of consciousness; it decides consciousness. However, consciousness is not totally passive, it can impact back to matter through the practical activities of human beings.*

Annotation 90

Engels explained in *Dialectics of Nature* that “matter evolves out of itself the thinking human brain,” which means that matter must necessarily come prior to consciousness.

As Marx explains in *Capital Volume I*, matter determines conscious activity:

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.

However, it's important to remember that the relationship between matter and consciousness is *dialectical*, and that conscious activity — through the combination of willpower and labor — can also impact the material world; social change arises through the combined willpower of many human beings. See: Annotation 80, p. 81.

a. The Role of Matter in Consciousness

Dialectical Materialism affirms that:

- **Matter is the first existence, and that consciousness comes after.**
- **Matter is the source of consciousness, it decides consciousness.**

We know that matter determines consciousness because consciousness is the product of the high-level-structured matter such as the human brain. Consciousness itself can only exist after the development of the material structure of the human brain. Humans are the result of millions of years of development of the material world. We are, therefore, products of the material world. This conclusion has been firmly established through the development of natural science, which has given us great insight into the long history of the Earth and of the evolution of living organisms, including human beings.

All of this scientific evidence stands as the basis for the viewpoint: *matter comes first, consciousness comes after* [see Annotation 114, p. 116].

We have already discussed the factors which constitute the natural and social sources of consciousness:

- Human brains
- Impacts of the material world on human brains that cause reflections
- Labor
- Language

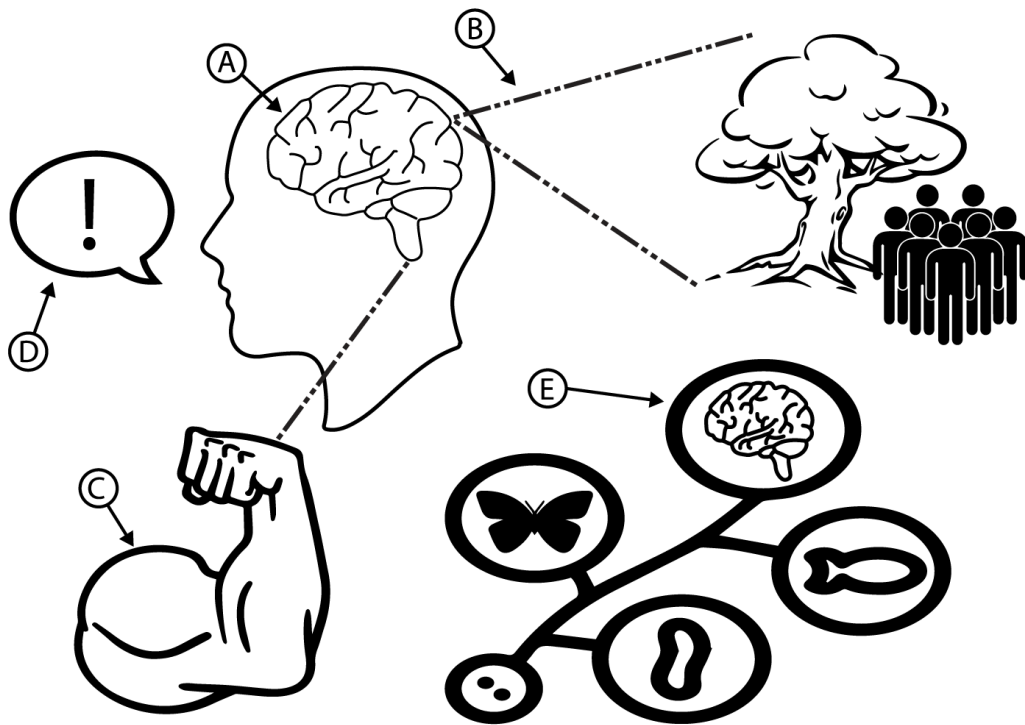
[See Annotation 72, p. 68 and Annotation 73, p. 75]

All of these factors also assert that *matter is the origin of consciousness*.

Annotation 91

The material basis of consciousness is rooted in the following phenomena:

- A. The material structure of the human brain.
- B. Impacts from the material world cause reflections in human consciousness.
- C. Human Labor — physical process which dialectically develops consciousness.
- D. Human Speech — physical process which dialectically develops consciousness.



MATERIAL BASIS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

- E. Evolution of human brains and consciousness through material processes of the material world.

For more information, see: Nature and Structure of Consciousness.

Consciousness is composed of reflections and subjective images of the material world, therefore *the content of consciousness is decided by matter* [see Annotation 68, p. 65]. The development of consciousness is determined by natural laws and by social laws¹⁹ as well as the material environment which we inhabit. All of these factors which determine consciousness are material in nature. Therefore, matter determines not only the content but also the development of consciousness.

b. The Role of Consciousness in Matter

In relation to matter, *consciousness can impact matter through human activities*.

When we discuss consciousness we are discussing *human* consciousness. So, when we talk about the role of consciousness, we are talking about the role of human beings. Consciousness in and of itself cannot directly change anything in reality. In order to change reality, humans have to implement material activities. However, consciousness controls every human activity, so even though consciousness does not directly create or change the material world, it equips humans with knowledge about objective reality, and based on that foundation of knowledge, humans are able to identify goals, set directions, develop plans, and select methods, solutions, tools, and means to achieve our goals. So, consciousness manifests its ability to impact matter through human activities.

The impact of consciousness on matter can have positive or negative results.

Annotation 92

“Positive” and “negative,” in this context, are subjective and relative terms which simply denote “moving towards a goal” and “moving away from a goal,” based on a specific perspective.

From the perspective of revolutionary communism, “positive” can be taken as moving towards the end goal of the liberation of the working class from capitalist oppression and the construction of a stateless, classless society. Likewise, “negative” can be taken as moving away from that goal. See: Annotation 114, p. 116.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the material basis of social laws, see Annotation 10, p. 10, Annotation 78, p. 80, and Annotation 79, p. 81.

Humans have the ability to overcome all challenges in the process of achieving our goals and improving our world, so long as our conscious activities meet the following criteria:

- We must perceive reality accurately.
- We must properly apply scientific knowledge, revolutionary sentiments, and directed willpower.
- We must avoid contradicting objective laws of nature and society.

Successfully achieving our goals and improving the world in this manner constitutes the *positive* outcome of human consciousness.

On the contrary, if human consciousness wrongly reflects objective reality, nature, and laws, then, right from the beginning, our actions will have negative results which will do harm to ourselves and our society.

Therefore, by directing the activities of humans, consciousness can determine whether the results of human activities are beneficial or harmful. Our consciousness thus determines whether our activities will succeed or fail and whether our efforts will be effective or ineffective.

By studying the matter, origin, and nature of consciousness, as well as the relationships between matter and consciousness, we can see that:

- Matter is the source of consciousness²⁰.
- Matter determines the content and creative capacity of consciousness²¹.
- Matter is the prerequisite to form consciousness²².
- Consciousness only has the ability to impact matter, and this impact is indirect, because it has to be done through human material activities within material reality²³.

The strength with which consciousness can impact the material world depends on:

- The accuracy of reflection of the material world in consciousness²⁴.
- Strength of willpower which transmits consciousness to human activity²⁵.

²⁰ See: Annotation 72, p. 68.

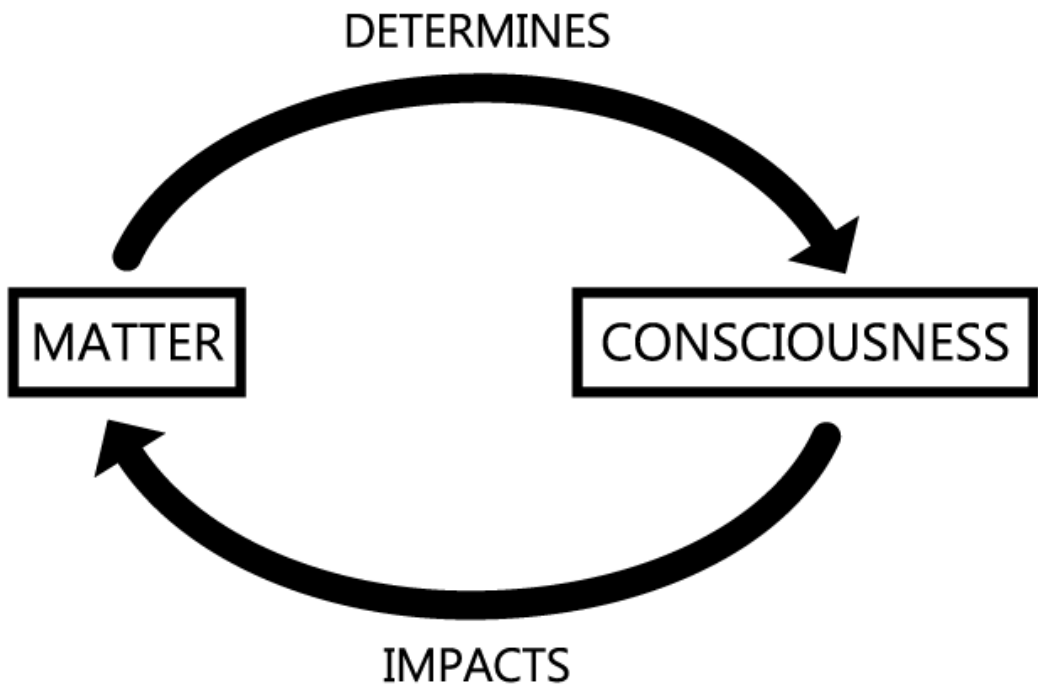
²¹ See: Annotation 90, p. 88.

²² See: *The Role of Matter in Consciousness*, p. 89.

²³ See: *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*, p. 88.

²⁴ See: Annotation 68, p. 65.

²⁵ See: *Nature and Structure of Consciousness*, p. 79.



Matter determines consciousness while consciousness impacts matter indirectly through human activity.

- The degree of organization of social activity²⁶.
 - Material conditions in which human activity occurs²⁷.
-

Annotation 93

The importance of organization in determining the outcomes of human social activity is one of the most important concepts of Marxism-Leninism and is discussed frequently by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and nearly every other important communist revolutionary in history. Marx explains the connections between social organization and conscious human activity in *Capital Volume I* [see Annotation 80, p. 81].

4. Meaning of the methodology

Dialectical Materialism builds the most basic and common methodological²⁸ principles for human cognitive and practical activities on the following bases:

- The viewpoint of the material nature of the world [*matter comes first, consciousness comes after*].
- The dynamic and creative nature of consciousness²⁹.
- The dialectical relationship between matter and consciousness³⁰.

All cognitive and practical activities of humans *originate from material reality and must observe objective natural and social laws*, however, our activities are capable of *impacting the material world through dynamic and creative conscious activity*. [See *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*, p. 88].

²⁶ See: Annotation 93, below.

²⁷ See: Annotation 10, p. 10.

²⁸ For discussion of the meaning of methodology, see *Methodology*, p. 44.

²⁹ See: *Nature of Consciousness*, p. 79.

³⁰ See: *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*, p. 88.

Annotation 94

The above paragraph summarizes an important methodological concept which is critical for understanding the philosophical framework of Dialectical Materialism. Dialectical Materialism, as a philosophy, synthesizes earlier materialist and idealist positions by recognizing the fact that the material determines consciousness, while consciousness can impact the material world through willful activity.

From this philosophical basis, the methodology of Materialist Dialectics has been developed to provide a deeper understanding of dialectical development, which is rooted in contradiction and negation within and between subjects. Materialist Dialectics is the subject of Chapter 2, p. 98.

According to this methodological principle [i.e., the Principle of the Dialectic Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness], if we hope to succeed in accomplishing our goals in the material world, then we must *simultaneously* meet two criteria:

1. We must ensure that our knowledge reflects the objective material world as much as possible, respecting the objective natural and social laws of the material world.

2. We must simultaneously recognize the dynamic and creative nature of our conscious activity.

When we say that human activities *originate from material reality* and *must observe objective natural and social laws* we mean that human knowledge must originate from the material world. This means that if we hope to be successful in our activities, we should respect the natural and social laws of the material world.

This means that in our human perception and activities, we must determine goals, and set strategies, policies, and plans which are rooted firmly in objective material reality. Humans have to take objective material reality as the foundation of our activities and plans, and all of our activities must be carried out in the material world. Humans have to examine and understand our material conditions and transform them in ways that will help us to accomplish our goals.

When we talk about *impacting the material world through dynamic and creative conscious activity*, we mean we must recognize the positive, dynamic, and creative roles of consciousness. We must recognize the role human consciousness plays in dynamically and creatively manifesting our will in the material world through labor. Impacting the material world through conscious activity at a revolutionary scale requires humans to respect and understand the role of scientific knowledge; to study laboriously to master such knowledge; and then to propagate such knowledge so to the masses to develop public knowledge and belief so as to guide the people's action.

Moreover, we also have to voluntarily study and practice³¹ in order to form and improve our revolutionary viewpoint³² and willpower³³ in order to have both scientific and humanitarian activity guidelines.

To implement this principle [i.e., the Principle of the Dialectic Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness], we have to avoid, fight against, and overcome the diseases of subjectivism³⁴ and idealism³⁵ through such errors as:

- Attempting to impose idealist plans and principles [which are not rooted in material conditions] into reality.
- Considering fantasy, illusion, and imagination instead of reality.
- Basing policies and programs on subjective desires.
- Using sentiment as the starting point for developing policies, strategies, etc.

On the other hand, in cognitive and practical activities, we also have to fight against empiricism³⁶, which disregards scientific knowledge and theories, and which is also very conservative, stagnant and passive.

Annotation 95

Process of Developing Revolutionary Public Knowledge

In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels makes a scathing critique of idealist socialist revolutionary thought, writing:

To all these [idealist socialists], Socialism is the expression of absolute truth³⁷, reason and justice, and has only to be discovered to conquer all the world by virtue of its own power. And as an absolute truth is independent of time, space, and of the historical development of man, it is a mere accident when and where it is discovered. With all this, absolute truth, reason, and justice are different with the founder of each different school. And as each one's special kind of absolute truth, reason, and justice is again conditioned by his subjective understanding, his conditions of existence, the

³¹ See: Annotation 211, p. 205.

³² See: Annotation 114, p. 116.

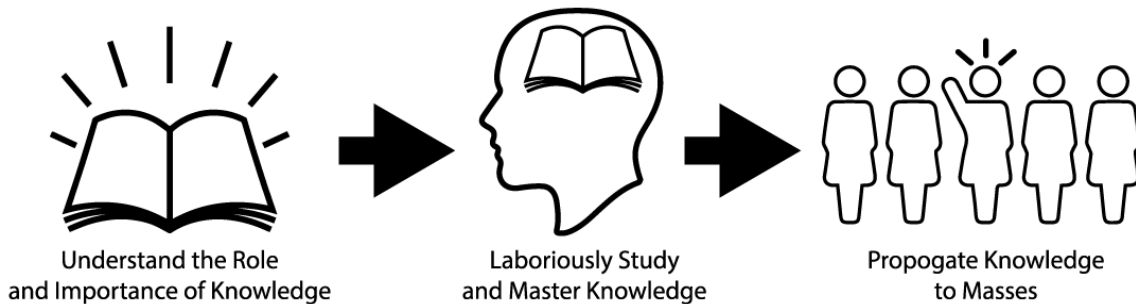
³³ See: *Nature and Structure of Consciousness*, p. 79.

³⁴ See: Annotation 222, p. 218.

³⁵ See: *The Opposition of Materialism and Idealism in Solving Basic Philosophical Issues*, p. 48.

³⁶ See: Annotation 10, p. 10.

³⁷ See: Annotation 232 and *The Properties of Truth*, on p. 228.



Process of Developing Revolutionary Public Knowledge

Developing revolutionary public knowledge must be preceded by mastery of knowledge and a firm grounding in the role and nature of knowledge.

measure of his knowledge and his intellectual training, there is no other ending possible in this conflict of absolute truths than that they shall be mutually exclusive of one another.

Here, Engels points out the absurdity of the idea that some abstract, purely ideal “truth” could liberate workers in the material world. Engels continues on, explaining how such idealist socialism could never lead to meaningful revolutionary change:

Hence, from this nothing could come but a kind of eclectic, average Socialism, which, as a matter of fact, has up to the present time dominated the minds of most of the socialist workers in France and England. Hence, a mish-mash allowing of the most manifold shades of opinion: a mish-mash of such critical statements, economic theories, pictures of future society by the founders of different sects, as excite a minimum of opposition; a mish-mash which is the more easily brewed the more definite sharp edges of the individual constituents are rubbed down in the stream of debate, like rounded pebbles in a brook.

In other words, idealist revolutionary movements only tend to result in endless debate and meaningless theories which are divorced from objective reality and material conditions. Such theories and idealist constructions do not lead to effective action in the real world. Socialism must become *real* (i.e., based in objective material conditions and praxis³⁸ in the real world) to affect change in the material world, as Engels explains elsewhere in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* [see Annotation 17, p. 18].

³⁸ See: *Praxis, Consciousness, and the Role of Praxis in Consciousness*, p. 204.

In *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx lays out an excellent case study of the failings of incoherent, idealist socialism. He begins by quoting the Gotha Program, which was an ideological program which the German Workers Party hoped to implement. In this text, Marx cites the Gotha Program line by line and offers his materialist critique of the idealist principles presented. In the following passage, Marx refutes some key errors caused by idealism and offers materialist correction:

Labor is not the source of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labor, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labor power... But a socialist program cannot allow such bourgeois phrases to pass over in silence the conditions that lone give them meaning. And insofar as man from the beginning behaves toward nature, the primary source of all instruments and subjects of labor, as an owner, treats her as belonging to him, his labor becomes the source of use values, therefore also of wealth. The bourgeois have very good grounds for falsely ascribing supernatural creative power to labor; since precisely from the fact that labor depends on nature it follows that the man who possesses no other property than his labor power must, in all conditions of society and culture, be the slave of other men who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labor. He can only work with their permission, hence live only with their permission.

Here, Marx points out the importance of having a firm understanding of the material reality of *labor* and its relation to the material, natural world. Marx points out that the idea that labor, alone, is the source of all wealth is an idealist notion of the bourgeoisie, a false consciousness [see Annotation 235, p. 231] which prevents proper material analysis and props up the capitalist viewpoint. A failure to grasp the truth of the material basis of reality weakens the socialist position, and any movement built on such weak idealist foundations will lead to failure in trying to bring about revolutionary change.

We have already discussed the shortcomings of empiricism in Annotation 10, p. 10, but it might be helpful to see another case study, this time from Engels, pointing out the flaws of empiricist analysis in his text *Anti-Dühring*. Engels begins by quoting the empiricist Eugen Dühring, who wrote:

Philosophy is the development of the highest form of consciousness of the world and of life, and in a wider sense embraces the principles of all knowledge and volition. Wherever a series of cognitions or stimuli or a group of forms of being come to be examined by human consciousness, the principles underlying these manifestations of necessity become an object of philosophy. These principles are the simple, or until now assumed to be simple,

constituents of manifold knowledge and volition. Like the chemical composition of bodies, the general constitution of things can be reduced to basic forms and basic elements. These ultimate constituents or principles, once they have been discovered, are valid not only for what is immediately known and accessible, but also for the world which is unknown and inaccessible to us. Philosophical principles consequently provide the final supplement required by the sciences in order to become a uniform system by which nature and human life can be explained. Apart from the fundamental forms of all existence, philosophy has only two specific subjects of investigation — nature and the world of man. Accordingly, our material arranges itself quite naturally into three groups, namely, the general scheme of the universe, the science of the principles of nature, and finally the science of mankind. This succession at the same time contains an inner logical sequence, for the formal principles which are valid for all being take precedence, and the realms of the objects to which they are to be applied then follow in the degree of their subordination.

Engels then proceeds to critique this empiricist worldview, showing that it does not properly reflect the material world and amounts to idealism in its own right:

What [Dühring] is dealing with are therefore principles, formal tenets derived from thought and not from the external world, which are to be applied to nature and the realm of man, and to which therefore nature and man have to conform. But whence does thought obtain these principles? From itself?

No, for Herr Dühring himself says: the realm of pure thought is limited to logical schemata and mathematical forms (the latter, moreover, as we shall see, is wrong). Logical schemata can only relate to forms of thought; but what we are dealing with here is solely forms of being, of the external world, and these forms can never be created and derived by thought out of itself, but only from the external world. But with this the whole relationship is inverted: the principles are not the starting-point of the investigation, but its final result; they are not applied to nature and human history, but abstracted from them, it is not nature and the realm of man which conform to these principles, but the principles are only valid in so far as they are in conformity with nature and history. That is the only materialist conception of the matter, and Herr Dühring's contrary conception is idealistic, makes things stand completely on their heads, and fashions the real world out of ideas, out of schemata, schemes or categories existing somewhere before the world, from eternity — just like a Hegel.

Lenin also heavily criticized empiricism in his work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which we discuss at length in Annotation 32, p. 27.

Chapter 2: Materialist Dialectics

Materialist dialectics is one of the basic theoretical parts that form the worldview and philosophical methodology of Marxism-Leninism. It is the “science of common relations” and also the “science of common rules of motion and development of nature, society, and human thoughts... Dialectics, as understood by Marx, and also in conformity with Hegel, includes what is now called the theory of knowledge, or epistemology.”³⁹

[Note: Epistemology is the theoretical study of knowledge; for more information see *Cognitive Theory of Dialectical Materialism*, p. 204.]

³⁹ *Karl Marx*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1914.

I. Dialectics and Materialist Dialectics

1. Dialectics and Basic Forms of Dialectics

a. Definitions of Dialectics and the Subjective Dialectic

In Marxism-Leninism, the term *dialectic* refers to regular relationships, interactions, transformations, motions, and developments of things, phenomena, and processes in nature, society and human thought.¹

There are two forms of dialectic: the *objective dialectic* and the *subjective dialectic*. The objective dialectic is the dialectic of the material world, while the subjective dialectic is the reflection of objective dialectic in human consciousness. [See Annotation 68, p. 65].

According to Engels, “Dialectics, so-called *objective* dialectics, prevail throughout nature, and so-called subjective dialectics (dialectical thought), is only the reflection of the motion through opposites which asserts itself everywhere in nature, and which by the continual conflict of the opposites and their final passage into one another, or into higher forms, determines the life of nature.”²

Annotation 96

Dialectics is an umbrella term which includes both forms of dialectical systems: *subjective* and *objective* dialectics.

Objective dialectics are the dialectical processes which occur in the material world, including all motion, relationships, and dynamic changes which occur in space and time.

Subjective dialectics, or *dialectical thought*, is a system of analysis and organized thinking which aims to reflect the objective dialectics of the material world within human consciousness. Dialectical thinking has two component forms: dialectical materialism and materialist dialectics [see Annotation 49, p. 45].

¹ See Annotation 9, p. 10.

² *Dialectics of Nature*, Friedrich Engels, 1883.

Subjective dialectics is the theory that studies and summarises the [objective] dialectic of nature into a system with scientific principles and rules, in order to build a system of methodological principles of perception and practice. Dialectics is opposed to *metaphysics* — a system of thought which conceives of things and phenomena in the world in an isolated and unchanging state [See Annotation 8, p. 8].

b. Basic Forms of Dialectics

Dialectics has developed into three basic forms and levels: ancient primitive dialectics, German idealist dialectics, and the materialist dialectics of Marxism-Leninism.

Ancient primitive dialectics is the earliest form of dialectics. It has developed independently in many philosophical systems in ancient China, India and Greece.

Chinese philosophy has two major forms of ancient primitive dialectics:

- “Changing Theory” (a theory of common principles and rules pertaining to the changes in the universe)
- The “Five Elements Theory” (a theory of the principles of mutual impact and transformation of the five elements of the universe) of the School of Yin-Yang. [See: *Primitive Materialism*, p. 52]

In Indian philosophy, Buddhist philosophy is a quintessential [see Annotation 6, p. 8] form of ancient primitive dialectics, which includes such concepts as “selflessness,” “impermanence,” and “predestination.”

An ancient, primitive form of dialectics also developed in Ancient Greek philosophy.

Friedrich Engels wrote: “The old Greek philosophers were all born natural dialecticians, and Aristotle, the most encyclopaedic of them, had already analyzed the most essential forms of dialectic thought... This primitive, naive, but intrinsically correct conception of the world is that of ancient Greek philosophy, and was first clearly formulated by Heraclitus: everything is and is not, for everything is fluid, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away.”³

Engels also wrote of Greek dialectics: “Here, dialectical thought still appears in its pristine simplicity, as yet undisturbed by the charming obstacles which the metaphysicists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — Bacon and Locke in England, Wolff in Germany — put in its own way... Among the Greeks — just because they were not yet advanced enough to dissect and analyse nature — nature is still viewed as a whole, in general. The universal connection of natural phenomena is not proved in regard to particular; to the Greeks it is the result of direct contemplation.”⁴

³ *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Friedrich Engels, 1880.

⁴ The Old Preface to *Anti-Dühring*, Friedrich Engels, 1878.

Annotation 97

Engels, here, is explaining how the ancient Greek dialecticians were correct to view nature as a cohesive system, a “whole, in general,” which they determined through direct observation of the natural world. The major shortcoming of this ancient Greek form of dialectics was a lack of inquiry into the specific processes and principles of nature. Engels laments that seventeenth and eighteenth century metaphysicists took us backwards by disregarding this view of nature as a cohesive, general whole.

Ancient, primitive dialectics had an accurate awareness of the dialectical characteristic of the world but with its primitive and naive perspective, it still lacked evidence-based forms of natural scientific achievements.

Jumping forward to the late 16th century, natural sciences started developing rapidly in Europe. Scientists began deeply analysing and studying specific factors and phenomena of nature which led to the birth of modern European metaphysical analysis. In the 18th century, metaphysics became the dominant methodology in philosophical thought and scientific study. However, when natural scientists moved from studying each subject separately to studying the unification of all those subjects in their relationships, the metaphysical method proved insufficient. Thus, European scientists and philosophers had to transition into a more advanced system of thought: dialectical thought.

The classical German idealist dialectics were founded by Kant and completed by Hegel. According to Engels: “*The second form of dialectics, which is the form that comes closest to the German naturalists [natural scientists], is classical German philosophy, from Kant to Hegel.*”⁵

Annotation 98

Engels discusses this history, and the shortcomings of the metaphysical philosophy of his era, in *The Old Preface to Anti-Dühring*. First, Engels explains why early modern natural scientists initially did not feel constrained by their adherence to metaphysics, since inquiries in the initial revolution of scientific study were limited to the narrow development of specific fields of inquiry by necessity:

Empirical natural science has accumulated such a tremendous mass of positive material for knowledge that the necessity of classifying it in each separate field of investigation systematically and in accordance with its inner inter-connection has become absolutely imperative.

⁵ The Old Preface to *Anti-Dühring*, Friedrich Engels, 1878.

Engels goes on to explain that at the time he was writing, enough knowledge had been accumulated within specific, distinct fields that it becomes necessary to begin studying the connections and overlaps between different fields, which called for theoretical and philosophical foundations:

It is becoming equally imperative to bring the individual spheres of knowledge into the correct connection with one another. In doing so, however, natural science enters the field of theory and here the methods of empiricism will not work, here only theoretical thinking can be of assistance.

Unfortunately, natural scientists were held back by the existing metaphysical theoretical foundations which were dominant at the time as, according to Engels, “theoretical thinking is an innate quality only as regards natural capacity. This natural capacity must be developed, improved, and for its improvement there is as yet no other means than the study of previous philosophy.”

Metaphysical theory and formal logic were in common use by natural scientists at the time. As Engels explained in *On Dialectics* and *Dialectics of Nature*, metaphysics and formal logic could never be as useful as dialectical analysis for examining and unifying concepts from wide-ranging dynamic systems of overlapping fields of inquiry.

Unfortunately, dialectics had not yet been suitably developed for use in the natural sciences before the work of Marx and Engels in developing dialectical materialism, as Engels explained in *On Dialectics*:

Formal logic itself has been the arena of violent controversy from the time of Aristotle to the present day. And dialectics has so far been fairly closely investigated by only two thinkers, Aristotle and Hegel. But it is precisely dialectics that constitutes the most important form of thinking for present-day natural science, for it alone offers the analogue for, and thereby the method of explaining, the evolutionary processes occurring in nature, interconnections in general, and transitions from one field of investigation to another.

The Idealist Dialectics of Hegel [see Annotation 9, p. 10] constituted a major development of dialectics, but the idealist nature of Hegelian dialectics made them unsuitable for natural scientists, who therefore discarded “Old-Hegelian” dialectics and were thus left without a suitable dialectical framework. Again, from *On Dialectics*:

The year 1848, which otherwise brought nothing to a conclusion in Germany, accomplished a complete revolution there only in the sphere of philosophy [and] the nation resolutely turned its back on classical German philosophy that had lost itself in the sands of Berlin old-Hegelianism... But a nation that wants to climb the pinnacles of science cannot possibly manage without theoretical thought. Not only Hegelianism but dialectics too

was thrown overboard — and that just at the moment when the dialectical character of natural processes irresistibly forced itself upon the mind, when therefore only dialectics could be of assistance to natural science in negotiating the mountain of theory — and so there was a helpless relapse into the old metaphysics.

Engels goes on to explain that, having rejected Hegel's dialectics, natural scientists were set adrift, cobbling together theoretical frameworks from the works of philosophers which were plagued by idealism and metaphysics, and which were therefore not suitable for the task of unifying the disparate fields of natural sciences together:

What prevailed among the public since then were, on the one hand, the vapid reflections of Schopenhauer, which were fashioned to fit the philistines, and later even those of Hartmann; and, on the other hand, the vulgar itinerant-preacher materialism of a Vogt and a Büchner. At the universities the most diverse varieties of eclecticism competed with one another and had only one thing in common, namely, that they were concocted from nothing but remnants of old philosophies and were all equally metaphysical. All that was saved from the remnants of classical philosophy was a certain neo-Kantianism, whose last word was the eternally unknowable thing-in-itself, that is, the bit of Kant [see Annotation 72, p. 68] that least merited preservation. The final result was the incoherence and confusion of theoretical thought now prevalent.

Engels explains that this lack of a proper dialectical materialist framework had frustrated natural scientists of his era:

One can scarcely pick up a theoretical book on natural science without getting the impression that natural scientists themselves feel how much they are dominated by this incoherence and confusion, and that the so-called philosophy now current offers them absolutely no way out. And here there really is no other way out, no possibility of achieving clarity, than by a return, in one form or another, from metaphysical to dialectical thinking.

After explaining that Hegel's system of dialectics came closest to meeting the needs of contemporary science, Engels explains why Hegelian dialectics were ultimately rejected by the scientific community:

Just as little can it be a question of maintaining the dogmatic content of the Hegelian system as it was preached by the Berlin Hegelians of the older and younger line. Hence, with the fall of the idealist point of departure, the system built upon it, in particular Hegelian philosophy of nature, also falls. It must however be recalled that the natural scientists' polemic

against Hegel, in so far as they at all correctly understood him, was directed solely against these two points: viz., the idealist point of departure and the arbitrary, fact-defying construction of the system.”

In other words, it was the idealism and the unworkable structuring of Hegelian dialectics that prevented its adoption by natural scientists. Engels finally explains how Marx was able to modify Hegel’s idealist dialectics into a materialist form which is suitable for empirical scientific inquiry:

It is the merit of Marx that... he was the first to have brought to the fore again the forgotten dialectical method, its connection with Hegelian dialectics and its distinction from the latter, and at the same time to have applied this method in *Capital* to the facts of an empirical science, political economy.

These Classical German philosophers [Kant, Hegel, etc.⁶] systematically organized idealist dialectics into formal philosophies. Of particular note was Hegel’s belief that the dialectical process would eventually lead to an “absolute idea.” This foundational belief in an “absolute idea” is what chiefly defines Hegelian dialectics as idealist in nature [see Annotation 98, p. 100].

Hegel believed that the subjective dialectic is the basis of the objective dialectic. [In other words, Hegel believed that *dialectical thought* served as the *objective dialectics* of the material world.]

According to Hegel, the “absolute idea” was the starting point of all existence, and that this “absolute idea,” after creating the natural world, then came to exist within human consciousness.

Engels wrote that in Hegelian dialectics: “... spirit, mind, the idea, is primary and that the real world is only a copy of the idea.”⁷

Annotation 99

In the above quoted passage, Engels was explaining why Hegelian dialectics were unsuitable for use in natural sciences. Here is a longer excerpt:

⁶ Kant’s “transcendental dialectic” was used to critique rationalism and pure reason, but was not a fully developed dialectical system of thought. Hegel’s idealist dialectics were more universal in nature. See Annotation 9, p. 10.

⁷ *The Old Preface to Anti-Dühring, On Dialectics*, Friedrich Engels, 1878.

First of all it must be established that here it is not at all a question of defending Hegel's point of departure: that spirit, mind, the idea, is primary and that the real world is only a copy of the idea... We all agree that in every field of science, in natural as in historical science, one must proceed from the given facts, in natural science therefore from the various material forms and the various forms of motion of matter; that therefore in theoretical natural science, too, the inter-connections are not to be built into the facts, but to be discovered in them, and when discovered to be verified as far as possible by experiment.

The German idealists (most notably Hegel) built an idealist system of dialectics organized into categories and common laws along with a strict logic of consciousness.

Lenin stated that: "Hegel brilliantly *divined* the dialectics of things (phenomena, the world, *nature*) in the dialectics of concepts."⁸

Annotation 100

What Lenin means, here, is that Hegel inadvertently and unconsciously discovered the concept of reflection [see Annotation 68, p. 65]. Hegel intuitively understood that the material world was reflected in human consciousness, and, by extension, subjective dialectics (dialectical thought) reflected objective dialectics (of the material world). Hegel's error was an inversion of the ideal and the material. As Marx later pointed out in the Afterword to the Second German Edition of *Capital Volume I*, it is the material which precedes the ideal, and not the other way around:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea,' he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos [craftsman/artisan/creator] of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea.' With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.

⁸ *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic*, Vladimir Ilyich. Lenin, 1914.

Engels also quoted and emphasized Marx's thoughts [in *the Old Preface to Anti-Dühring*, citing another quote of Marx from the *Afterword to the Second German Edition of Capital Volume I*, further quoted in Annotation 100 above]: "The mystification which dialectics suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."⁹

Annotation 101

In *the Old Preface to Anti-Dühring*, Engels explains some of the contemporary currents of science and philosophy of his era. Engels explains that Hegelian philosophy had been dismissed by a newer current of natural scientists who dismissed "the idealist point of departure and the arbitrary, fact-defying construction of the system." In other words, the natural scientists rejected Hegelianism because it was both idealist and was not built on a foundation of objective facts.

Engels points out, however, that Marx "was the first to have brought to the fore again the forgotten dialectical method" of Hegel.

The dialectical method was forgotten in the sense that the natural scientists ignored and dismissed dialectics along with the rest of Hegel's philosophy. So, Engels is pointing out that one of the great contributions of Marx was salvaging the dialectical method from Hegel while rejecting the idealist and non-fact-based characteristics of Hegelian philosophy.

Marx, according to Engels, proved that the dialectical method could be separated from idealism by "[applying the dialectical method] in *Capital* to the facts of an empirical science, political economy." This was the origin of dialectical materialism: the resurrection of the dialectical method and the development of a dialectical method in a materialist and scientific form.

The idealist characteristics of classical German dialectics and Hegelian philosophy was a limitation that needed to be overcome [so that it could be utilized for scientific inquiry]. Marx and Engels overcame that limitation and in so doing developed *materialist dialectics*. This system of dialectics is the most advanced form of dialectics in the history of philosophy to date. It is the successor of previous systems of dialectics, and it arose as a critique of the classical German dialectics.

⁹ Afterword to the Second German Edition of *Capital Volume I*, Karl Marx, 1873.

Engels said: “Marx and I were pretty well the only people to rescue conscious dialectics from German idealist philosophy and apply it in the materialist conception of nature and history.”¹⁰

2. Materialist Dialectics

a. Definition of Materialist Dialectics

Materialist dialectics have been defined in various ways by many prominent Marxist-Leninist philosophers.

Engels defined materialist dialectics as: “nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society, and thought.”¹¹

Engels also emphasized the role of the principle of general relations.¹² As John Burdon

Sanderson Haldane noted in the 1939 preface to *Dialectics of Nature*: “In dialectics they

[Marx and Engels] saw the science of the general laws of change.”¹³

Lenin emphasized the important role of the principles of development¹⁴ (including the theory of cognitive development) in the dialectics that Marx inherited from Hegelian philosophy.

Lenin wrote: “The main achievement was *dialectics*, i.e., the doctrine of development in its fullest, deepest, and most comprehensive form, the doctrine of the relativity of human knowledge that provides us with a reflection of eternally developing matter.”¹⁵

b. Basic Features and Roles of Materialist Dialectics

There are two basic features of the materialist dialectics of Marxism-Leninism:

First, the materialist dialectics of Marxism-Leninism is a system of dialectics that is based on the foundation of the scientific materialist viewpoint.

¹⁰ *Anti-Dühring*, The 1885 Preface, Friedrich Engels, 1878.

¹¹ *Anti-Dühring*, Friedrich Engels, 1878.

¹² See p. 107.

¹³ *Dialectics of Nature*, Friedrich Engels, 1883.

¹⁴ See Annotation 117, p. 119.

¹⁵ *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1913.

Annotation 102

Remember that *scientific* in Marxism-Leninism refers broadly to a systematic pursuit of knowledge, research, theory, and understanding [see Objects and Purposes of Study, p. 38]. Remember also that *materialism* in Marxism-Leninism has specific meaning as well, which differentiates it from other forms of materialism [see *Dialectical Materialism — the Most Advanced Form of Materialism*, p. 52]. Here, materialism includes an understanding that the material is the first basis of reality, meaning that the material determines the ideal (though human consciousness can impact the material world through willpower and labor [see *Nature and Structure of Consciousness*, p. 79]). Materialism is also built upon scientific explanations (rooted in empirical data and practice, i.e. systematic experimentation and observation) of the world. And finally, remember that *viewpoint* is the starting point of inquiry [see Annotation 11, p. 12].

Thus, a *scientific materialist viewpoint* is a perspective which begins analysis of the world in a manner that is both scientifically systematic in pursuit of understanding and firmly rooted in a materialist conception of the world.

Note: Materialist Dialectics contains *Twelve Basic Pairs of Categories*, *Two Basic Principles* and *Three Universal Laws*. These are summarized, respectively, in Appendix A (p. 246), Appendix B (p. 247), and Appendix C (p. 248), and explained in depth throughout the rest of this chapter.

In this way, materialist dialectics fundamentally differs from the classical German idealist dialectics, and especially differs from Hegelian dialectics¹⁶ (as these dialectics were founded on idealist viewpoints).

Moreover, it also has a higher level of development compared to other dialectical systems of thought found in the history of philosophy going back to ancient times. Such previous forms of dialectics were fundamentally based on materialist stances, however the materialism of those ancient times was still naive, primitive and surface-level.

Second, the materialist dialectics of Marxism-Leninism unifies dialectical materialist viewpoints and materialist dialectical methodology, so it not only explains the world, but is also a tool humans can use to perceive and improve the world.

Every principle and law of Marxist-Leninist materialist dialectics is both:

1. An accurate explanation of the dialectical characteristics of the world.
2. A scientific methodology for perceiving and improving the world.

By summarizing the general interconnections and development of all things — every phenomenon in nature, society and human thought — Marxist-Leninist materialist dialectics provides the most general methodological principles for the process of perceiving and improving the world. They are not just objective methodological principles; they are a comprehensive, constantly developing, and historical methodology.

This methodology can be used to analyze contradictions [see Annotation 119, p. 123] in order to find the basic origins and motivations of both motion and developmental

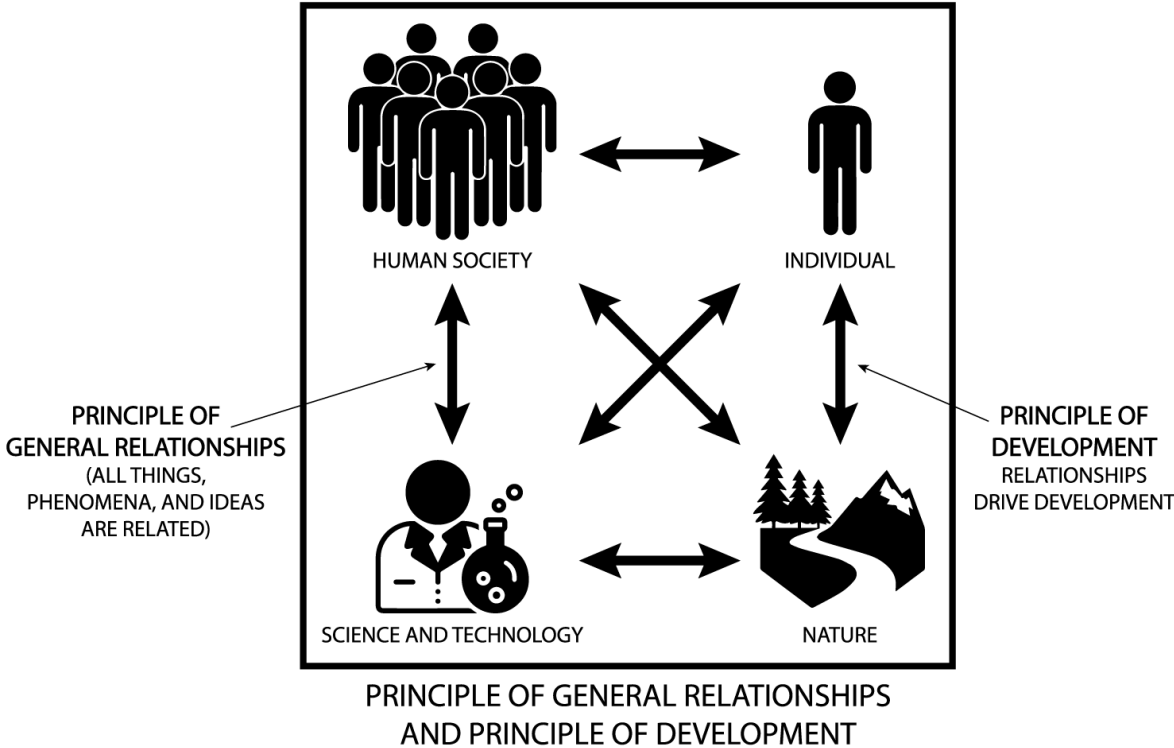
¹⁶ See Annotation 98, p. 100.

processes. Therefore, materialist dialectics is a great scientific tool for the revolutionary class to perceive and improve the world.

With these basic features, materialist dialectics plays a very important role in the worldview and philosophical methodology of Marxism-Leninism. Materialist dialectics are the foundation of the scientific and revolutionary characteristics of Marxism-Leninism and also offer the most general worldview and methodology for creative activities in scientific study and practical activities.

II. Basic Principles of Materialist Dialectics

Annotation 103



The Principle of General Relationships and the Principle of Development are the most basic principles of materialist dialectics. These two principles are dialectically related to one another.

The following sections will outline the Principle of General Relationships and the Principle of Development, which are the most fundamental principles of materialist dialectics. These two concepts are closely (and dialectically) related:

1. The Principle of General Relationships

a. Definition of Relationship and Common Relationship

Annotation 104

The *Principle of General Relationships* describes how all things, phenomena, and ideas are related to one another, and are defined by these internal and external relationships

The *Principle of Development* relates to the idea that motion, change, and development are driven by internal and external relationships.

These two principles are dialectically linked: any given subject is defined by its internal relationships, and these same relationships drive the development of every subject.

Note: The foundation of the principles of Materialist Dialectics were laid out by

Engels in *Dialectics of Nature*. Engels began working on *Dialectics of Nature* in February, 1870 and had to stop in 1876 to work on *Anti-Dühring*. He then restarted work on *Dialectics of Nature* in 1878 and continued working on it until 1883, when Karl Marx died. Engels felt that it was more important to try and put together Marx's great unfinished works, *Capital Volumes 2, 3, and 4*, and so stopped working on *Dialectics of Nature* once again. So, unfortunately, Engels died before this seminal work on Materialist Dialectics could be completed, and what we have instead is an unfinished assemblage of notes.

What follows in the rest of this book is a cohesive system of Materialist Dialectics which was built upon the foundations laid out by Engels in *Dialectics of Nature* and many other works of political and scholarly writing from various sources. This is the system of Materialist Dialectics studied by Vietnamese students and applied by Vietnamese communists today.

Because this text comes from predominantly Vietnamese scholarship and ideological development, we have had to translate some terms into English which are not derived from the "canon" of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. In some cases, various terms have been consolidated into one concept. For example: Engels used the term "interconnection"

(German: *innern Zusammenhang*, literally: “inner connections”) in *Dialectics of Nature*, but Vietnamese political scientists use the term “relationship.” Where Engels uses the term “motion” (German: *Bewegung*) modern Vietnamese communists tend to use the word “development.” Wherever this is the case, we have chosen to use the words in English which most closely match the language used in the original Vietnamese of this text.

In materialist dialectics, the word *relationship* refers to the regulating principles, mutual interactions, and mutual transformations which exist between things, phenomena, and ideas, as well as those existing between aspects and factors within things, phenomena, and ideas.

Annotation 105

Throughout this book, *phenomenon/phenomena* simply refers to anything that is observable by the human senses.

Materialist dialectics examines relationships between things, phenomena, and ideas and *within* things, phenomena, and ideas. A relationship which occurs between two separate things or phenomena is referred to as an *external relationship*. A relationship which occurs *within* a thing or phenomenon is referred to as an *internal relationship*.

These terms are relative; sometimes a relationship may be internal in one context but external in a different context. For example, consider a solar system:

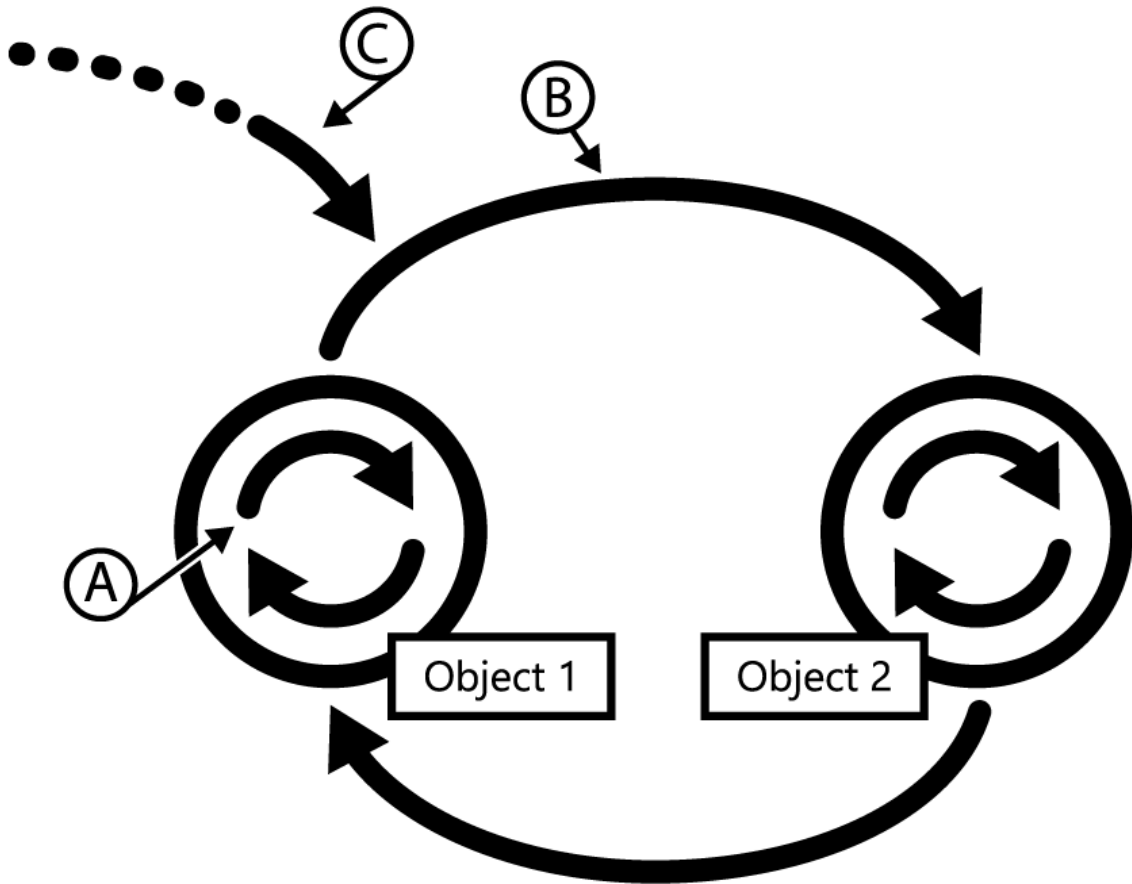
When considering a solar system as a whole, the orbit of a moon around a planet may be considered as an internal relationship of the solar system. But when considering the moon as an isolated subject, its orbit around a planet may be seen as an external relationship which the moon has with the planet.

The diagram above illustrates different types of relationships:

Object 1 has its own internal relationships (A), and, from its own perspective, it also has external relationships with Object 2 (B). From a wider perspective, the relationship between Object 1 and Object 2 (B) may be viewed as an internal relationship.

This *system of relationships* (between Object 1 and Object 2) will also have external relationships with other things, phenomena, and ideas (C).

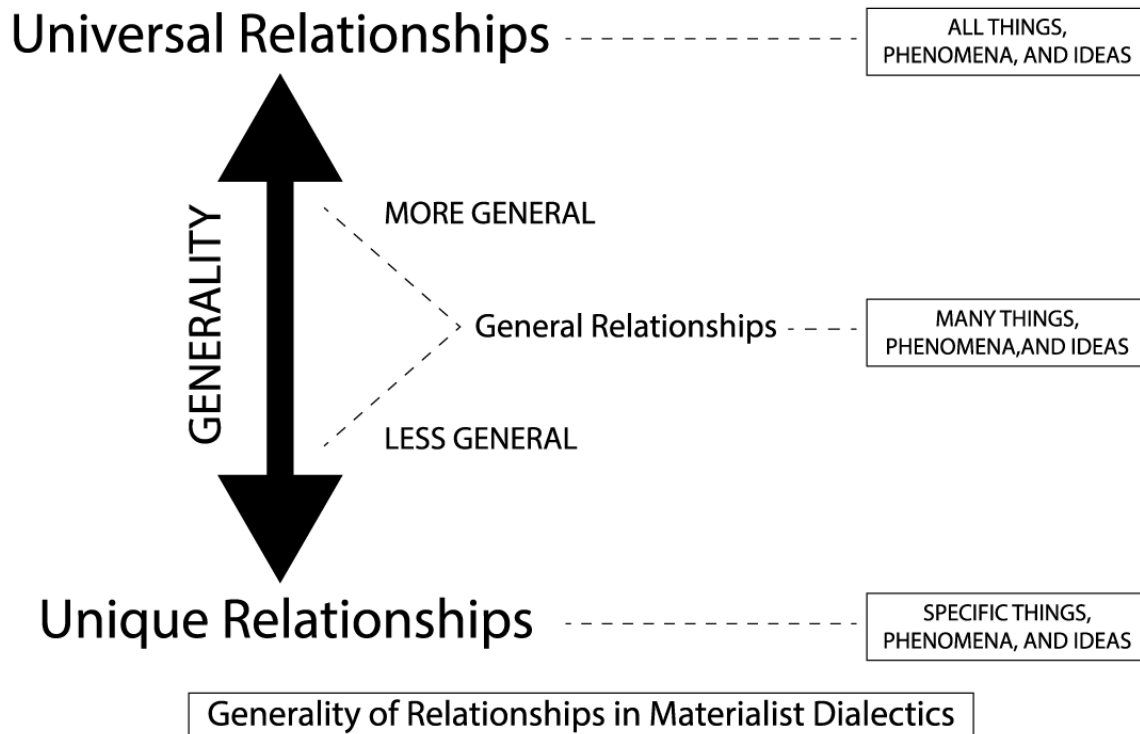
Relationships have a quality of *generality*, which refers to how frequently they occur between and within things, phenomena, and ideas. When we refer to *general relationships*, we are usually referring to relationships which exist broadly across many things, phenomena, and ideas. General relationships can exist both internally, *within* things, phenomena, and ideas, and externally, *between* things, phenomena, and ideas.



Internal and External Relationships

The most general relationships are *universal relationships*: these are relationships that exist between and within *everything* and *all phenomena*, and they are one of the two primary subjects of study of materialist dialectics. [The other primary subject of study is the *Principle of Development*; see page 119.]

Annotation 106



The discussion of generality of relationships can seem confusing at first. What’s important to understand is that generality is a spectrum ranging from the least general relationships (*unique relationships*, which only occur between two *specific* things/phenomena/ideas) and the most general relationships (*universal relationships*, which occur between or within *all* things/phenomena/ideas).

Of particular importance in the study of materialist dialectics are *universal* relationships which exist within and between all things, phenomena, and ideas [see below].

Translation Note: In the original Vietnamese, the word “universal” is not used. Instead, the compound term “phổ biến nhất” is used, which literally means “most general.” In Vietnamese, this phrasing is commonly used to describe the concept of “universal”

and it is thus not confusing to Vietnamese speakers. For this translation, we have opted to use the word “universal” because we feel it is less confusing and better explains the concept in English.

The universal relationships include (but are not limited to):

- Relationships between basic philosophical category pairs (Private and Common, Essence and Phenomenon, etc.).¹
- Relationships between quantity and quality.²
- Relationships between opposites.³

Together, in all forms of relationships in nature, society and human thought (special, general, and universal) there is unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

Annotation 107

Principle of General Relationships

According to *Curriculum of the Philosophy of Marxism-Leninism For University and College Students Specializing in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought*: “Materialist dialectics upholds the position that all things, phenomena, and ideas exist in mutual relationships with each other, regulate each other, transform into each other, and that nothing exists in complete isolation. That is the core idea of the *Principle of General Relationships*.”

From this Principle, we find the characteristics of *Diversity in Unity* and *Unity in Diversity*; the basis of Diversity in Unity is the fact that every thing, phenomenon, or idea, contains many different relationships; the basis of Unity in Diversity is that many different relationships exist — unified — within each and every thing, phenomenon, and idea.

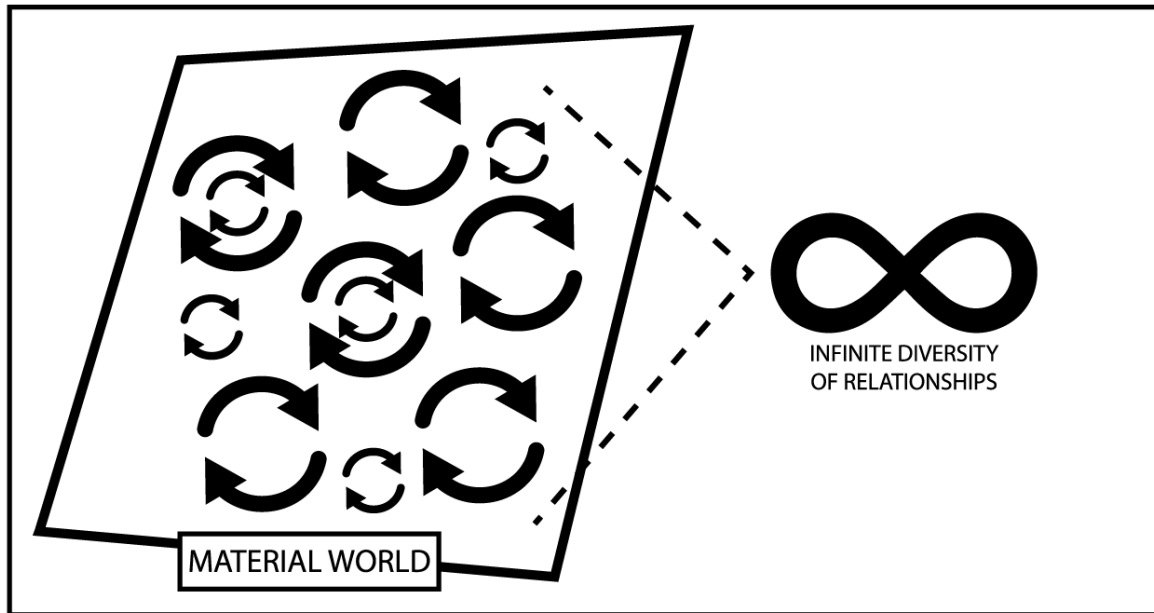
Diversity in Unity

There exist an infinite number of diverse relationships between things, phenomena, and ideas, but all of these relationships share the same foundation in the material world.

¹ See *Private and Common*, p. 128; *Essence and Phenomenon*, p. 156.

² See Annotation 117, p. 119.

³ See Annotation 190, p. 181.



DIVERSITY IN UNITY

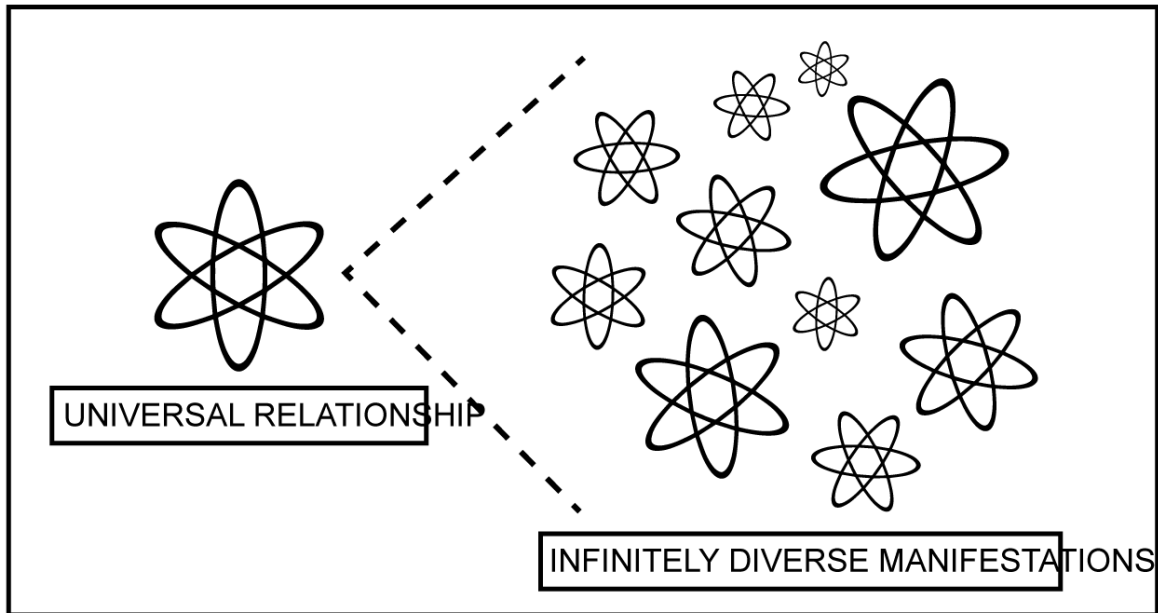
An infinite diversity of relationships exist within the unity of the material world.

The material world is not a chaotic and random assortment of things, phenomena, and ideas. Rather, it is a system of relationships between things, phenomena, and ideas. Likewise, since the material world exists as the foundation of all things, phenomena, and ideas, the material world is thus the foundation for all relationships within and between things, phenomena, and ideas. Because all relationships share a foundation in the material world, they also exist in unity, even though all relationships are diversified and different from one another.

Unity in Diversity

When we examine the universal relationships that exist within and between all different things, phenomena, and ideas, we will find that each individual manifestation of any universal relationship will have its own different manifestations, aspects, features, etc. Thus even the universal relationships which unite all things, phenomena, and ideas exist in infinite diversity.

Paraphrased From: Curriculum of the Philosophy of Marxism-Leninism For University and College Students Specializing in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought



UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Universal relationships which unite all things, phenomena, and ideas manifest in infinitely diverse ways.

b. Characteristics of Relationships

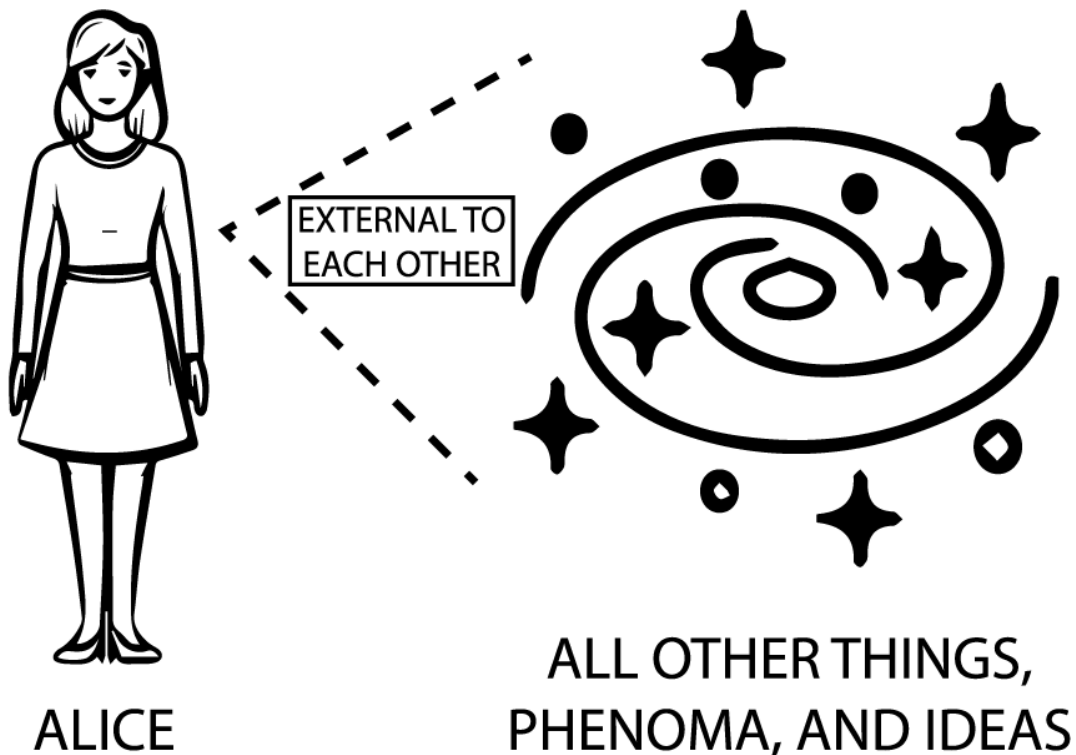
Objectiveness, generality, and diversity are the three basic characteristics of relationships.

- *The Characteristic of Objectiveness of Relationships*

According to the materialist dialectical viewpoint, relationships between things, phenomena, and ideas have objective characteristics.

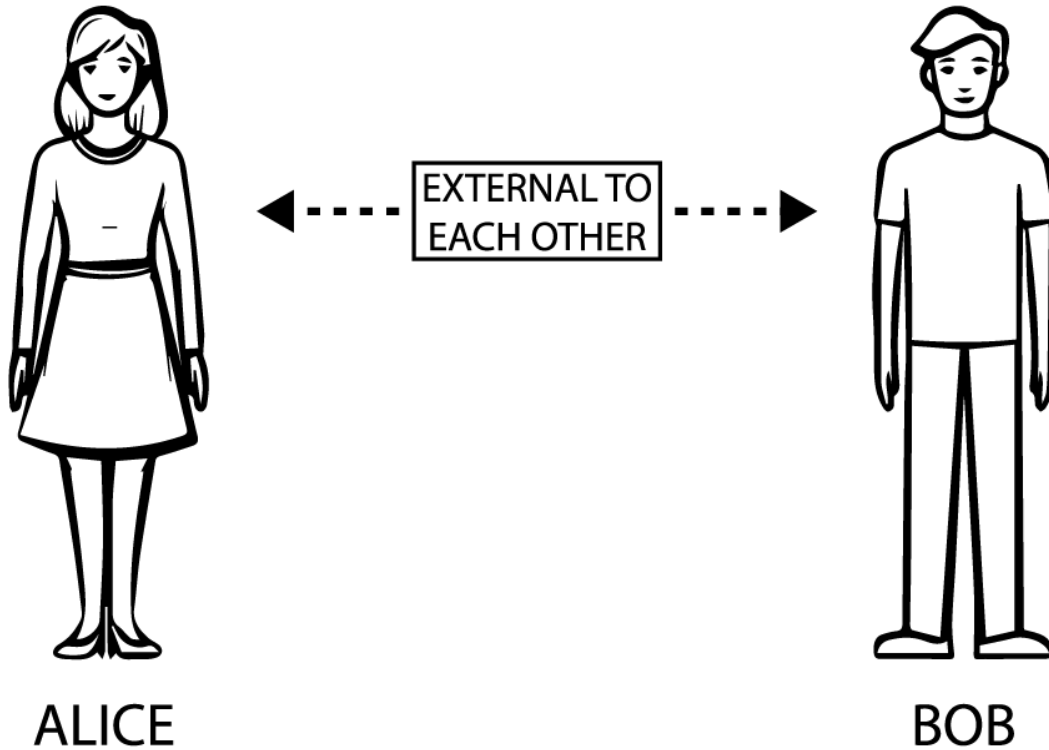
Annotation 108

In materialist dialectics, objectiveness is an abstract concept that refers to the relative externality of all things, phenomena, and ideas. Every thing, phenomena and idea exists externally to every other thing, phenomena, and idea. This means that to each individual subject (i.e., each individual thing/phenomena/idea), all other things, phenomena, and ideas are external objects



All things, phenomena, and ideas have the relative characteristic of objectiveness.

All together, the collection of all things, phenomena, and ideas in the universe create the external reality of any given subject. So, objectiveness is relative. In the case of human beings, every individual person exists as an individual subject to which all other things, phenomena, and ideas (including other human beings) have *objective characteristics*.

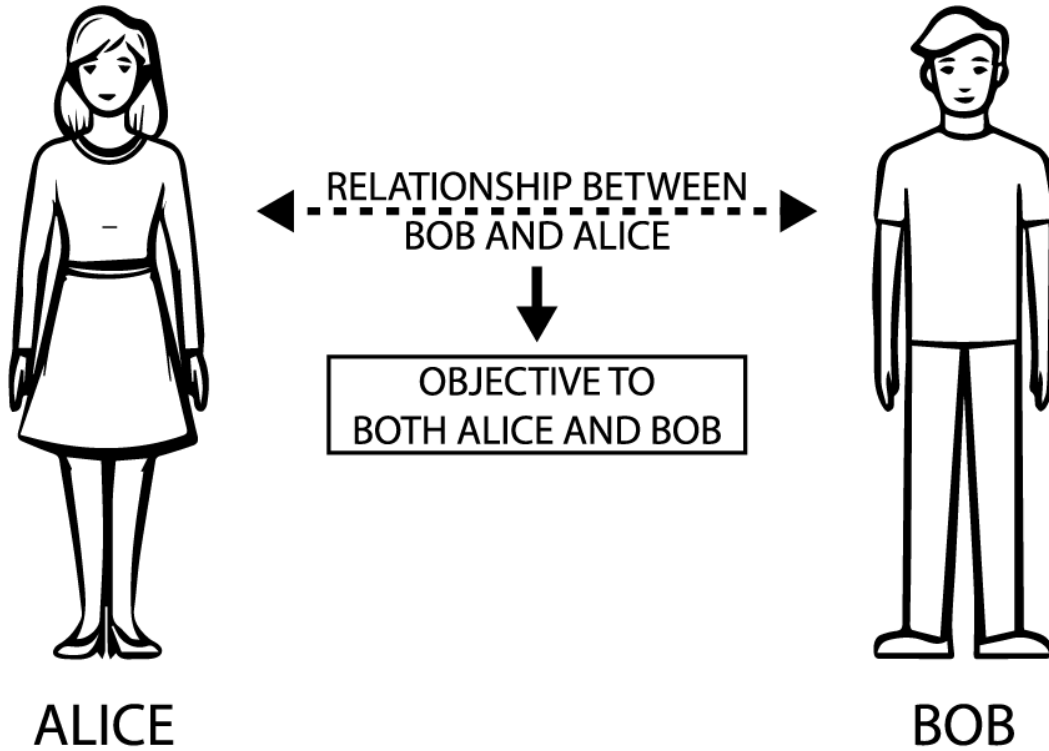


Alice and Bob are external to one another; each is objective from the other's perspective.

Of course, objectiveness is always relative. Something might be external from a certain perspective but not from another perspective. For example, say there are two people: Bob and Alice. From Bob's perspective, Alice has objective characteristics. But from Alice's perspective, Bob would have objective characteristics.

As all relationships are inherently external to any given subject (even subjects which are party to the relationship), relationships also have objective characteristics.

Whenever two things, phenomena, or ideas have a relationship with one another, they form a pair. The relationship is inherent to this pair and external to any subject which exists outside of the pair. The mutual interaction and mutual transformation



The relationship between Alice and Bob has objective characteristics to both Alice and Bob.

which occurs to the things, phenomena, or objects within the pair as the result of the relationship are *inherent* and *objective* properties of the pair.

Annotation 109 Translation note:

In the original Vietnamese text, the word for “objective” is “*khách quan*.” This is a compound word in which “*khách*” means “guest,” and “*quan*” means “point of view.” Therefore, “*khách quan*” literally means “the guest’s (or outsider’s) point of view.”

Thus we translate this to “objectiveness/objective,” the characteristic of being viewed from the outside.

The word “inherent” in the original Vietnamese is “*vốn có*.” This is another compound word: “*vốn*” is a shortened form of the word “*vốn dĩ*,” which means “by or through nature,” “naturally,” and “intrinsically.” “*Có*” means “to have” or “to exist.” “**Vốn có**” thus means “already existing naturally” or “already there, through nature.”

So we use the word “inherent” to mean “existing intrinsically or naturally within, without external influence.”

Human beings can’t change or impact external things and phenomena — and the relationships between them — through human will alone. Humans are limited to perceiving relationships between things and phenomena and then impacting or changing them through our practical activities.

- *The Characteristic of Generality of Relationships*

According to the dialectical viewpoint, there is no thing, phenomenon, nor idea that exists in absolute isolation from other things, phenomena and ideas.

Annotation 110

Although all things, phenomena, and ideas have the characteristic of *externality* and *objectiveness* to all other things, phenomena, and ideas [see Annotation 108, p. 112], this does not mean that they exist in *isolation*. Isolation implies a complete lack of any relationships with other things, phenomena, and ideas. On the contrary, according to the *Principle of General Relationships* [see p. 107], *all* things, phenomena, and ideas have relationships with *all other* things, phenomena, and ideas.

Simultaneously, there is also no known thing, phenomenon, nor idea that does not have a systematic structure, including component parts which in turn have their own

internal relationships. This means that every existence is a system, and, moreso, is an *open* system that exists in relation with other systems. All systems interact and mutually transform one another.

Annotation 111

As explained above, a *systematic structure* is a structure which includes within itself a system of *component* parts and relationships. It has been postulated by some scientific models that there may be some “fundamental base particle” (quarks, preons, etc.), which, if true, would mean that there is a certain basic material component which cannot be further broken down. However, this would not contradict the Principle of Materialist Dialectics of General Relationships (which states that all things, phenomena, and ideas interact with and mutually transform one another — see Annotation 107, p. 110).

- *The Characteristic of Diversity of Relationships*

In addition to affirming the objectiveness⁴ and generality⁵ of relationships, the dialectical viewpoint of Marxism-Leninism also emphasizes the *diversity* of relationships. The characteristic of diversity is defined by the following features:

- All things, phenomena, and ideas have different relationships. Every relationship plays a distinct role in the existence and development of the things, phenomena, and ideas which are included within.
- Any given relationship between things, phenomena, and ideas will have different characteristics and manifestations under different conditions and/or during different periods of motion and/or at different stages of development.

Annotation 112

One of Marx’s most critical observations was that things are defined by their internal and external relationships, including human beings. For example, in *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx wrote that “the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations.” It is only through

⁴ See Annotation 108, p. 112.

⁵ See p. 108.

relationships — through mutual impacts and transformations — that things, phenomena, and ideas (including human beings and human societies) change and develop over time. All of these relationships — which both define and transform all things, phenomena, and ideas in existence — exist in infinite diversity [see Annotation 107, p. 110].

Just as things, phenomena, and ideas change and transform through the course of relations with one another, the nature of the relationships themselves also change and develop over time.

Characteristics refer to the features and attributes that exist *internally* within a given thing, phenomena, or idea.

Manifestation refers to *how* a given thing, phenomena, or idea is expressed *externally* in the material world.

For example, a ball may have the *characteristics* of being made of rubber, having a mass of 100 grams, and having a melting point of 260°C. It may *manifest* by bouncing on the ground, having a spherical shape, and having a red appearance to human observers.

If ten such balls exist, they will all be slightly different. Even if they have the same mass and material composition, they will have slightly different variations in size, shape, etc. Even if each ball will melt at 260°C, the melting will manifest differently for each ball — they will melt into slightly different shapes, at slightly different speeds, etc.

Relationships also have characteristics and manifestations. For example, the moon's orbit around the Earth is a relationship. It has characteristics such as the masses of each related body, forces of gravity, and other factors which produce and influence the orbit. The same orbital relationship also has manifestations such as the duration of the moon's orbit around the Earth, the size of its ellipse, the orbit's effects on the tides of the Earth's ocean, etc.

Characteristics and *Manifestation* correspond, respectively, to the philosophical category pair of *Content* and *Form*, which is discussed in section page 147.

Therefore, no two relationships are exactly the same, even if they exist between very similar things, phenomena, and ideas and/or in very similar situations.

It is also important to note that the characteristic of diversity also applies to things, phenomena, and ideas themselves. In other words, every individual thing, phenomenon, and idea in existence also manifests differently from every other thing, phenomenon, and idea in existence, even if they seem quite similar.

c. Meaning of the Methodology

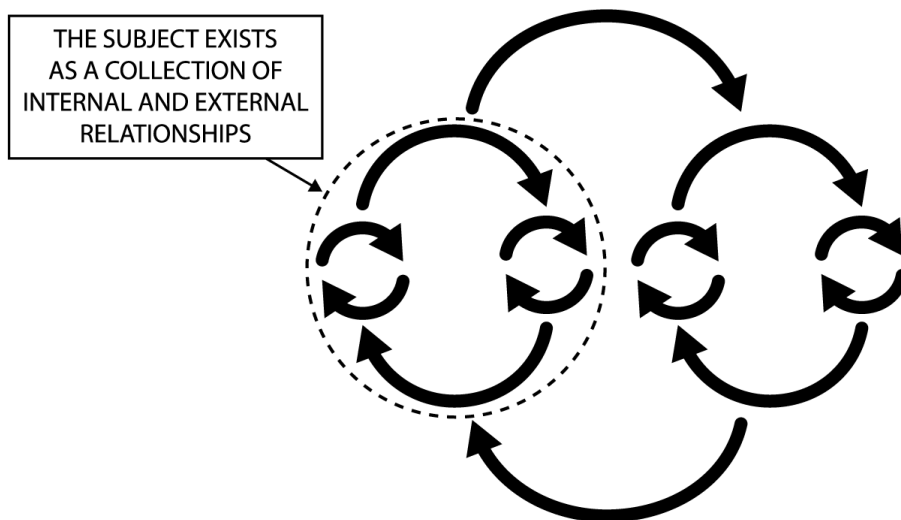
Based on the objective and popular characteristics of relationships, we can see that in our cognitive and practical activities, we have to have a *comprehensive viewpoint*.

Having a *comprehensive viewpoint* requires that in the process of perceiving and handling real life situations, humans have to consider the internal dialectical relationships between the component parts, factors, and aspects within a thing or phenomenon.

We also need to consider the external mutual interactions they have with other things, phenomena, and ideas. Only on such a comprehensive basis can we properly understand things and phenomena and then effectively handle problems in real life. So, the comprehensive viewpoint is the opposite of a unilateral and/or metaphysical viewpoint [see Annotation 51, p. 49] in both perception and practice.

Lenin said: “If we are to have true knowledge of an object we must look at and examine all of its facets, its connections, and ‘mediacies [indirect relationships].”⁶

Annotation 113



COMPREHENSIVE VIEWPOINT

The comprehensive viewpoint sees the subject in terms of all of its internal and external relationships.

Consider a factory. A factory exists as a collection of internal relationships (between the workers, between machines, between the workers and the machines, etc.) and external relationships (between the factory and its suppliers, between the factory and its customers, between the factory and the city, etc.). In order to have a comprehensive viewpoint when examining the factory, one must consider and understand all of the internal and external relationships which define it.

⁶ *Once Again On The Trade Unions*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1921.

The diversified characteristic of relationships [see Annotation 107, p. 110] shows that in human cognitive and practical activities, we have to simultaneously use a comprehensive viewpoint and a historical viewpoint.

Having a *historical viewpoint* requires that, in perceiving and handling real life situations, we need to consider the specific properties of subjects, including their current stage of motion and development. We also need to consider that the exact same methods can't be used to deal with different situations in reality — our methods must be tailored to suit the exact situation based on material conditions.

Annotation 114

While the *comprehensive viewpoint* focuses on internal and external *relationships* of subjects, the *historical viewpoint* focuses on the specific *properties* of subjects — especially the current stage of motion and development. In order to have a proper historical viewpoint, we must study and understand the way a subject has developed and transformed over time. To do this, we must examine the history of the subject's changes over time, hence the term “historical viewpoint.” In addition, it's important to understand that no two situations which we might encounter will ever be exactly the same. This is because the component parts and relationships that make up any given situation will manifest differently.

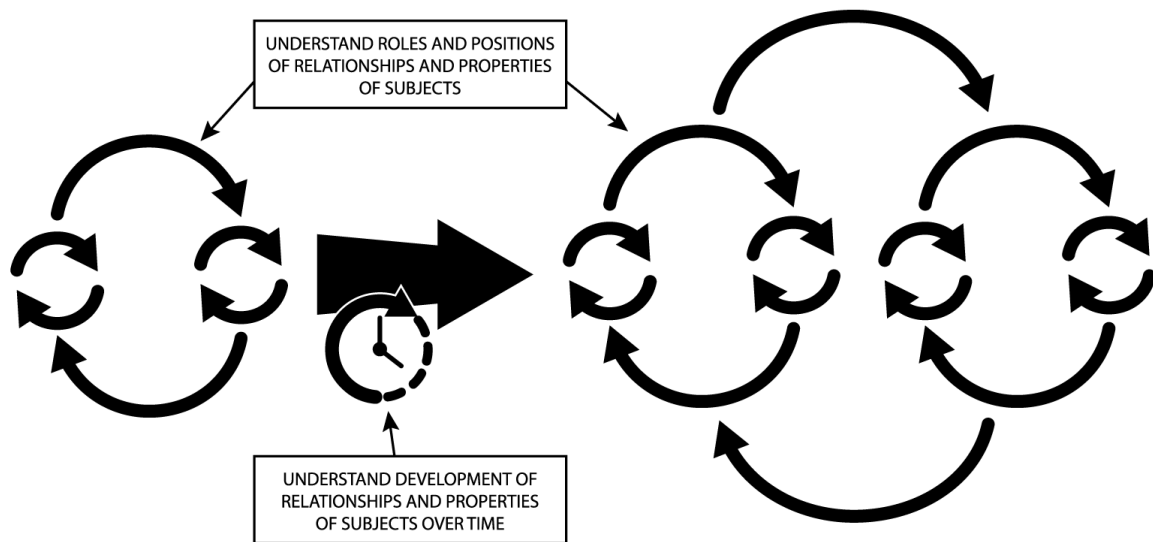
So, in order to properly deal with situations, we have to understand the component parts and relationships of examined subjects as well as their histories of development so that we can develop plans and strategies that are suitable to the unique circumstances at hand.

For example, it would be disastrous if communists today tried to employ the *exact same* methods which were used by the Communist Party of Vietnam in the 20th century to defeat Japan, France, and the USA. This is because the material conditions and relationships of Vietnam in the 20th century were very different from any material conditions existing on Earth today. It is possible to learn lessons from studying the methods of the Vietnamese revolution and to *adapt* some such methods to our modern circumstances, but it would be extremely ineffective to try to copy those methods and strategies — *exactly* as they manifested then and there — to the here and now.

In order to come up with suitable and effective solutions to deal with real life problems, we must clearly define the roles and positions of each specific relationship

that comes into play, and the specific time, place, and material conditions in which they exist.

Annotation 115



HISTORICAL VIEWPOINT

A historical viewpoint focuses on the roles and positions of relationships and properties of subjects as well as their development over time.

The role of a relationship has to do with how it functions within a system of relationships and the position refers to its placement amongst other subjects and relationships.

Consider once again the example of the factory [see Annotation 113]. In addition to its internal and external relationships, the factory also has various roles — it functions within various systems and from various perspectives. For instance, the factory may have the role of financial asset for the corporation that owns it, it may have the role of place of employment for the surrounding community, it may have the role of supplier for various customers, etc.

The factory is also *positioned* among other subjects and relations. If it's the only employer in town then it would have a position of great importance to the people of the community. If, on the other hand, if it's just one of hundreds of factories in a heavily industrialized area, it may have a position of much less importance. It may have a position of great importance to an individual factory worker who lives in poverty in an

economy where there are very few available jobs, but of less importance to a freelance subcontractor for whom the factory is just one of many customers, and so on.

These positions and roles will change over time. For example, the factory may initially exist as a small workshop with a small handful of workers, but it may grow into a massive factory with hundreds of employees. It is vital to understand this Principle of Development, which is discussed in more detail on the next page.

In summary, proper dialectical materialist analysis requires a *comprehensive and historical viewpoint* — we must consider subjects both *comprehensively* in terms of the internal and external relationships of the subject itself as well as *historically* in terms of roles and positions of subjects, as well as their relationships, material conditions, and development over time.

So, in both perception and practice, we have to avoid and overcome sophistry and eclectic viewpoints.

Annotation 116

Sophistry is the use of falsehoods and misleading arguments, usually with the intention of deception, and with a tendency of presenting non-critical aspects of a subject matter as critical, to serve a particular agenda. The word comes from the Sophists, a group of professional teachers in Ancient Greece, who were criticized by Socrates (in Plato's dialogues) for being shrewd and deceptive rhetoricians. This kind of bad faith argument has no place in materialist dialectics. Materialist dialectics must, instead, be rooted in a true and accurate understanding of the subject, material conditions, and reality in general.

Eclecticism is an incoherent approach to philosophical inquiry which attempts to draw from various different theories, frameworks, and ideas to attempt to understand a subject, applying different theories in different situations without any consistency in analysis and thought. Eclectic arguments are typically composed of various pieces of evidence that are cherry picked and pieced together to form a perspective that lacks clarity. By definition, because they draw from different systems of thought without seeking a clear and cohesive understanding of the totality of the subject and its internal and external relations and its development over time, eclectic arguments run counter to the comprehensive and historical viewpoints. Eclecticism is somewhat similar to dialectical materialism in that it attempts to consider a subject from many different perspectives, and analyzes relationships pertaining to a subject, but the major flaw of eclecticism is a lack of clear and coherent systems and principles, which leads to a chaotic viewpoint and an inability to grasp the true nature of the subject at hand.

2. Principle of Development

a. Definition of Development

According to the metaphysical viewpoint, development is simply a *quantitative* increase or decrease; the metaphysical viewpoint does not account for *qualitative* changes of things and phenomena. Simultaneously, the metaphysical viewpoint also views development as a process of continuous progressions which follow a linear and straightforward path.

Annotation 117

In materialist dialectics, it is important to distinguish between *quantity* and *quality*. *Quantity* describes the total *amount* of component parts that compose a subject.

Quality describes the unity of component parts, taken together, which defines the subject and distinguishes it from other subjects.

Both quantity and quality are dynamic attributes; over time, the quantity and quality of all things develop and change over time through the development of internal and external relationships. Quantity and quality itself form a dialectical relationship, and as quantity develops, quality will also develop. A given subject may be described by various quantity and quality relationships.

Example 1:

A single football player, alone, has the quantity value of 1 football player and the quality of *a football player*. Eleven football players on a field would have the quantity value of 1 and will develop the quality of *a football team*. This subject, *football team*, is composed of the same component parts as the subject *football player*, but the quantity change and other properties (being on a field, playing a game or practicing, etc.) change the quality of the component parts into a different stable and unified form which we call a *football team*.

The relationship between quantity and quality is dynamic:

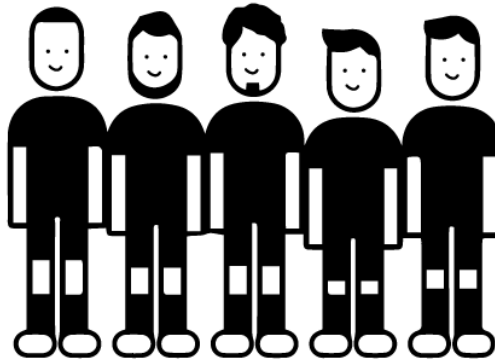
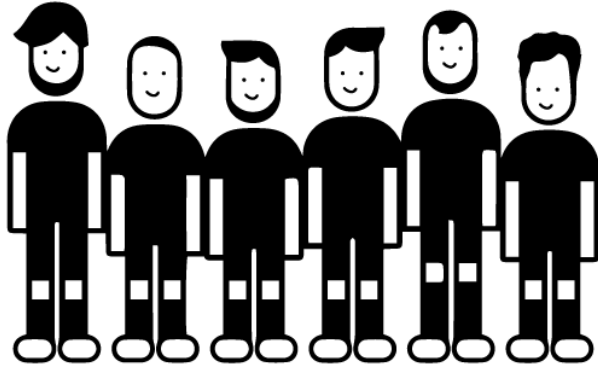
If one of the players doesn't show up for practice, and there are only ten players on the field, it might still have the quality of *football team*, but in a live professional game there will be a certain threshold — a minimum number of players who must be present to officially be considered a *team*. If this number of players can't be fielded then they will not be considered a full *team* and thus won't be allowed to play.

Likewise, if there are only one or two players practicing together in a park, they would probably not be considered a *football team* (though they might be described in terms of having the quality of being *on the same team*).

Example 2:



Quantity: 1 = Quality: Football Player



Quantity: 11 = Quality: Football Team

In the process of development, Quantity Change leads to Quality Change

Quantity: 1 O + 2 H atoms Quantity: Billions of H₂O Molecules Quantity: ~5,000 Drops of Water
 Quality: Water Quality: Drop of Water Quality: Cup of Water

DEVELOPMENT: QUANTITY CHANGE LEADS TO QUALITY CHANGE



DEVELOPMENT: QUANTITY CHANGE LEADS TO QUALITY CHANGE

All of these have the quality of water because of the molecular quantities of hydrogen and oxygen atoms, however, from the perspective of volume, quantity changes still lead to quality changes.

The properties of quantity and quality are relative, depending on the viewpoint of analysis.

A single molecule of water has a quantity of one in terms of molecules, but it still retains the quality of “water” because of the *quantities* of one oxygen atom and two hydrogen atoms per molecule which, in this stable form, give it the *quality* of water.

A drop of water might have a quantity of many billions of molecules, but it would still have the quality of “water.” It would also now assume the quality of a “drop.”

When you combine enough drops of water, you will eventually have a quality shift where the “drops” of water combine to form another quality — i.e., a “cup” of water. The quantity change leads to a change in quantity; we would no longer think of the water in terms of “drops” after the quantity rises to a certain level.

In terms of *temperature* and physical properties, if the water is heated to a certain point it will boil and the water will become *steam*. The quantity of water in terms of drops wouldn’t change, but the quantity-value of temperature would eventually lead to a quality value change from “water” to “steam.”

Example 3:

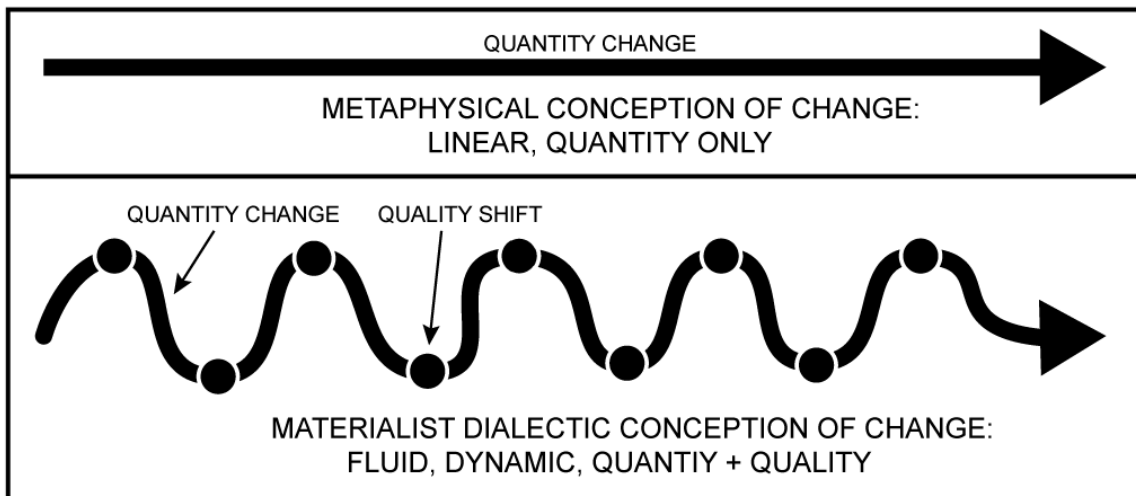
AS QUANTITY OF AGE INCREASES, QUALITY CHANGES

As humans age and the quantity of years we’ve lived builds up over time, our “quality” also changes, from baby, to child, to teenager, to young adult, to middle age, to old age, and eventually to death. The individual person is still the same human being, but the quality of the person will shift over time as the quantity-value of age increases.

Metaphysical vs. Dialectical Materialist Conceptions of Change



The same human being will undergo various quality changes as age quantity increases over time.



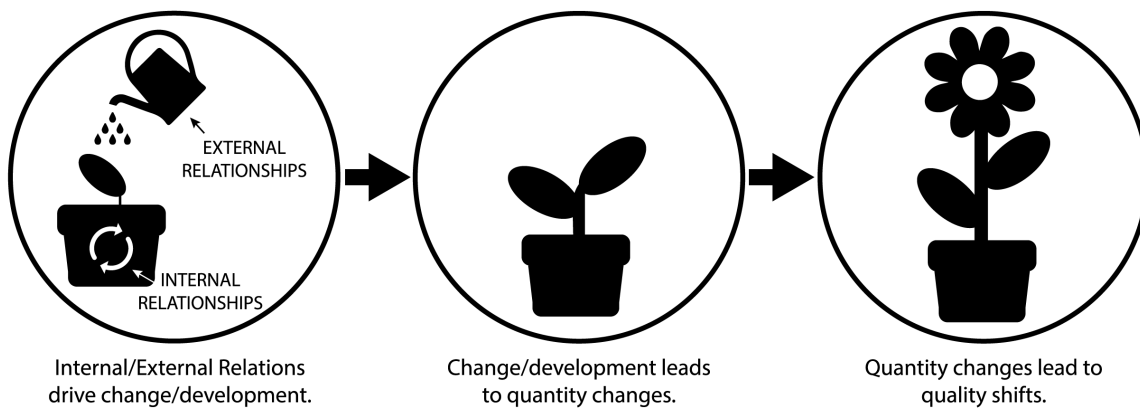
Metaphysics only consider linear properties of quantity change; Materialist Dialectics takes quantity changes and quality shifts into consideration when considering change over time.

Because the metaphysical perspective tries to define the world in terms of static, isolated subjects, only *quantity* is considered and *quality shifts* are not taken into account. Thus, metaphysical logic sees development as linear, simple, and straightforward. Materialist dialectics, on the other hand, sees development as a more complicated, fluid, and dynamic process involving multiple internal and external relationships changing in quantity and quality over time.

In contrast to the metaphysical viewpoint, in materialist dialectics, *development* refers to the *motion* of things and phenomena with a forward tendency: from less advanced to more advanced, from a less complete to a more complete level.

Annotation 118

In materialist dialectics, *motion (also known as change)* is the result of mutual impacts between or within things, phenomena, and ideas, and all motion and change results from mutual impacts which themselves result from internal and external relationships with other things, phenomena, and ideas. Any given *motion/change* leads to quantity changes, and these quantity changes cumulatively lead to quality changes [see Annotation 117, p. 119]. Grasping this concept — that development is driven by relations — is critically important for understanding materialist dialectics.



The concept of “change” in materialist dialectics centers on internal and external relationships causing mutual impacts which lead to quantity changes which build into quality shifts.

This process, taken in total, is referred to as *development*. Development represents the entire process in which internal and external change/motion leads to changes in

quantity which in turn lead to changes in quality over time. The process of development can be fast or slow, complex or simple, and can even move backwards, and all of these properties are relative. Development has a *tendency* to develop from less advanced to more advanced forms. The word *tendency* is used to denote phenomena, development, and motion which inclines in a particular direction. There may be exceptional cases which contradict such tendencies, but the general motion will incline towards one specific manner. Thus, it is important to note that “development” is not necessarily “good” nor “bad.” In some cases, “development” might well be considered “bad,” or unwanted. For example, rust developing on a car is typically not desired. So, the tendency of development from lower to higher levels of advancement implies a “forward motion,” though this motion can take an infinite number of forms, depending on the relative perspective. Development can also (temporarily) halt in a state of equilibrium [see Annotation 64, p. 62] or it can shift direction; though it can never “reverse,” just as time itself can never be “reversed.”

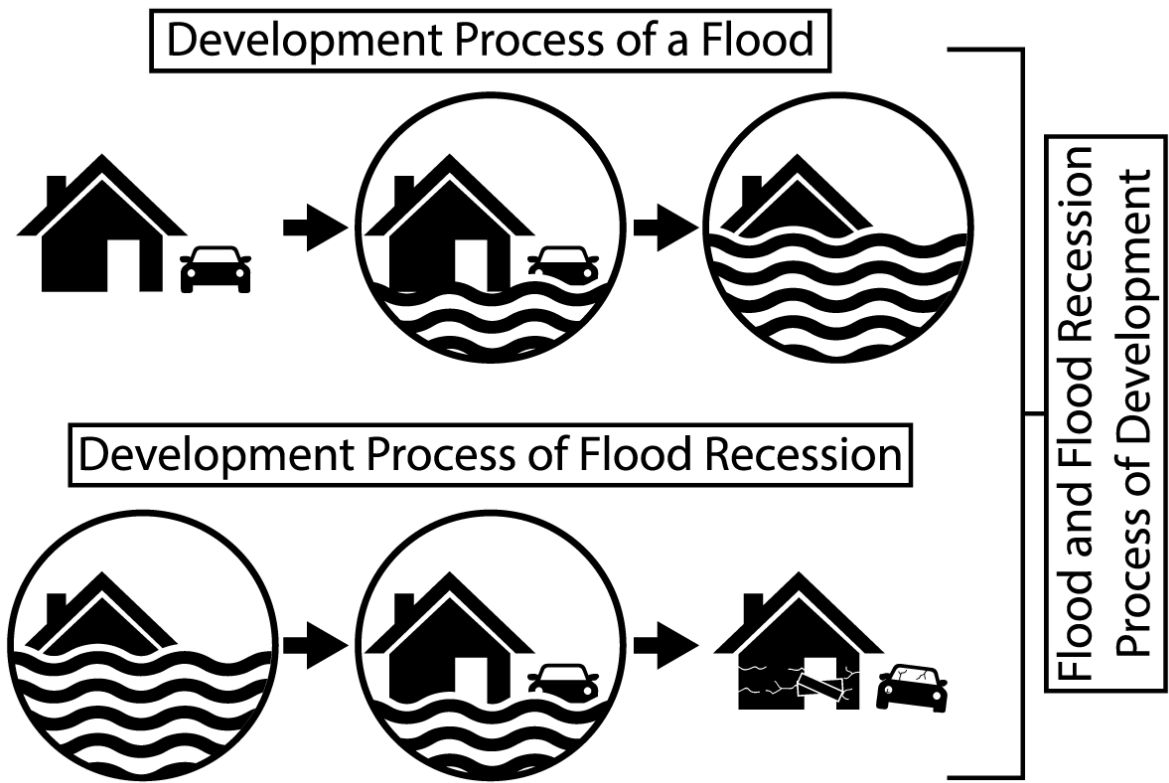
For example, during a flood, water may “develop” over the land, and as the floodwaters recede this may alternatively be viewed as another “forward” development process of *recession* — a development of the overall “flooding and receding” process. The flood is not actually “reversing” — the development is not being “undone.” Flood water may recede but it will leave behind many traces and impacts; thus it is not a true “reversal” of development.

The false belief that development can be reversed is the root of conservative and reactionary positions [see Annotation 208].

Development can be considered positive or negative, depending on perspective. Some ecosystems have natural flood patterns which are vital for sustaining life. For a person living in a flood zone, however, the flood would most likely be considered an unwanted development, whereas flood recession would be a welcomed development.

It is important to note that the definition of development is not identical to the concept of “motion” (change) in general. It is not merely a simple quantitative increase or decrease, nor a repetitive cyclic change in quantity. Instead, in materialist dialectics, development is defined in terms of *qualitative* changes with the direction of advancing towards higher and more advanced levels. [See diagram *Relationship Between Motion, Quantity/Quality Shifts, and Dialectical Development*, Annotation 119, below]

Development is also the process of creating and solving objective *contradictions* within and between things and phenomena. Development is thus the unified process of negating negative factors while retaining and advancing positive factors from old things and phenomena as they transform into new things and phenomena.



Both flooding and flood recession are development processes with the same forward tendency. Flood recession may appear to be a “reversal,” but it is in fact forward development.

Annotation 119

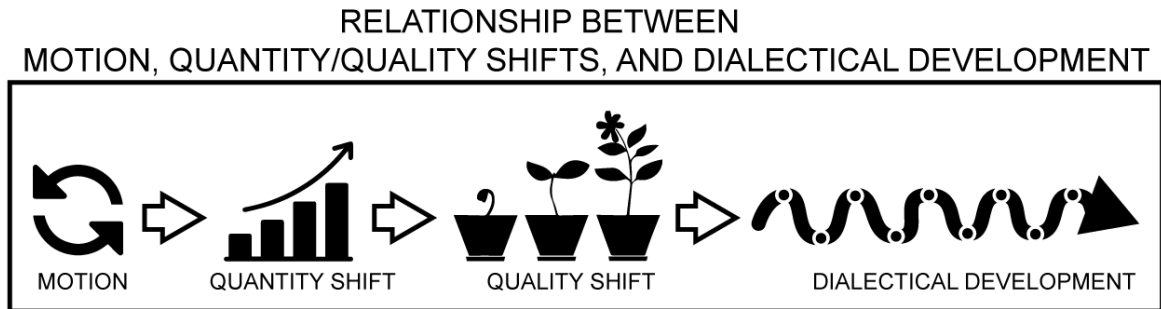
A *contradiction* is a relationship in which two forces oppose one another. Although a contradiction might exist in *equilibrium* for some amount of time [see Annotation 64, p. 62], eventually, one force will overcome the other, resulting in a change of *quality*. This process of overcoming is called *negation*. In short, *development* is a process of change in a subject's quantity as well as negation of contradictions within and between subjects, leading to quality shifts over time.

b. Characteristics of Development

Every development has the characteristics of objectiveness,⁷ generality,⁸ and diversity.⁹ *The characteristic of objectiveness of development* stems from the origin of motion.

Annotation 120

Remember that, in materialist dialectics, objectiveness is the relative characteristic that every subject has of existing and developing externally to all other subjects [see Annotation 108, p. 112]. Since motion originates from mutual impacts which occur between external things, objects, and relationships, the motions themselves also occur externally (relative to all other things, phenomena, and objects). This gives motion itself objective characteristics.



Dialectical Development consists of Quantity and Quality Shifts, which in turn derive from motion.

⁷ See: Annotation 108, p. 112.

⁸ See: Annotation 106, p. 109.

⁹ See: Annotation 107, p. 110.

Development is derived from motion as a process of quality shifting which arise from quantity changes which arise from motion [see Annotation 117, p. 119]. Since development is essentially an accumulation of motion, and motion is objective, development itself must also be objective.

The *Principle of Development* states that development is a process that comes from within the thing-in-itself; the process of solving the contradictions within things and phenomena. Therefore, development is inevitable, objective, and occurs without dependence on human will.

Annotation 121

The “thing-in-itself” refers to the actual material object which exists outside of our consciousness [see Annotation 72, p. 68]. Development arises from motion and self-motion [see Annotation 62, p. 59] with objective characteristics. Although human will can impact motion and development through conscious activity in the material world [see *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*, p. 88], motion and development can and does occur without being dependent on human will. Human will is neither a requirement nor prerequisite for motion and development to occur.

Development has the *characteristic of generality* because development occurs in every process that exists in every field of nature, society, and human thought; in every thing, every phenomenon, and every idea and at every stage* of all things, phenomena, and ideas. Every transformation process contains the possibility that it might lead to the birth of a new thing, phenomenon, or idea [through a change in quality, i.e. development].

Annotation 122

In materialist dialectics, “stage” (or “stage of development”) refers to the current quantity and quality characteristics which a thing, phenomenon, or object possesses. Every time a quality change occurs, a new stage of development is entered into.

Development has the *characteristic of diversity* because every thing, phenomenon, and idea has its own process of development that is not totally identical to the process of development of any other thing, phenomenon, or idea. Things and phenomena will develop differently in different spaces and times. Simultaneously, within their own processes of development, things, phenomena, and ideas are impacted by other things, phenomena, and ideas, as well as by many other factors and historical conditions. Such impacts can change the direction of development of things, phenomena, and ideas. They

can even temporarily set development back, and/or can lead to growth in one aspect but degeneration in another.

Annotation 123

Because development has the characteristic of generality and the characteristic of diversity, the principle of diversity in unity and unity in diversity also applies to development [see: Annotation 107, p. 110].

c. Meaning of the Methodology

Materialist dialectics upholds that the principle of development is the scientific theoretical basis that we must use to guide our perception of the world and to improve the world. Therefore, in our perception and reality, we have to have a *development viewpoint*.

According to Lenin: “dialectical logic requires that an object should be considered in development, in change, in ‘self-movement.’”¹⁰

This development viewpoint [which holds that all things, phenomena, and ideas are constantly developing, and that development is thus unavoidable] requires us to overcome conservatism, stagnation¹¹, and prejudice, which are all opposed to development.

Annotation 124

Conservatism and prejudice are mindsets which seek to prevent and stifle development and to hold humanity in a static position. Not only is this detrimental to humanity, it is also ultimately a wasted effort, because development is inevitable in human society, as in all things, phenomena, and ideas. Therefore, we must avoid and fight against such stagnant mindsets.

According to this development viewpoint, in order to perceive or solve any problem in real life, we must consider all things, phenomena, and ideas with their own forward tendency of development taken in mind. On the other hand, the path of development is a dialectical process that is reversible and full of contradictions. Therefore, we must be aware of this complexity in our analysis and planning. This means we need to have

¹⁰ *Once Again On The Trade Unions*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1921. See also: *Mode and Forms of Matter*, p. 59.

¹¹ See Annotation 62, p. 59.

a *historical viewpoint* [see Annotation 114, p. 116] which accounts for the diversity and complexity of development in perceiving and solving issues in reality.

Annotation 125

Materialist dialectics requires us to consider the complexity and constant motion of reality. By comparison, the metaphysical viewpoint (which considers all things, phenomena, and ideas as static, isolated entities which have linear and simple processes of development) stands as a barrier to understanding this complexity and incorporating it into our worldview. Thus, it is vital that we develop comprehensive and historical viewpoints which acknowledge the diversity and complexity of reality.

In summary, as a science of common relations and development, Marxist-Leninist materialist dialectics serve a very important role in perception and practice. Engels affirmed the role of materialist dialectics in this passage:

“An exact representation of the universe, of its evolution, of the development of mankind, and of the reflection of this evolution in the minds of men, can therefore only be obtained by the methods of dialectics, with its constant regard to the innumerable actions and reactions of life and death, of progressive or retrogressive changes.”

Lenin also said: “Dialectics requires an all-round consideration of relationships in their concrete development, but not a patchwork of bits and pieces.”¹²

¹² *Once Again On The Trade Unions*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1921.

III. Basic Pairs of Categories of Materialist Dialectics

*Category** is the most general grouping of aspects, attributes, and relations of things, phenomena, and ideas. Different specific fields of inquiry may categorize things, phenomena, and/or ideas differently from one another.

Annotation 126

* *Translation note:* In Vietnamese, the word “phạm trù” is used here, which translates in this context more closely to the English philosophical term “category of being,” which means “the most general, fundamental, or broadest class of entities.” “Category of being” is sometimes simplified in English-language philosophical discourse to “category,” which we have chosen to do here for ease of reading and to better reflect the way it reads in the original Vietnamese.

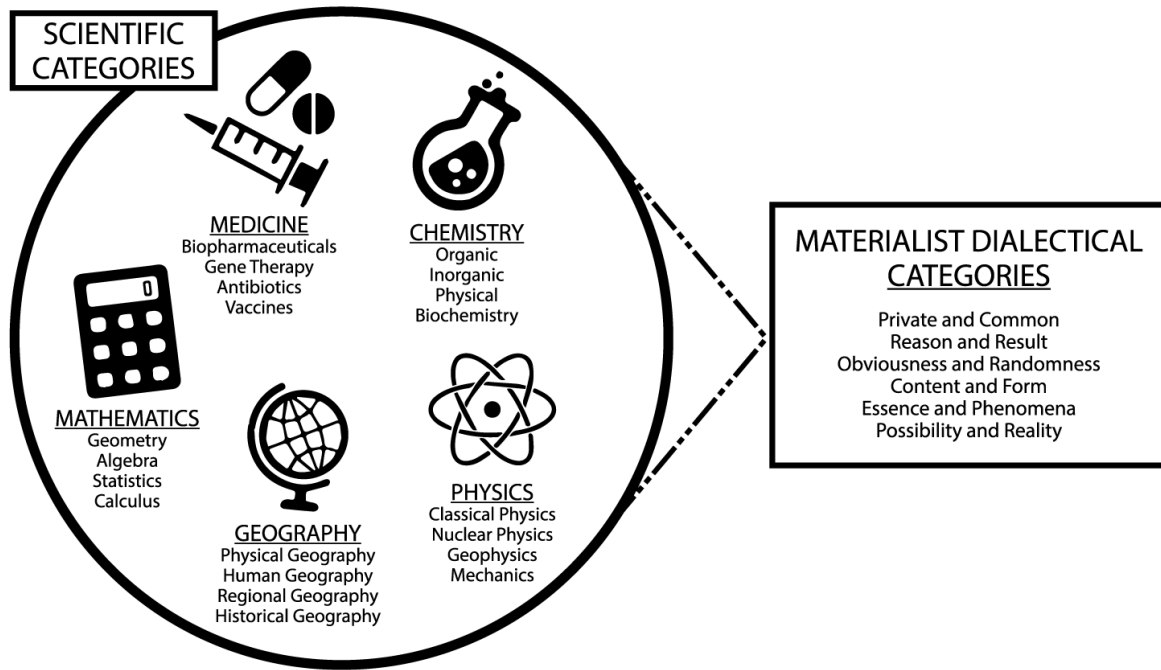
Every science has its own systems of categories that reflect the aspects, attributes, and basic relations that fall within its scope of study. For example, mathematics contains the categories “arithmetic,” “geometry,” “point,” “plane,” and “constant.” Physics contains the categories of “mass,” “speed,” “acceleration,” and “force,” and so on. Economics includes “commodity,” “value,” “price,” “monetary,” and “profit” categories.

Every such category reflects only the common relations found within the specific fields that fall within the scope of study of a specific science.

Categories of materialist dialectics, on the other hand, such as “matter,” “consciousness,” “motion,” “contradiction,” “quality,” “quantity,” “reason,” and “result,” are different. Categories of materialist dialectics reflect the most general aspects and attributes, as well as the most basic and general relations, of not just some specific fields of study, but of the whole of reality, including all of nature, society and human thought.

Every thing, phenomenon, and idea has many properties, including: a reason for existing in its current form, a process of motion and change, contradictions, content, form, and so on. These properties are aspects, attributes, and relations that are reflected in the categories of materialist dialectics. Therefore, the relationship between the categories of specific sciences and categories of materialist dialectics is a dialectical relationship between the Private and the Common [see *Private and Common*, p. 128].

Annotation 127



The categories of specific sciences are limited to the scope of study, while the categories of materialist dialectics encompass all things, phenomena, and ideas.

Unlike the categories contained within specific scientific fields, the philosophical categories of materialist dialectics can be used to analyze and define all things, phenomena, and ideas. The categories of specific scientific fields and the materialist dialectical categories have a Private/Common dialectical relationship [discussed on the next page].

As a science of general relations and development, materialist dialectics summarizes the most general relations of every field of nature, society, and human thought into basic category pairs: *Private and Common*, *Reason and Result*, *Obviousness and Randomness*, *Content and Form*, *Essence and Phenomenon*, *Possibility and Reality*.

Annotation 128

Every individual materialist dialectical category has a dialectical relationship with another materialist dialectical category. Thus, all categories in materialist dialectics are presented as *category pairs*. So, a *category pair* is simply a pair of categories within materialist dialectics which have a dialectical relationship with one another.

Note that this formalized system of category pairs reflects many decades of work by Vietnamese philosophical and political scientists based on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and other socialist thinkers. Also note that these are not the only category pairs that can be discussed; there are potentially an infinite number of categories which can be used in materialist dialectical analysis. However, universal category pairs, which can be applied to analyze any and all things, phenomena, and ideas, are much fewer and farther between. That said, the universal category pairs discussed in this book are the ones which have most often been used by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and other prominent materialist dialecticians.

1. Private and Common

a. Categories of Private and Common

The *Private Category* encompasses specific things, phenomena, and ideas; the *Common Category* defines the common aspects, attributes, factors, and relations that exist in many things and phenomena.

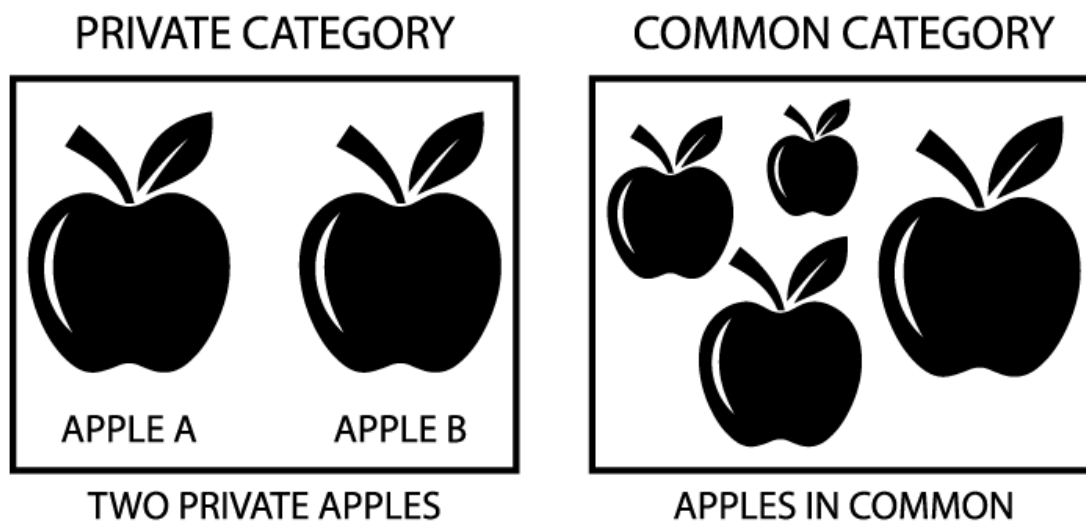
Within every Private thing, phenomenon, and idea, there exists the Common, and also the Unique. The Unique encompasses the attributes and characteristics that exist in only one specific thing, phenomenon, or idea, and does not repeat in any other things, phenomena, or ideas.

Annotation 129

The *Private* category includes specific individual things, phenomena and ideas.

The *Common* category includes aspects, factors, and relations that exist in many things, phenomena, and ideas. For example, say there are two apples: Apple A and Apple B. Apple A is a specific individual object. Apple B is another distinct, separate object. In that sense, both apples are *private* apples, and fall within the *Private* category.

However, both Apple A and Apple B share common attributes. For instance, they are both fruits of the same type: “apple.” They may have other attributes in common: they may be the same color, they may have the same basic shape, they may be of



similar size, etc. These are *common* attributes which they share. Thus, Apple A and Apple B will also fall within the *common* category, based on these common attributes.

Apple A and Apple B will also have *unique* attributes. Only Apple A has the exact molecules in the exact place and time which compose Apple A. There is no other object in the world which has those same molecules in that same place and time. This means that Apple A also has *unique* properties.

The Common and Private categories have a dialectical relationship. The Common contains the Private, and the Private contains the Common. Every private subject has some attributes in common with other private subjects, and common attributes can only exist among private subjects. Thus every thing, phenomenon, and idea in existence contains internally within itself dialectical relationships between the Private and the Common, and has dialectical Private/Common relationships externally within other things, phenomena, and ideas.

It is also true that every private subject contains within itself *Unique* attributes which it does *not* share with any other thing, phenomenon, or idea. For example, Mount Everest is unique in that it is 8,850 meters tall. No other mountain on Earth has that exact same height. Therefore, the private subject "Mount Everest" has unique properties which it does not share with any other subject, even though it has other attributes in common with countless other private entities.

Whenever two individual subjects have a relationship with one another, that relationship is a *unique relationship* in the sense that it is a relationship that is shared only by those two specific subjects; however, there will also be common attributes and properties which any such relationship will share with other relationships in existence. This recalls the *principle of Unity in Diversity and Diversity in Unity* [see Annotation 107, p. 110]. So, every thing, phenomenon, and idea contains the Common *and* the

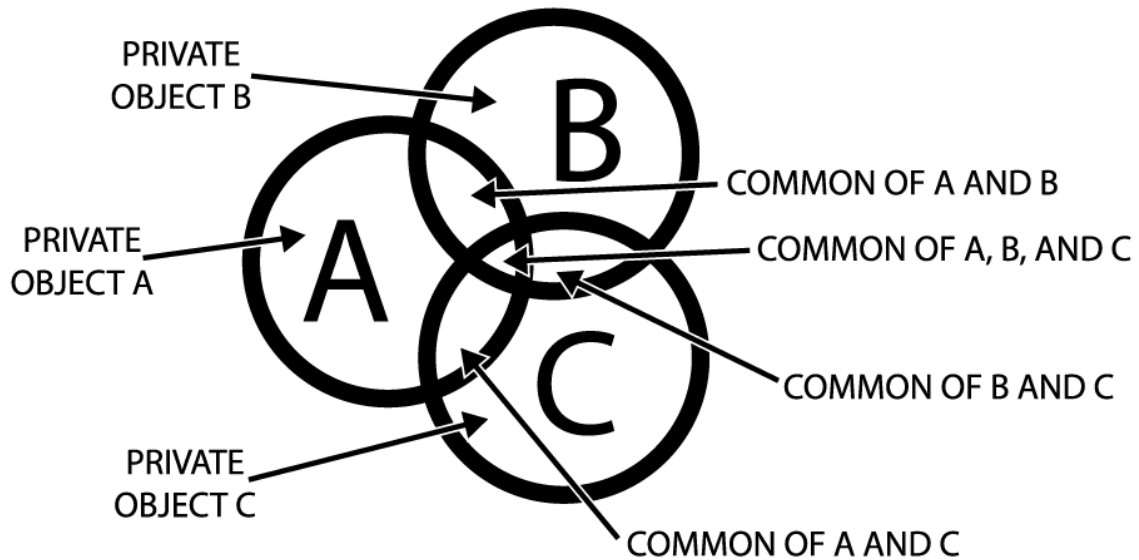


DIAGRAM OF PRIVATE AND COMMON ATTRIBUTES

All private subjects have attributes in common with other private subjects.

Unique and has unique *and* common relationships with other things, phenomena, and ideas.

This category pair is very useful in developing a comprehensive viewpoint [see Annotation 114, p. 116]. Remember that a comprehensive viewpoint indicates an understanding of the internal and external relations of a given subject. This means that in order to develop a comprehensive viewpoint, you must know the private aspects of each individual relation, component, and aspect of the subject, and you must also study the commonalities of the subject as well. It's also important to study a variety of *private* information sources or data points to look for *commonalities* between them. In other words, if you want to have a proper comprehensive viewpoint [see Annotation 113, p. 116] about any subject, you have to find and analyze as many *private* data points and pieces of evidence as possible.

For example: If a person only ever saw one apple, a green apple, then that person might believe that “all apples are green.” This conclusion would be premature: the person is attempting to make an assumption about the *Common* without examining enough *Privates*. This is a failure of mistaking mistaking the *Private* for the *Common* which stems from a lack of a comprehensive viewpoint.

Now, let's take a look at an example of how the “Unique” can become “Common,” and vice-versa: 1947 TODAY

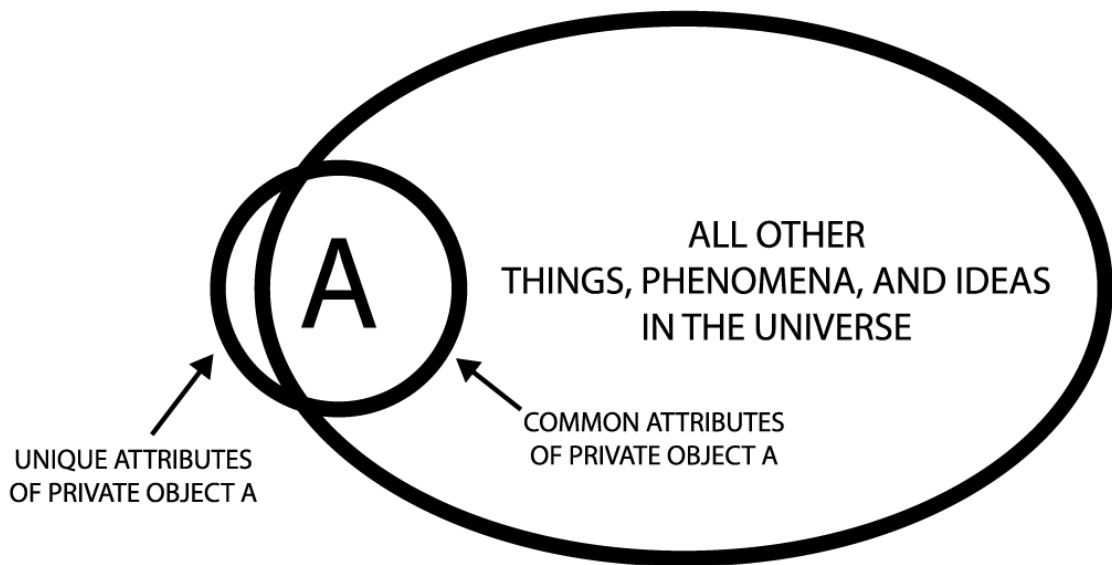
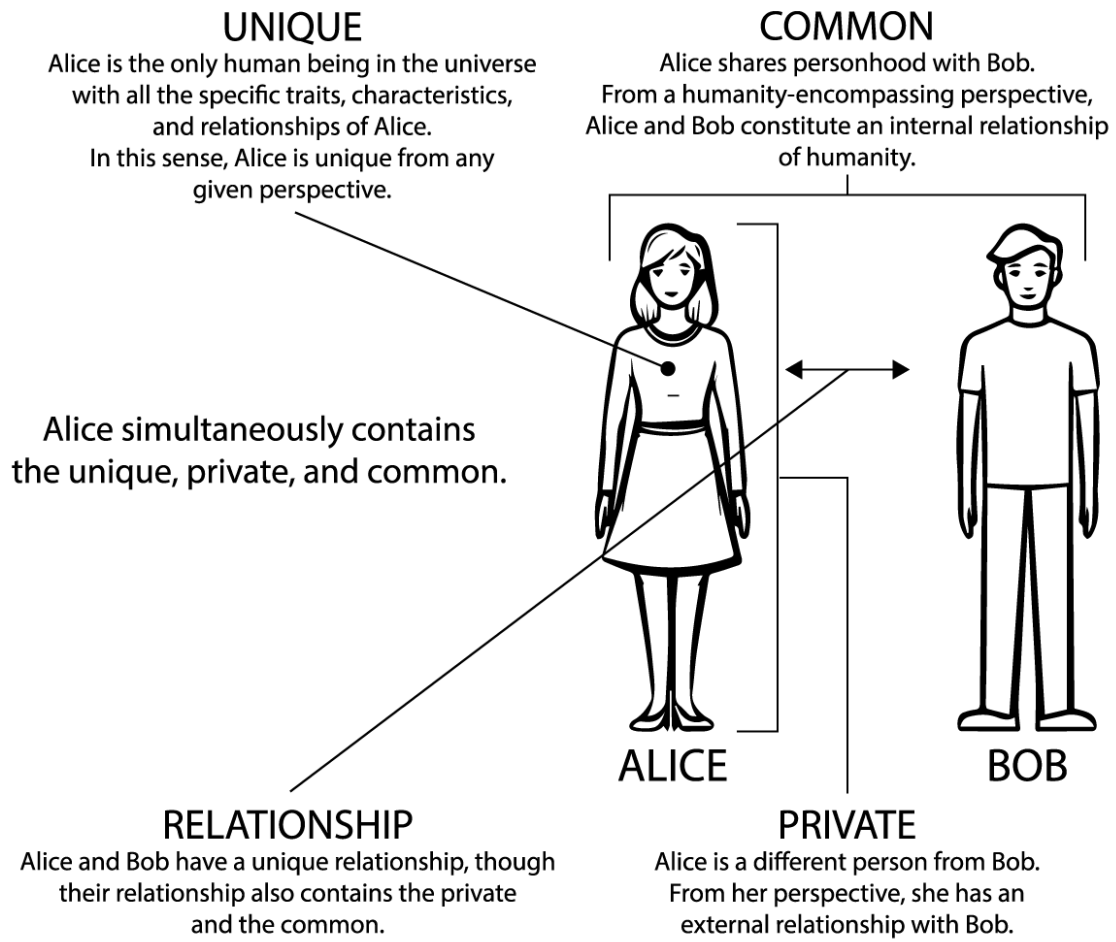


DIAGRAM OF UNIQUE AND COMMON ATTRIBUTES

All private subjects have attributes in common with other private subjects.



All things, phenomena, and ideas contain the unique, the private, and the common.

1947



KALASHNIKOV'S
PROTOTYPE AK-47

UNIQUE:
Only AK-47

PRIVATE:
A specific object

COMMON:
Shares features with other rifles



TODAY



KALASHNIKOV'S
PROTOTYPE AK-47

UNIQUE:
Only first prototype AK-47

PRIVATE:
A specific object

COMMON:
Shares features with other AK-47s
(and with other rifles)



Private/Common

Development of Kalashnikov's Prototype AK-47

“Unique” things, phenomena, and ideas can become “common” through development processes (and vice-versa).

In 1941, a Soviet soldier named Mikhail Kalashnikov was in the hospital after being wounded in the Battle of Bryansk. Another soldier in the hospital said to Kalashnikov, “why do our soldiers only have one rifle for two or three of our men, while the Germans have automatics?” To solve this problem, Kalashnikov designed the AK-47 machine gun. When he finished making the first prototype, it was the only AK-47 in the world.

At this precise moment, the AK-47 was simultaneously *Unique*, *Private*, and *Common*.

It was *Unique* because it was the first and only AK-47 in the world, and no other object in the world had those properties. It was *Private* because it was a specific object with its own individual existence. It was *Common* — even though it was the only existing prototype — because it shared Common features with other rifles, and with other prototypes. It was the only AK-47 in existence.

Soon, however, the Soviet Union began manufacturing them, and they became very common. Now there are millions of AK-47s in the world. So, today, that prototype machine gun remains simultaneously *Unique*, *Private*, and *Common*, with some slight developments:

It remains *Private* because it is a specific object with its own individual existence. Even though it is no longer the only AK-47 in existence, it remains *Unique* because it is still the very first AK-47 that was ever made, and even though there are now many other AK-47s, there is no other rifle in the universe that shares that same unique property. It remains *Common* because it still shares common features with other rifles and other prototypes, but it now also shares *commonality* with many other AK-47 rifles. It is no longer *Unique* for having the properties of an AK-47 in and of itself.

If someone were to destroy Kalashnikov’s prototype AK-47, the *Private* of that *object* would no longer exist — it would remain only as an *idea*, and the *Private* would transform to whatever becomes of the material components of the rifle. The *Unique* would also no longer remain specifically as it was before being destroyed. However, there would still be many other AK-47s which would share common features related to that prototype; for instance, that they were all designed based on the prototype’s design.

Translator’s Note: The words “Private,” “Common,” and “Unique” may seem unusual because they are direct translations from the Vietnamese words used to describe these concepts in the original text. Various other words have been used by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and other materialist dialecticians when discussing the underlying concepts of these philosophical categories. For instance, in most translations of Lenin, his discussion of such topics is typically translated into English using words such as “universal,” “general,” “special,” “particular,” etc.

Example (from Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks*): “Language in essence expresses only the universal; what is meant, however, is the special, the particular. Hence what is meant cannot be said in speech.” Here, “universal” refers to that which is *Common*

in all things, phenomena, and ideas, and “special/particular” refers to the *Private* — specific individual things, phenomena, and ideas — along with their *Unique* properties.

Here are excerpts from Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks* discussing these concepts:

(‘It?’ The most universal word of all.) Who is it? I. Every person is an I.

Das Sinnliche? It is a universal, etc., etc. ‘This??’ Everyone is ‘this.’

Why can the particular not be named? One of the objects of a given kind (tables) is distinguished by something from the rest...

Leaves of a tree are green; John is a man; Fido is a dog, etc. Here already we have dialectics (as Hegel’s genius recognised): the individual is the universal... And a naïve confusion, a helplessly pitiful confusion in the dialectics of the universal and the particular — of the concept and the sensuously perceptible reality of individual objects, things, phenomena.

Further, the ‘subsumption’ under logical categories of ‘sensibility’ (Sensibilität), ‘irritability’ (irritabilität) — this is said to be the particular in contrast to the universal!! — and ‘reproduction’ is an idle game.

Marx, too, discussed these concepts using words which are commonly translated into English using different terms. For example, in *Capital*:

The general form of relative value, embracing the whole world of commodities, converts the single commodity that is excluded from the rest, and made to play the part of equivalent — here the linen — into the universal equivalent.

Here, “general form” refers to the *commonalities* of form that exist between all commodities. The “single commodity” refers to a private commodity; a specific commodity that exists separately from all other commodities. And when referring to a “universal equivalent,” Marx is referring to equivalence which such a commodity has in *common* with every other commodity.

The rest of this passage continues as a materialist dialectical analysis of the *Private*, *Common*, and *Unique* features and aspects of commodities:

The bodily form of the linen is now the form assumed in common by the values of all commodities; it therefore becomes directly exchangeable with all and every of them. The substance linen becomes the visible incarnation, the social chrysalis state of every kind of human labour. Weaving, which is the labour of certain private individuals producing a particular article, linen, acquires in consequence a social character, the character of equality with all other kinds of labour. The innumerable equations of which the general form of value is composed, equate in turn the labour embodied in the

linen to that embodied in every other commodity, and they thus convert weaving into the general form of manifestation of undifferentiated human labour. In this manner the labour realised in the values of commodities is presented not only under its negative aspect, under which abstraction is made from every concrete form and useful property of actual work, but its own positive nature is made to reveal itself expressly. The general value form is the reduction of all kinds of actual labour to their common character of being human labour generally, of being the expenditure of human labour power. The general value form, which represents all products of labour as mere congelations of undifferentiated human labour, shows by its very structure that it is the social resumé of the world of commodities. That form consequently makes it indisputably evident that in the world of commodities the character possessed by all labour of being human labour constitutes its specific social character.

We have chosen to use the terms “Private,” “Common,” and “Unique” in the translation of this text because they most closely match the words used in the original Vietnamese. In summary, it is important to realize that you may encounter the underlying *concepts* which are related by these words using various phrasings in the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, etc.

b. Dialectical Relationship Between Private and Common

According to the materialist dialectical viewpoint: the Private, the Common and the Unique exist objectively [see Annotation 108, p. 112]. The Common only exists within the Private. It expresses its existence through the Private.

Annotation 130

The *Common* can't exist as a specific thing, phenomenon, or idea. However, every specific thing, phenomenon, or idea exists as a *private* subject which has various features in *common* with other *private* things, phenomena, and ideas. We can therefore only understand the *Common* through observation and study of various *private* things, phenomena, and ideas. For example, a human can't perceive with our senses alone the *Common* of apples. Only by observing many *private* apples can begin to derive an understanding of what all *private* apples have in *common*.

The Common does not exist in isolation from the Private. Therefore, commonality is inseparable from things, phenomena, and ideas. The Private only exists in relation to the Common. Likewise, there is no Private that exists in complete isolation from the Common.

Annotation 131

No commonality can possibly exist outside of private things, phenomena, and ideas because commonality describes features which different things, phenomena, and ideas share. No private thing, phenomenon, or idea can possibly exist *absolutely without* commonality because there is no thing, phenomenon, or idea that shares *absolutely no features* with *any other* thing, phenomenon, or idea.

The Private category is more all-encompassing and diverse than the Common category; Common is a part of Private but it is more profound and more “essential” than the Private. This is because Private is the synthesis of the Common and the Unique; the Common expresses generality and the regular predictability of many Privates.

Annotation 132

The Private encompasses all aspects of a specific, individual thing, phenomenon, or idea; thus it encompasses all aspects, features, and attributes of a given subject, including both the Common and the Unique. In this way, the Private is the synthesis of the Common and the Unique.

Common attributes require more consideration, effort, and study to properly determine, because multiple private subjects must be considered and analyzed before common attributes can be confidently discovered and understood. They offer us a more profound understanding of the essence [see *Essence and Phenomenon*, p. 156] and nature of things, phenomena, and ideas because they offer insights into the *relationships* between and within different things, phenomena, and ideas. As we discover more commonalities, and understand them more deeply, we begin to develop a more comprehensive perspective of reality. We begin to develop an understanding of the laws and principles which govern relations between and within things, phenomena, and ideas, and this gives us the power to more accurately predict how processes will develop and how things, phenomena, and ideas will change and mutually impact one another over time.

Under specific conditions, the Common and the Unique can transform into each other [See Annotation 129, p. 128].

The dialectical relationship between Private and Common was summarised by Lenin:

“Consequently, the opposites (the individual as opposed to the universal) are identical: the individual exists only in the connection that leads to the universal. The

universal exists only in the individual and through the individual. Every individual is (in one way or another) a universal. Every universal is (a fragment, or an aspect, or the essence of) an individual. Every universal only approximately embraces all the individual objects. Every individual enters incompletely into the universal, etc., etc. Every individual is connected by thousands of transitions with other **kinds** of individuals (things, phenomena, ideas) etc.”¹ [Note: “individual and universal” here refer the same underlying concepts of “Private and Common” (respectively); see translator’s note on p. 132].

c. Meaning of the Methodology

We must acknowledge and recognize the Common in order to study the Private in our cognitive and practical activities. If we fail to acknowledge the Common, then whenever we attempt to understand and comprehend any Private thing, phenomenon or idea, we will make mistakes and become disoriented. To understand the Common we have to study and observe the Private because the Common does not exist abstractly outside of the Private.

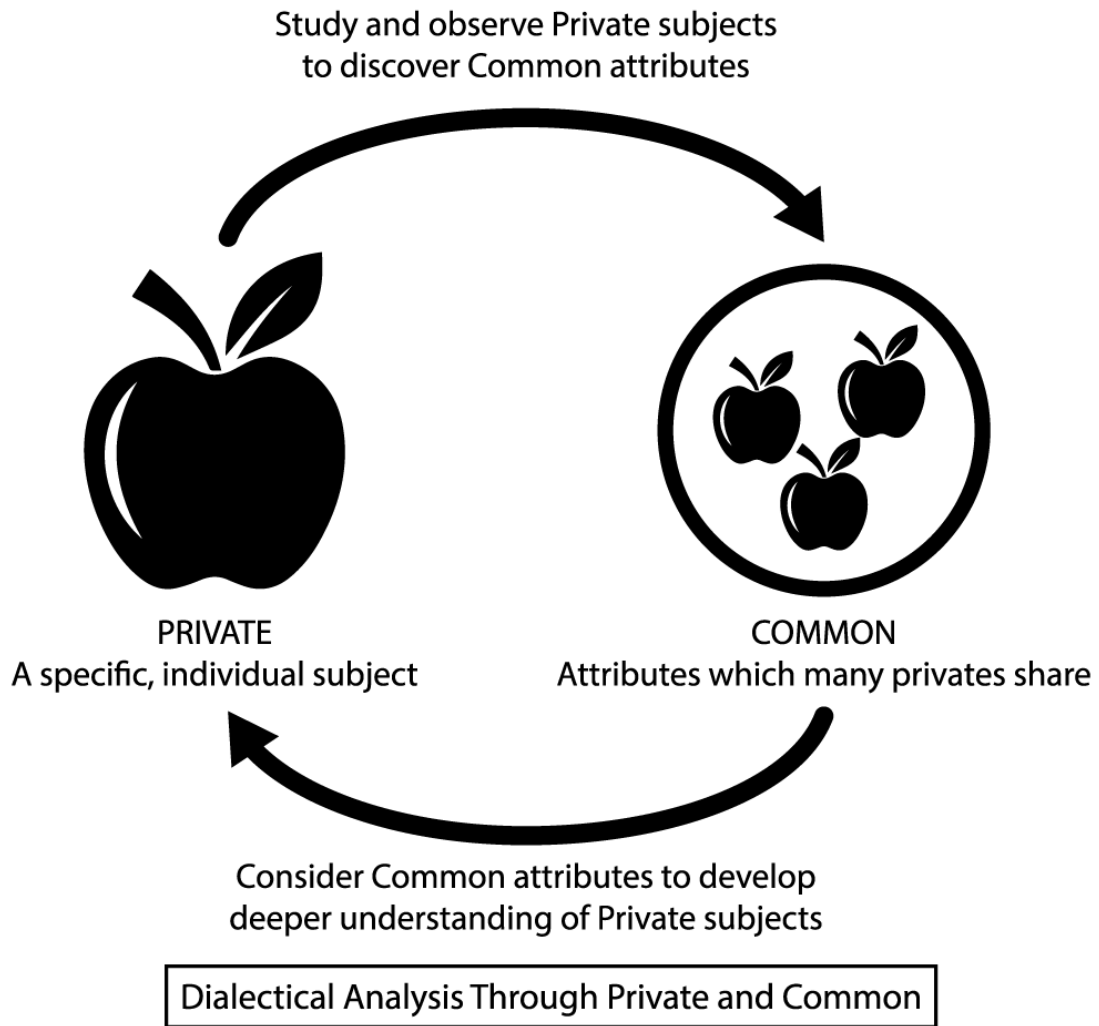
Annotation 133

Our understanding of Common attributes arise from the observation and study of private things, phenomena, and ideas. At the same time, developing our understanding of Commonalities between and within Private subjects deepens our understanding of their essential nature [see: Essence and Phenomenon].

It is impossible to know anything at all about the Common without observing Private subjects, and attempting to understand Private subjects without taking into consideration the attributes and features which they have in Common with other Private subjects will lead to incomplete and erroneous analysis.

In addition, we must identify the Common features and attributes of every specific Private subject we study. We must avoid being dogmatic, metaphysical, and inflexible in applying our knowledge of commonalities to solve problems and interpret the world.

¹ *On the Question of Dialectics*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1915.



Dialectical analysis of private and common characteristics involves observing private subjects to determine common attributes and considering common attributes to gain insights about private subjects.

Annotation 134

Dogmatism and Revisionism in Relation to the Private and Common

Dogmatism is the inflexible adherence to ideals as incontrovertibly true while refusing to take any contradictory evidence into consideration. Dogmatism stands in direct opposition to materialist dialectics, which seeks to form opinions and conclusions only after careful consideration of all observable evidence.

Dogmatism typically arises when the Common is overemphasized without due consideration of the Private. A dogmatic position is one which adheres to ideals about commonalities without taking Private subjects into consideration.

Dogmatism can be avoided by continuously studying and observing and analyzing Private subjects and taking any evidence which contradicts erroneous perceptions of “false commonalities” into consideration. This will simultaneously deepen our understanding of the Private while improving our understanding of the Common. For example: Sally might observe a few red apples and arrive at the conclusion: “all apples are red.” If Sally is then presented with a green apple, yet refuses to acknowledge it by continuing to insist that “all apples are red,” then Sally is engaging in dogmatism.

According to Vietnam’s *Curriculum of the Philosophy of Marxism-Leninism For University and College Students Specializing in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought*, the opposite of Dogmatism is *Revisionism*. Revisionism occurs when we overestimate the Private and fail to recognize commonalities. In failing to recognize common attributes and features between and within things, phenomena, and ideas, the Revisionist faces confusion and disorientation whenever they encounter any new things, phenomena, and ideas, because they lack any insight into essential characteristics of the subject and its relations with other subjects.

For example: if Sally has spent a lot of time studying a red apple, she may start to become confident that she understands everything there is to know about apples. If she is then presented with a green apple, she might become confused and disoriented and draw the conclusion that she has to start all over again with her analysis, from scratch, thinking: “this can’t possibly be an apple because it’s not red. It must be something else entirely.” Sally can avoid this revisionist confusion by examining the other common features which the red and green apples share before making any conclusions.

Metaphysical Perception of the Private and Common

The *metaphysical* position attempts to categorize things, phenomena, and ideas into static categories which are isolated and distinct from one another [see Annotation 8, p. 8]. In this way, the metaphysical perception ultimately fails to properly understand the role of both the Private *and* the Common. Categories may be arranged in taxonomic configurations based on shared features, but ultimately every category is

seen as distinct and isolated from every other category. This perspective severs the dialectical relationship between the Private, the Common, and the Unique, and thus leads to a distorted perception of reality. As Engels wrote in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

The analysis of Nature into its individual parts, the grouping of the different natural processes and objects in definite classes, the study of the internal anatomy of organized bodies in their manifold forms — these were the fundamental conditions of the gigantic strides in our knowledge of Nature that have been made during the last 400 years. But this method of work has also left us as legacy the habit of observing natural objects and processes in isolation, apart from their connection with the vast whole; of observing them in repose, not in motion; as constraints, not as essentially variables; in their death, not in their life. And when this way of looking at things was transferred by Bacon and Locke from natural science to philosophy, it begot the narrow, metaphysical mode of thought peculiar to the last century.”

In other words, Engels points out that separating and dividing Private subjects into distinct and isolated categories without acknowledging the dialectical nature of the Private and the Common leads to severe limitations on what we can learn about the world. Instead, we have to examine things, phenomena, and ideas *in relation to one another*, which must include the analysis of Commonalities.

Rather than divide subjects into distinct, separate categories, materialist dialectics seek to examine Private subjects as they really exist: as a synthesis of Unique and Common attributes; and simultaneously to examine commonalities as they really exist: as properties which emerge from the relations of Private objects.

In our cognitive and practical activities, we must be able to take advantage of suitable conditions that will enable transformations from the Unique and the Common (and vice versa) for our specific purposes.

Annotation 135

In advancing the cause of socialism, revolutionaries must work to transform our Unique positions into common positions. For instance, the process of developing revolutionary public knowledge [see Annotation 94, p. 93] begins with studying and understanding revolutionary knowledge. Initially, this knowledge will be *unique* to the socialist movement. By disseminating the knowledge to the public, we hope to transform this knowledge into *common knowledge*.

Likewise, we hope to transform other common things, phenomena, and ideas back towards the Unique. For instance, the capitalist mode of production is currently the most common mode of production on Earth. In order to advance humanity towards communism, we must transition the capitalist mode of production from the Common towards the Unique, with the ambition of eventually eliminating this mode of production altogether.

2. Reason and Result

a. Categories of Reason and Result

The *Reason* category is used to define the mutual impacts between internal aspects of a thing, phenomenon or idea, or between things, phenomena, or ideas, that bring about changes.

The *Result* category defines the changes that were caused by mutual impacts which occur between aspects and factors *within* a thing, phenomenon, or idea, or *externally* between different things, phenomena, or ideas.

Annotation 136

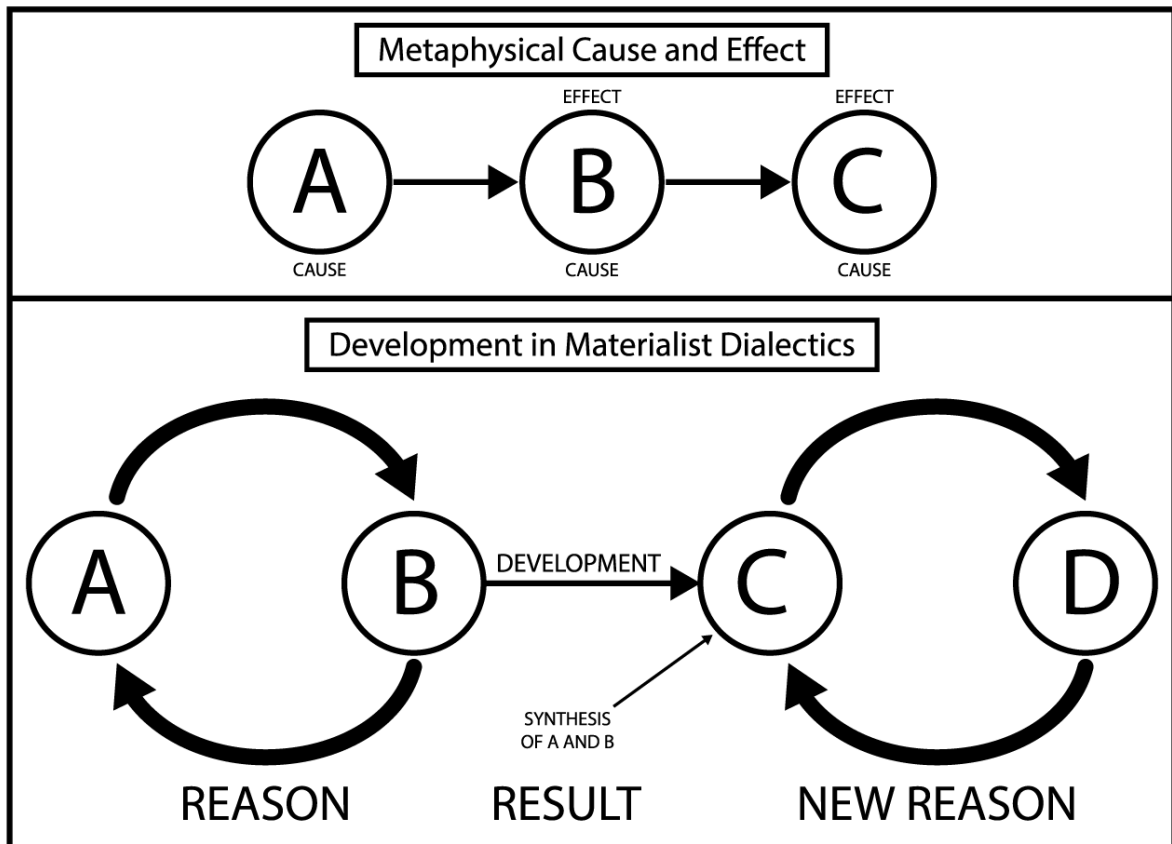
Translation note: the Vietnamese words for “reason and result” can also be translated as “cause and effect.” We have chosen to use the words “reason and result” to distinguish materialist dialectical categories from metaphysical conceptions of development.

In metaphysics [see Annotation 8, p. 8], any given *effect* is seen to have a single *cause*. In materialist dialectics, we instead examine the *mutual impacts* which occur within and between subjects through motion and development processes.

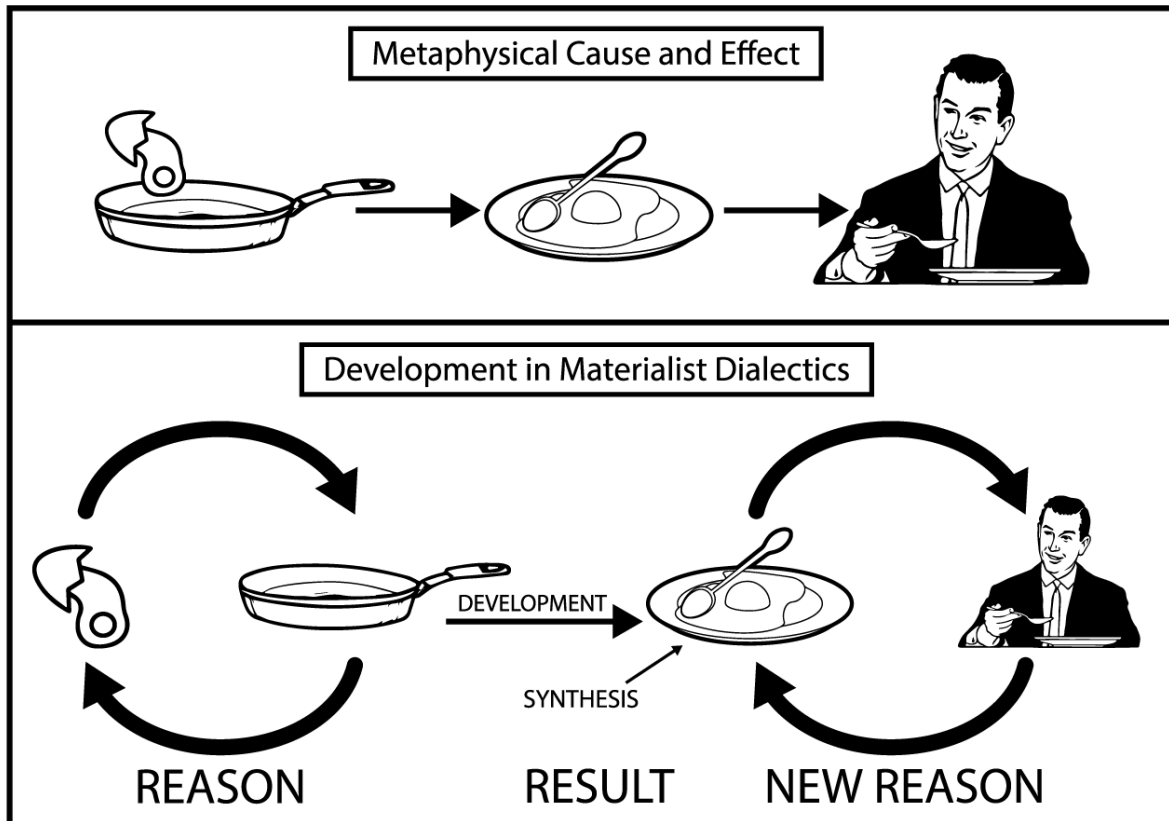
In the metaphysical conception of cause and effect, (A) causes effect (B), then effect (B) causes effect (C), and so on. Materialist dialectics, on the other hand, uses the model of *development* (see Annotation 117, p. 119), wherein objects (A) and (B) mutually impact one another, resulting in development (C). (C) will then have relations with other things, phenomena, and/or ideas, and the mutual impacts from these new relations will become the reasons for future results. Consider the following example:

In the metaphysical “cause and effect” model, putting an egg in a hot pan is the cause which results in the effect of producing a fried egg. The egg being fried has the effect of the egg now being suitable for eating, which is the cause of the egg being eaten by a hungry person.

This is a simplification of the metaphysical conception of causes and effects, since metaphysics does recognize that one cause can have branches of multiple effects, but the essential characteristic of the metaphysical conception of causality is to break down



Metaphysical vs. Materialist Dialectical conceptions of development.



Metaphysical vs. Materialist Dialectical conceptions of frying and eating an egg.

all activity and change in the universe into static and distinct episodes of one distinct event causing one or more other distinct events.

In contrast, the materialist dialectical model of development holds that every result stems from mutual impacts which occur relationally between things, phenomena, and ideas, and that the resulting synthesis — the newly developed result of mutual impacts — will then have new relations with other things, phenomena, and ideas, and that these *relations* will become new reasons for new results through *mutual impact*.

In this example, the egg and the hot pan will mutually impact each other. The frying pan will become dirty and need to be washed (the result of putting an egg in the frying pan); meanwhile, the egg will become a fried egg, which is fit for human consumption (the result of being cooked in the frying pan). The fried egg will then have a relationship with a hungry human, and this relationship will be a new reason which will lead to further results (i.e., the human eating and digesting the egg).

So, the key difference between the classical metaphysical conception of causality and the materialist dialectical model of development is that metaphysics focus more on individual events in time whereas materialist dialectics focus on the relations and mutual impacts between things, phenomena, and ideas over time.

b. Dialectical relationship between Reason and Result

The relationship between Reason and Result is objective, and it contains inevitability: there is no Reason that does not lead to a Result; and likewise, there is no Result without any Reason.

Reasons cause Results, which is why Reason always comes before Result, and Result always comes after Reason.

A Reason can cause one or many Results and a Result can be caused by one or many Reasons.

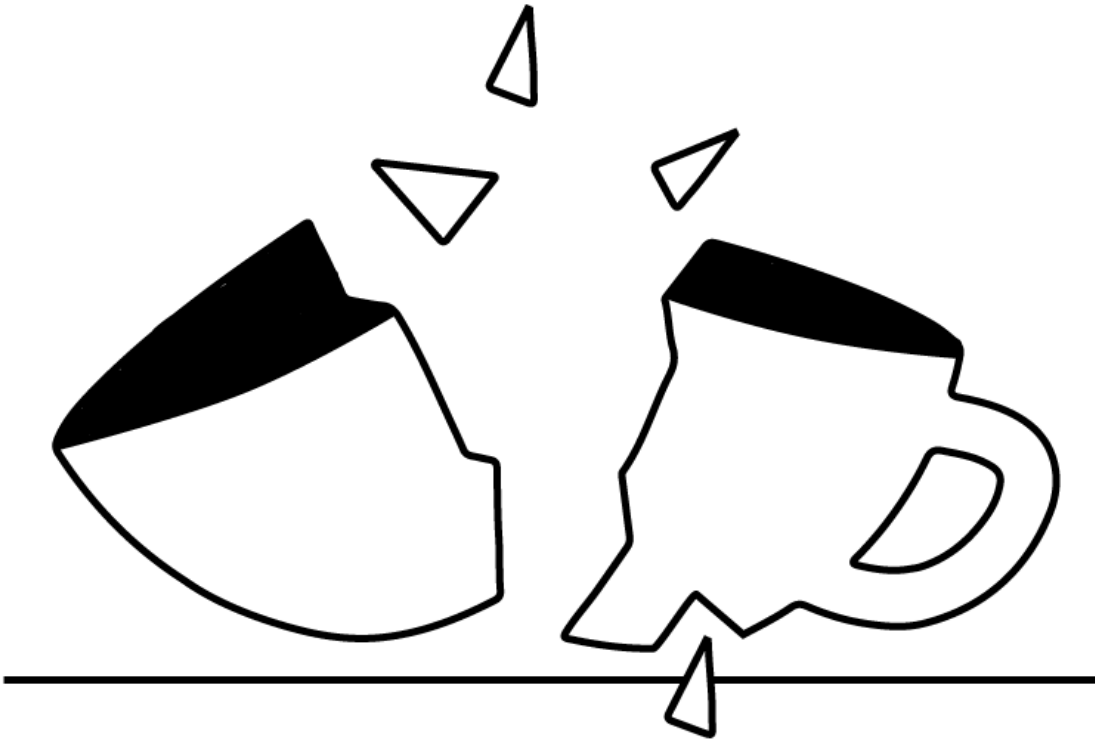
When many Reasons lead to a single Result, the impacts which lead to the Result are mutual between all things, phenomena, and ideas at hand. These mutual impacts can have many relational positions or roles, including: direct reasons, indirect reasons, internal reasons, external reasons, etc.

Annotation 137

As stated in the previous annotation, Reasons which lead to Results stem from mutually impacting relations between things, phenomena, and ideas. There is no way for one subject to affect another subject without also being affected itself in some way.

Reasons can take many forms, including (but not limited to):

Types of Reasons and Results



Direct Reasons stem from immediate relations.

Direct Reasons are Reasons which stem from immediate relations, with no intervening relations standing between the Reason and Result.

For example, dropping a coffee cup causes an immediate relationship between the cup and the ground, and that relation leads directly to the Result of the coffee cup breaking to pieces.



Indirect Reasons have an intervening relationship between the Reason and the Result.

Indirect Reasons are Reasons which have intervening relations between a Reason and a Result.

For example, the dropped coffee cup above may have smashed into pieces directly because it hit the ground, but it may also have indirect Reasons. The person holding the cup may have been frightened because she heard a loud noise, and the loud noise was caused by a car backfiring, and the car backfiring was caused by the driver not maintaining his car engine.

In materialist dialectical terms, the driver's relationship with his car would be an indirect Reason for the car backfiring; the relationship between the car (which backfired) and the person holding the coffee cup would be the direct Reason for dropping the cup; and the cup's relationship with the ground would be the direct reason for the cup smashing. At the same time, the driver's relationship with his car would be an indirect Reason for the Result of the coffee cup smashing to pieces.

Internal Reasons are Reasons which stem from internal relations that occur between aspects and factors *within* a subject.

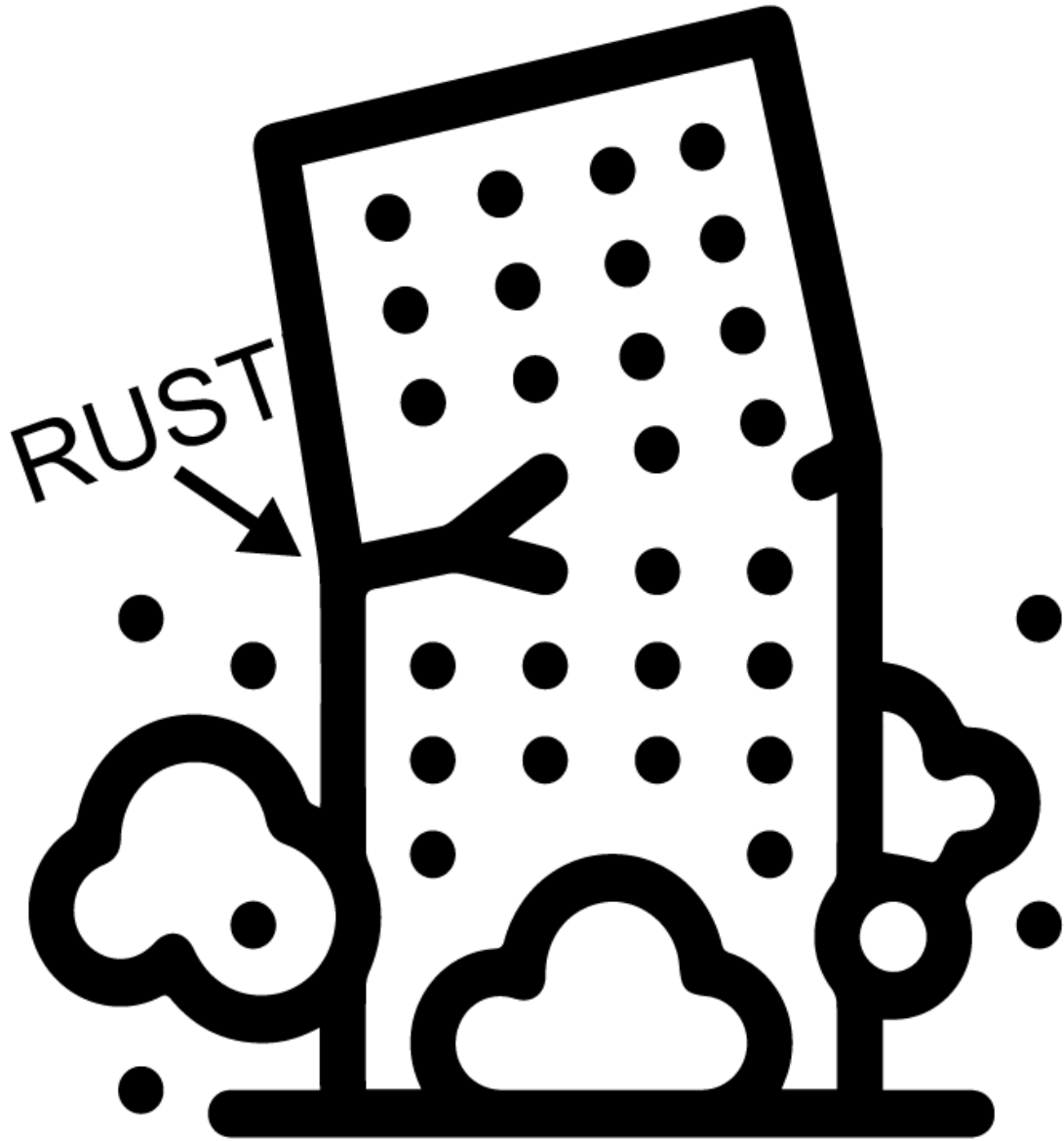
For example, if a building collapses because the steel structure *within* the building rusts and fails, then that could be viewed as an *internal Reason* for the collapse.

External Reasons are reasons which stem from external relations that occur between different things, phenomena, and ideas.

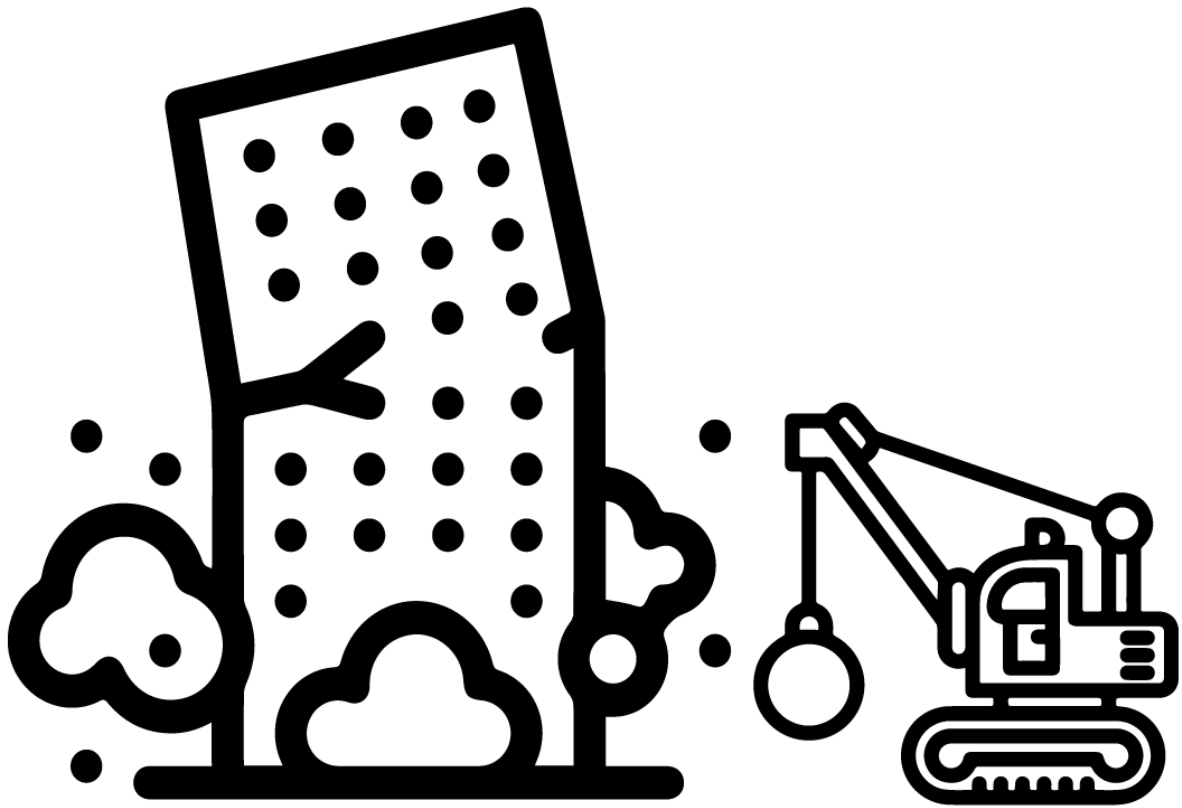
For example, if a building collapses because it is smashed by a wrecking ball, then that could be viewed as an *external Reason* for the collapse.

All of these roles and positions can be viewed *relatively*. From one viewpoint, a Reason may be seen as internal, but from another viewpoint, it might be viewed as external. For example, if a couple has a disagreement which leads to an argument, the disagreement may be seen as an external Reason from the perspective of each individual within the couple. But to a relationship counselor viewing the situation from the outside, the disagreement may be seen as an internal Reason which leads to *the couple* (a subject defined by the internal relationship between the husband and wife) arguing.

From one perspective, a government official ordering a building to be torn down may be seen as the direct Reason for the Result of the building being torn down. But from a different perspective, one can see many intervening relations: complaints from local residents may have led to the government official making the order, the order would be delivered to a demolition crew, the demolition crew would assign a crew member to operate a wrecking ball, the crew member would operate the wrecking ball, the wrecking ball would smash the building. All of these can be seen as intervening relations which constitute indirect reasons leading up to the direct Reason of the wrecking ball smashing the building. Choosing the right viewpoint during analysis is critical to make sure that Reason and Result relations are viewed properly and productively, and care must also be taken to ensure that the correct Reasons are attributed to Results (see *Reason and Result*, p. 138).



Internal Reasons stem from internal relationships.



External Reasons stem from external relations.

Likewise, a Reason can cause many Results, including primary and secondary Results.

Annotation 138

Primary Results are Results which are more direct and predictable.

Secondary Results are Results which are indirect and less predictable.

For example, an earthquake may have *primary* Results such as the ground shaking, buildings being destroyed, etc. *Secondary* Results from the earthquake might include flights being rerouted from local airports, shortages at grocery stores, etc.

In the motion of the material world, there is no known “first Reason” or “final Result.”

Annotation 139

With our current understanding of the universe, it is uncertain what might have caused the creation of all existence. Was it the Big Bang? If so, did the Big Bang have some underlying reason? There is also no way to know if there will ever be a “final Result.” Will the heat death of the universe occur, and if so, will that end all transpiring of relations which would end the cycle of development — of Reasons and Results?

As of now, we do not have solid answers to these questions. If and when answers arise, it is possible that the materialist dialectical framework will need to be updated to reflect new scientific knowledge, just as Marx, Engels, and Lenin have updated materialist dialectics in the past [see Annotation 72, p. 68]. What’s important to understand in the meantime is that within our realm of human experience and understanding, for all practical purposes, every Result which we live through and observe has some underlying Reason, and will itself lead to one or more Results.

Engels said: “we find upon closer investigation that the two poles of an antithesis [see Annotation 200, p. 192], positive and negative, e.g., are as inseparable as they are opposed, and that despite all their opposition, they mutually interpenetrate [are mixed together]. And we find, in like manner, that cause and effect are conceptions which only hold good in their application to individual cases; but as soon as we consider the individual cases in their general connection with the universe as a whole, they run into each other, and they become confounded when we contemplate that universal action

and reaction in which causes and effects are eternally changing places, so that what is effect here and now will be cause there and then, and vice versa.”²

Annotation 140

In the above passage, Engels is simply explaining that since all things, phenomena, and ideas are relationally linked and inter-related [see *Basic Principles of Materialist Dialectics*, p. 106], the mutual impacts and processes of change which lead to development (the reasons and results which transpire between all things, phenomena, and ideas) are also all linked and inter-related. What might be viewed as a Reason is also a Result of one or more prior Reasons, just as every Result is also a Reason for future Results.

c. Meaning of the Methodology

Because the relationship between Reason and Result is objective and inevitable, we can't ignore the relationship between Reason and Result in our perception and practice. In reality, there is no thing, phenomenon or idea that can exist without any underlying Reason or Reasons; and vice versa, there is no Reason that does not lead to any Result.

Annotation 141

In political activity, it is important to remember that *every* interaction within every relationship will lead to mutual impacts which will cause change and development; in other words, everything we choose to do will be the Reason for one or more Results. We must be aware of unintended or unpredicted Results from our activities.

Reason-Result relationships are very complicated and diverse. Therefore, we must accurately identify the types of Reasons [direct, indirect, internal, external, etc.] so that we can come up with proper solutions which are suitable for the specific situation in both perception and practice. A Reason can lead to many results and, likewise, a Result can be caused by many Reasons, which is why we must have a comprehensive viewpoint and a historical viewpoint [see Annotation 114, p. 116] in our perception of reality so we can properly analyse, solve and apply Reason-Result relationships.

² *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Friedrich Engels, 1880.

Annotation 142

It is critical to understand that there may be many events or relationships which might be falsely ascribed as Reasons for a given Result (and vice-versa).

For example: in 1965, the United States of America officially declared war on North Vietnam after the so-called “Gulf of Tonkin Incident,” in which Vietnamese forces supposedly fired on a United States Navy ship in the Gulf of Tonkin. The Gulf of Tonkin Incident is often described as the “cause” or the “Reason” that the Vietnam War began.

However, the real “Reason” why the USA declared war on North Vietnam had to do with the underlying contradiction between capitalist imperialism and communism in Vietnam. This contradiction had to be resolved one way or another. The United States of America willfully decided to try to negate this contradiction by instigating war, and this was the true reason the war began. In fact, the so-called “Gulf of Tonkin Incident” never even occurred as described — the attack on the USA’s ship never really occurred. A document released by the Pentagon in 2005 revealed that the incident was completely fabricated. So, saying that the “Gulf of Tonkin Incident” was the Reason for the war is nonsensical, since it’s an event which never even occurred in reality.

Understanding the true nature of Reason and Result is very important for making decisions and choosing a path forward in political action. Attributing the wrong Reason to a Result, or misunderstanding the Results which stem from a Reason, can lead to serious setbacks and failures. Therefore, it is vital for revolutionaries to properly identify and understand the *actual* Reasons and Results which drive development.

3. Obviousness and Randomness

a. Categories of Obviousness and Randomness

Annotation 143

In Vietnamese, the words for these categories are “tất nhiên” and “ngẫu nhiên,” which respectively translate to “obvious” and “random.” In socialist literature, various words have been used by different authors to convey the underlying meaning of these categories (Engels, for instance, used the terms “necessary” and “accidental” to mean “obvious” and “random,” respectively). We have chosen to use words which closely match the Vietnamese used in the original text, but the reader should be aware that these same concepts may be described using many different words in various English translations of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Ho Chi Minh, etc.

The *Obviousness* category refers to events that occur because of the essential [see *Essence and Phenomenon*, p. 156] internal aspects of the material structure of a subject. These essential internal characteristics become reasons for certain results under certain conditions: the Obvious *has* to happen in a certain way, it *can't* happen any other way.

Annotation 144

Obviousness can only apply to material subjects in the material world and results which are certain to happen based on the material laws of nature. Obviousness arises from the internal aspects, features, and relations of physical objects. Paper *will* burn under certain specific conditions, due its internal material structure. If those conditions (i.e., temperature, the presence of oxygen, etc.) exist, then paper *will* catch fire predictably. In other words, paper will *obviously* burn under certain circumstances due to its internal composition,.

The *Randomness* category refers to things that happen because of external reasons: things that happen, essentially, by chance, due to impacts from many external relations. A Random outcome *may* occur or it *may not* occur; a Random outcome could happen *this* way or it could happen *that* way.

Annotation 145

As we discussed above, paper *will* burn if it reaches a certain temperature — that much is *obvious*. If your friend holds paper over the flame of the lighter, the paper *will* burn — that's *obvious*. But you can't be certain whether your friend will actually hold the paper to the flame or not. This demonstrates *Randomness*. Whether your friend will ultimately hold the paper to the flame or not depends on an external relation which is not defined by the internal structure of the paper, and which can't be predicted with the same predictability as obvious events which are rooted in internal material aspects.

b. Dialectical relationship between Obviousness and Randomness

Obviousness and Randomness both exist objectively and play an important role in the motion and development of things and phenomena. Obviousness plays the decisive role.

Annotation 146

Obviousness plays the decisive role simply because Obviousness is far more predictable and the laws which govern material phenomena are essentially fixed. We can't change the laws of physics, the nature of chemical reactions, etc.

Obviousness and Randomness exist in dialectical unity; there is no pure Obviousness, nor pure Randomness. It is obvious that Randomness shall occur in our universe, however Obviousness clears a path through this Randomness.

Annotation 147

Our universe is incredibly complex and there are many different potential external relations which could impact any given situation, such that some degree of Randomness is always present in any situation; in other words, the presence of Randomness can be seen as Obvious.

In 1922, Ho Chi Minh identified objective internal characteristics of the working class of France and its colonies. He wrote: "The mutual ignorance of the two proletariats gives rise to prejudices. The French workers look upon the native as an inferior and negligible human being, incapable of understanding and still less of taking action. The natives regard all the French as wicked exploiters. Imperialism and capitalism do not fail to take advantage of this mutual suspicion and this artificial racial hierarchy to frustrate propaganda and divide forces which ought to unite."

In this example, Ho Chi Minh identifies prejudice as an obvious outcome of mutual ignorance. The prejudice arises as a matter of course from internal objective aspects of the two proletarian groups. As long as French and native workers remain ignorant of one another, prejudice will arise. The specific forms which this prejudice will take, however, and their resulting impacts and developments, will be more or less Random because there are many external factors (including the external impacts of the capitalist class, which seeks to take advantage of these prejudices) which can't be predicted. Therefore, it is necessary for political revolutionaries to account for both random and obvious factors in confronting such prejudice. Ho Chi Minh's suggestion for overcoming these difficulties was concise and to-the-point: "Intensify propaganda to overcome them." Only by negating the internal aspects of mutual ignorance through education and propaganda could communists hope to negate the resulting prejudice.

As Engels said: "One knows that what is maintained to be necessary [*obvious*] is composed of sheer accidents, and that the so-called accidental [*random*] is the form behind which necessity hides itself — and so on."³

³ *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Friedrich Engels, 1886.

Obviousness and Randomness are not static properties: Randomness and Obviousness continuously change and develop over time. Under specific conditions, Obviousness and Randomness can transform into each other: Obviousness can become Random and Randomness can become obvious.

Annotation 148

Randomness can be introduced to an obvious situation: it may be obvious that a mineshaft will collapse, until human beings come along and intervene by repairing the structural integrity of the mineshaft. It may seem Random whether a city's economy will grow or shrink, until a volcano erupts and buries the city in lava and ash, making it obvious that the economy will not grow because the city no longer exists.

Most situations are in a flux, as Obviousness and Randomness dialectically develop and change over time, with outcomes becoming more or less obvious or Random over time. It is vital that we, as political revolutionaries, are able to distinguish between Obviousness and Randomness and to leverage this understanding to our advantage.

c. Meaning of the Methodology

Basically, in our perception and reality, we have to base our plans, strategies, and actions as much as possible on the Obvious, not the Random. However, we must not ignore Randomness, nor try to separate the Obvious from the Random. When faced with situations which seem very Random, we must find ways to develop Obviousness. When faced with what seems obvious, we must keep an eye out for Randomness. Obviousness and Randomness can mutually transform, so we need to create suitable conditions to hinder or promote such transformation to suit our purposes.

Annotation 149

We must always remember that no situation is purely obvious, nor purely Random, and to take this into account in all of our planning and activity.

A skyscraper made from heavy steel beams may seem quite sturdy and stable; it may appear obvious that the structure will remain stable and sound for decades. However, it is still important for engineers to periodically *confirm* that the steel is still sound through testing and observation. Engineers must also be prepared for Random events like lightning, earthquakes, storms, etc., which may affect the seemingly obvious structural integrity of the building.

Likewise, when faced with extremely complex situations which seem completely Random, we must seek out (or bring about) the obvious. Wildfires are extremely chaotic and difficult to predict. However, firefighters can rely on certain obvious patterns and natural laws which govern the spread of fire. By digging trenches, lighting counter-fires, spraying water, and other such actions, firefighters can bring wildfires under control. This illustrates how humans are able to make situations less Random by bringing about an increasing amount of Obviousness over time through practical activity.

4. Content and Form

a. Categories of Content and Form

The *Content* category refers to the sum of all aspects, attributes, and processes that a thing, phenomenon, or idea is made from.

The *Form* category refers to the mode of existence and development of things, phenomena, and ideas. *Form* thus describes the system of relatively stable relationships which exist internally within things, phenomena, and ideas.

Annotation 150

Content and Form can be difficult to comprehend at first because the ways in which Content and Form manifest and interact can vary wildly depending on the subject being discussed and the viewpoint from which the subject is being considered.

Content represents the component things, materials, attributes, features, etc., which, together, make up a thing, phenomenon, or idea. You can think of it as the “ingredients” from which a subject is made.

Form refers to a stable system of internal relationships which compose a thing, phenomenon, or idea, as well as the mode of existence and development [see Annotation 60, p. 59] of those relations.

Remember that from a dialectical materialist perspective, everything in our universe is defined by internal and external relations. If a thing, phenomenon, or idea has internal relations which are *relatively* stable, then it has a Form.

We would not call all of the assorted ingredients which are used to make a cake “a cake” unless they have been assembled together and baked into the stable form which we interpret as “a cake.” Once a portion is removed from the cake, the portion itself assumes a new stable form which we call “a slice of cake.” The slice of cake will maintain its relatively stable form until being eaten, discarded, or otherwise transitioning into

some other form. It is only considered a “slice of cake” for as long as it maintains its own specific stable form.

Stability itself is also *relative*: a “spray” of water may only last for a few seconds but we can still conceive of it as having Form. On the other hand, a mountain has a set of stable internal relations (a Form) which might last for millions of years.

We can think of Form as having two aspects: inner Form and outer Form.

Inner form refers to the internal stable relations which we have already discussed.

Outer form is how an object “appears” to human senses.

In this book, we are primarily concerned with the *inner Form* of subjects, however, in other contexts (such as art and design), the *outer Form* plays a more prominent role.

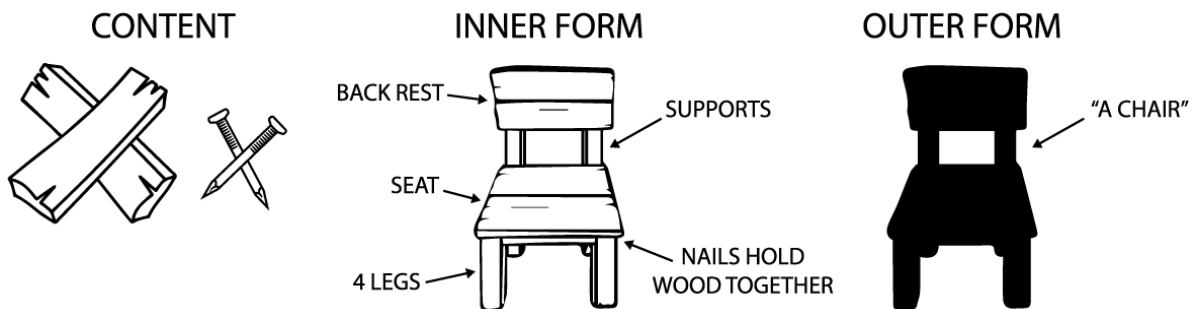
Now, let’s identify some of the common viewpoints from which Content and Form might be considered.

Material vs. Ideal

When discussing the *material* — i.e., *objective* systems and objects⁴ — discussion of Content and Form is more straightforward.

Material

With material things and phenomena, the *Content* is what the thing is made out of: the physical parts, aspects, attributes, and processes that compose the subject. For example, the Content of a wooden chair might be the wood, nails, paint, and other materials which are used to create the chair.



A material object can be described in terms of content, inner form, and outer form.

The *inner Form* of a material object refers to *stable internal relations* which compose the object. The stable relationship between the wood and the nails — the nails bind the wood together, the wood is cut in certain patterns, the paint adheres to the wood through physical and chemical bonds, etc. *Stability* is, again, relative — over time, the paint will chip and flake, the wood will rot, the nails will rust, etc. Dialectical processes of change will eventually reduce the chair into something other than a chair

⁴ See Annotation 10, p. 10 and Annotation 108, p. 112.

(i.e., through rotting, burning, disassembly, etc.), but as long as the internal relations maintain the Form of a chair we conceive of it as a chair.

The *outer Form* of a material object refers to the way it appears to human consciousness. Its shape, aesthetics, etc.

Ideal

With the ideal — i.e., *abstract* ideas and concepts — discussion of Content and Form becomes more complicated. As Vietnam's *Marxism-Leninism Textbook for Students Who Specialize in Marxism-Leninism* explains:

Many times, human consciousness has difficulty in trying to clearly define the Content of a subject — especially when the subject is an abstract idea. We often mistake Content with inner Form. Usually, in this situation, there is a strong combination and intertwining between both Content and Form. In such a situation, the Form can be referred to as the “inner Form,” or the “Content-Form.”

With physical things and phenomena, this type of Form usually belongs to a very specific Private, it doesn't exist in any other Private, it is the Unique [see Annotation 129, p. 128].

The reason the inner Form of physical objects usually exists in *Private* as the *Unique* is because the stable internal relations of any given physical object are equivalent to the specific material components which distinguish one physical object from all other physical objects. In other words, if you have two chairs which are exact copies of each other, made from the same kind of wood, cut into the same shape, using the same type and configuration of fasteners, etc., they are still not the exact same object. The internal relations of one chair are what make it *that* chair and distinguish it from all other objects in the universe. The *outer Form* of these chairs may have many commonalities (they look similar, they have the same color, etc.), but the *inner Form* is what distinguishes one chair from the other.

However, within the realm of abstract ideas, there are also Forms which many abstract Privates share. In the context of abstract ideas, we call this kind of Form the “outer Form,” the “form-Form,” or the “common Form.”

When we try to define the Content of a subject which is an abstract idea, our consciousness usually tries to answer the question: “what is the subject?”

This is usually a simple matter. Take, for example, the abstract idea of “freedom.” When we try to think of the Content of *freedom* we can answer it pretty easily. What is the subject of *freedom*? It is the condition which allows humans to follow their own will, it is the absence of external coercion, etc., etc.

But, when we try to define the Form of an abstract idea, our consciousness tries to answer the question: “how is the subject?” — this is when we have to define the mode of existence (the Form) of that subject.

This is where things get more complicated. The mode of existence of an abstract idea can usually be considered to be language, since our ideas are usually expressed through language, but it can take on other modes of existence as well, such as visual media (paintings, photographs), physical motions of the human body (body language, dance), etc. This is how the field of art studies is concerned with the philosophical categories of Content and Form.

Content and Form in Art

Many readers may already be familiar with the subject of Content and Form from studying art, design, communications, and related fields. At first glance, the definitions of Content and Form may seem different from what we’ve been discussing so far.

This is because art concerns itself with *abstract ideas* expressed through various Forms of *physical representations*.

These physical representations may include physical objects (photographs, paintings, sculptures), performed and/or recorded physical activities (dance, music, theater, film), human language recorded in stable physical Forms of written language (novels, poems, stories) or spontaneously performed oral language (storytelling, impromptu spoken-word poetry).

Because the study of art is primarily concerned with interpreting and understanding ideas expressed through these physical manifestations, art is concerned with the *stable inner relations* of the *ideas* which artists imbue within their works of art — much more than the stable inner relations of the physical components of the object.

According to the Vietnamese art textbook *Curriculum of General Aesthetics*:

What is the Form of a work of art? Form is the way to express the Content of an artwork. Form and Content within a work of art have a strong unity with each other and they regulate each other. Form is the organization, the inner structure of the Content of an artwork. Therefore, Form is the way that the Content expresses itself, and that way is described by two features.

We must ask:

First: what expresses the Content of a work of art?

Second: how is it expressed?

Art exists when two conditions are met: first, there must be a subject with an outer Form. Second, an artist must convey aesthetic meaning, or humanization, of that subject. This aesthetic meaning is the Content.

So, in studying works of art, we are less concerned with the *physical content* of the artwork (the canvas, paint, etc.) than we are with the *abstract content* of the artwork (the ideas which the artist imbues within the artwork).

As for Form, the *inner Form* of art represents the stable internal relations which compose the art (both ideal, i.e., the stable internal relations of the abstract ideas imbued within the art by the artist, as well as physical, i.e., the stable internal relations of the physical media of the art).

The *outer Form* of art represents how our human senses perceive the art, such as composition techniques, the use of color, etc.

The chart below breaks down the differences in a general, non-artistic viewpoint of physical objects and processes in materialist dialectical terms (i.e., the viewpoint an engineer might have), as compared with the artistic viewpoint of physical objects and processes (which an art critic might have). Some fields, such as designing products for human use, might draw from both viewpoints.

Content and Form of Physical Objects and Processes		
	General Viewpoint	Art Viewpoint
Content	What it's made of (the "stuff" it's made of)	Inner/aesthetic meaning (the "ideas" it's made of)
Inner Form	Stable internal relations between internal parts/attributes/features	Stable internal relations within the work (physical media, actors in a play, etc.)
Outer Form	How it appears to human senses (shape, color, etc.)	How it appears to human senses (composition, aesthetics, etc.)

Content and Form in Specific Artistic Media

Every medium of art will interpret Content and Form in its own way. For example:

Literature is a specific art discipline which deals with recorded human language in the Form of writing. In written literature, the Content would be the ideas expressed in a piece of writing; what the words say. The inner Form would be the way the ideas relate to each other — i.e., story structure, pacing, character development, etc. The outer form would be the physical format of the writing — i.e., manuscript, magazine article, paperback book, ebook, etc.

Painting is a specific art discipline in which pigments are applied to objects to create images which convey ideas and emotions. In painting, the Content would be the

meaning which an artist embodies in a work of art. The inner Form would include the stable internal relations within the artwork (i.e., the bonds and mixtures between the pigments, the canvas, etc.), while the outer Form would be how the artwork appears to human senses (composition, aesthetics, etc.). Generally speaking, the creator of the art will have to make decisions about the inner Form (i.e., selection of oil vs. acrylic vs. watercolor, selection of shade, tint, and hue, physical brush strokes, etc.) so as to produce the desired outer Form (the way the finished artwork will appear to viewers).

Theater is a specific art discipline in which human beings perform physical actions and use their voices to convey ideas to an audience. In theater, the Content includes the ideas which are being presented, such as the script, the musical score, the story, the performance choices of actors, costumes, props, etc. The inner Form would include the stable relations between the members of the cast, the director, the physical stage, the lighting, etc., and the outer Form would be the way the play appears to the audience.

These are just some examples. Each medium of expression will have its own variations in how Content and Form are considered.

Engels described the manifestation of Content and Form in *Dialectics of Nature*:

The whole of organic nature is one continuous proof of the identity or inseparability of form and content. Morphological and physiological phenomena, form and function, mutually determine one another. The differentiation of form (the cell) determines differentiation of substance into muscle, skin, bone, epithelium, etc., and the differentiation of substance in turn determines difference of form.

Content and Form are discussed frequently in analysis of human social systems and objective relations which occur within society. For example, Marx made many critical insights into economics by analyzing and explaining the form of value [see Annotation 14, p. 16] under capitalism.

Indeed, the entire capitalist system can be viewed in terms of content and form. The current form of human civilization is capitalism. That is to say, capitalism is the stable set of relations and characteristics of the current political economy which dominates the planet. The content of capitalism includes all the components of the base and superstructure, including the various classes (capitalists, working class, etc.), the means of production, government institutions, corporate institutions, etc. All of these elements are configured together into the relatively stable form which we call “capitalism.”

Other Viewpoints of Content and Form

Of course, there are many other viewpoints for discussing Content and Form of abstract ideas. Every philosophical field will have its own unique ways of utilizing Content and Form analysis. One example is the concept of Content and Form in legal philosophy. Vietnamese legal expert Dinh Thuy Dung writes:

The law has internal and external forms:

The inner Form is the internal structure of the law, the relationships and the connections between the elements constituting the law. The inner Form of the law is called the legal structure, which includes the constituent parts of the legal system such as the branch of law, legal institutions, and legal norms.

The outer Form is the manifestation, or mode of existence, of the law. In other words, the outer Form of the law is how we view and understand the law [i.e., who enforces the law and what repercussions will occur if we violate the law]. Based on the outer Form of the law, one can know how it exists in reality, and where and to whom it applies. The external Form of the law is also approached in relation to its Content.

According to this understanding, the Content of the law includes all the elements that make up the law, while the Form of the law is understood as the elements which contain or express the Content.

If you understand that the Content of the law is the will of the state, then the legal Form is the way of expressing the will of the state.

There are countless other ways in which Content and Form can be used to analyze and understand things, phenomena, and ideas. We hope that these examples have given you a better idea of the various ways in which Content and Form can be used to understand the world. In general, socialist texts deal with the *inner Form* of things, phenomena, and ideas. That is to say, the inner relations which compose the subject being considered. The outer form — how things appear to our senses — tends to be less relevant in analysis of human social systems, though it is often important in consideration of specialized fields of revolutionary activity such as aesthetics, propaganda, etc.

b. Dialectical relationship between Content and Form

Content and Form have a strong dialectical relationship with one other. There is no Form that does not contain any Content. Simultaneously, there is no Content that does not exist in a specific Form. The same Content can manifest in many Forms and a Form can contain many Contents.

The relationship between Content and Form is a dialectical relationship in which Content decides Form and Form can impact Content.

Annotation 151

For example, if you want to make a table, and all you have available are wood and nails, then that Content (the wood and the nails) will determine the Form the table ends up taking. You are going to end up with a wooden table, and it will therefore have to have certain characteristics of Form.

When Content changes, the Form must change accordingly. If, instead of wood, you have iron, then the table you end up building will have a much different Form. Form can also *influence* the Content, but not nearly as much as Content *determines* Form. For instance, if you have wood and nails, but you develop a technique for building a table that doesn't need any nails, then the result (a wooden table without any nails) would be an example of a development in Form reflecting as a change in Content.

The main tendency of Content is change. On the other hand, Form is relatively stable in every thing and phenomenon. As Content changes, Form must change accordingly. However, Content and Form are not always perfectly aligned.

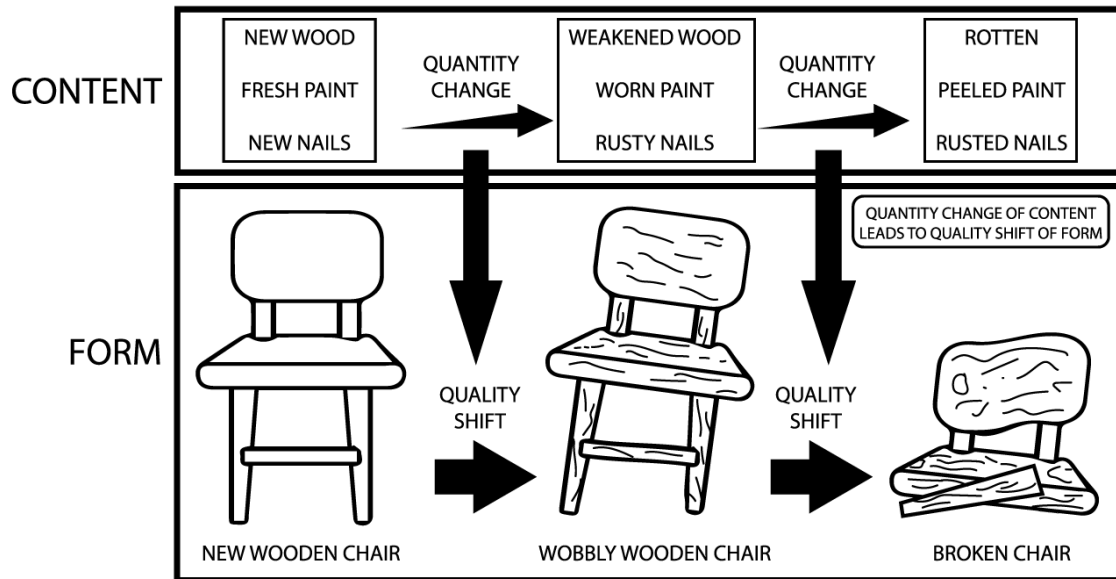
Annotation 152

Since all things, phenomena, and ideas are constantly changing, it stands to reason that the internal components (things, phenomena, and ideas, and their relations) which compose the Content of a subject will constantly be undergoing processes of change and development. Thus, we say that the tendency of Content is change. Since the Form is based on the *internal relations* of the components of Content, it stands to reason that a change in Content will lead to change in Form. These kinds of changes in Content and Form also occur through the dialectical process: changes in quantity lead to changes in quality [see Annotation 117, p. 119].

As soon as a wooden chair is finished being built, the paint is already beginning to degrade. The wood is already beginning to rot. The iron nails are already beginning to rust. These changes may be imperceptibly slow — they may even take centuries to occur, if the chair is kept in a hospitable environment — but the changes are occurring, quantitatively, over time, none-the-less.

Eventually, changes in quantity will lead to changes in quality. At some point, the chair might weaken and begin to wobble whenever it's sat in. Human beings might recognize this quality and begin to think of it as a "wobbly chair." The chair might degrade to the point where it can't be safely used at all, in which case it will have quality shifted into a "broken chair." If the chair is repaired, that would represent another quality shift. If it is used for firewood, that would be another quality shift.

Keep in mind that changes in Form do not directly cause changes in Content. If you disassemble a wooden chair into the constituent wood and nails, the wood and



Quantity changes in Content lead to quality shifts in Form.

nails remain more or less unchanged. But if you burn a wooden chair, it's the *change in Content* which leads to the change in Form from "chair" to "pile of ash."

Form simply represents the stable relationships between the component parts of the subject's Content. The only way to change Form is to change those inner relations, or to change the components which are relating. There is no way to change Form without changing the Content, and changing the Content changes the Form by definition.

Content determines Form, but Form is not *fully* decided by Content, and Form can impact back on Content. If a Form is suitable with its Content, it can improve the development of its Content. If a Form is not suitable with its Content, it can constrain the development of its Content.

Annotation 153

The dialectical relationship between Content and Form is somewhat similar to the dialectical relationship between the material and the ideal (see *Matter and Consciousness*,

p. 88). Just as the material world *determines* consciousness while consciousness *impacts* the material world, the Content of a subject *determines* the Form while the Form *impacts* the Content.

Suitability describes the applicability of a subject for a specific application or role. Whether or not something is "suitable" or not can be highly subjective (i.e., which

music would be “suitable” to play at a party), or it can be more objective (i.e., what kind of batteries to use with an electronic device).

We might say that hardwood is “suitable” Content for the Form of a chair because it is durable, strong, relatively inexpensive, and long-lasting. It might be “unsuitable” to have a chair made of hardwood if it is to be used as an office chair, because the hard surfaces might cause strain and discomfort. However, we can utilize conscious activity to adjust and develop suitability between Content and Form. Changing the Content by adding cushioning or padding might make the Content and Form more suitable with each other. Similarly, changing the Form by designing contours and adding adjustability to the chair might make the Content and Form more suitable with each other for their intended application as an office chair.

If a Form is not suitable with the Content, it restrains the development of the Content. Just think of a shovel (Form) made of wood (Content), which will degrade very rapidly over time, vs. a shovel (Form) made of steel (Content) which will last much longer. This works in both directions. Consider the Content of drinking cups: a porcelain cup might last for a long time and even develop positively over time (by acquiring a desirable patina), while a cup made out of mild steel would not be desirable, as it would be highly prone to rust from extended use containing liquids.

c. Meaning of the Methodology

Content and Form always have a dialectical relationship with each other. Therefore, in our perception and practice, we must not try to separate Content and Form, nor should we solely focus on one and ignore the other.

Because Content determines Form, whenever we are considering a thing, phenomenon, or idea, we must base our consideration first on its Content. If we want to change a thing or phenomenon, we have to change its Content first.

In reality, we must promote the positive impact of Form on Content by making the Form fit the Content. Likewise, we must also change the Form that is no longer suitable with its Content and therefore constrains the development of its Content.

Annotation 154

In any analysis, it is very important that we carefully consider whether or not Content and Form are suitable with each other in our own projects and activities. We can learn a lot about suitability from observation and practice (see *Cognitive Theory of Dialectical Materialism*, p. 204) and improve suitability through conscious activity.

Marx believed that it is vital to consider Content and Form when analyzing human society and political economy. One of his core critiques of political economists like

Adam Smith and David Ricardo was a failure to consider Content and Form when it comes to value, commodities, and money. He discusses this extensively in *Capital Volume 1*, as in this excerpt:

The value-form, whose fully developed shape is the money-form, is very elementary and simple. Nevertheless, the human mind has for more than 2,000 years sought in vain to get to the bottom of it all, whilst on the other hand, to the successful analysis of much more composite and complex forms, there has been at least an approximation. Why? Because the body, as an organic whole, is more easy of study than are the cells of that body. In the analysis of economic forms, moreover, neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both.

Marx, here, is saying that studying the economy is more difficult than studying the human body because it can't be physically observed and dissected. Rather, we have to rely on abstraction, which leaves us prone to making many more mistakes in analyzing Content and Form.

But in bourgeois society, the commodity-form of the product of labour – or value-form of the commodity – is the economic cell-form. To the superficial observer, the analysis of these forms seems to turn upon minutiae. It does in fact deal with minutiae, but they are of the same order as those dealt with in microscopic anatomy.

Marx's analysis of capitalism relies to great extent upon recognizing the commodity-form of the product (Content) of labor. Labor existed long before capitalism. Labor has existed for as long as humans have worked to change our own material conditions. But under capitalism, labor specifically takes on the Form of a *commodity* which is bought by capitalists. This becomes the basis for Marx's entire critique of capitalism.

Obviously, there is much more to Marx's use of Content and Form in analyzing capitalism and human society, but this should hopefully give you some idea of the importance of Content and Form in analysis of human society and revolutionary activity.

5. Essence and Phenomenon

a. Categories of Essence and Phenomenon

The *Essence* category refers to the synthesis of all the internal aspects as well as the obvious and stable relations that define the existence, motion and development of things, phenomena, and ideas.

The *Phenomenon* category refers to the external manifestation of those internal aspects and relations in specific conditions.

Annotation 155

Understanding Essence and Phenomena can be challenging at first, but it is very important for materialist dialectical analysis.

Essence should not be confused with *Form*. Form represents the stable internal relations of the component content of a subject, whereas Essence represents the *synthesis* of all internal aspects as well as all obvious and stable attributes which *define the existence, motion, and development* of a subject.

Phenomena are simply external manifestations of a subject which occur *in specific conditions*.

The Essence of a subject is not dependent on conditions, whereas in different conditions, the same subject will exhibit different Phenomena. For example, COVID-19 is, *essentially*, a specific virus strain. That is to say, all of the internal aspects and stable relations that define the existence, motion, and development of COVID-19 are synthesized as a virus which we call COVID-19.

The *Phenomena* of COVID-19 which we can observe in patients would include symptoms such as fever, coughing, trouble breathing, etc.

The Essence of a cloud is water vapor in the atmosphere: that is the synthesis, the coming-together, of all the internal stable relations and aspects which will determine how a cloud exists, moves, and develops over time.

The Phenomena of clouds are all the things we can sense: the appearance of big fluffy white things in the air, shadows on the ground, and, sometimes, rain.

Essence defines Phenomenon: the internal attributes and stable relations will produce the Phenomena which we can observe. A cloud is not *essentially defined* as a fluffy white thing in the air; that is just the appearance a cloud has to our human senses in certain specific conditions.

b. Dialectical relationship between Essence and Phenomenon

Essence and Phenomenon both exist objectively as two unified but opposing sides.

The unity between Essence and Phenomenon: Essence always manifests through Phenomena, and every Phenomenon is always the manifestation of a specific Essence. There is no pure Essence that exists separately from Phenomena and there is no Phenomenon that does not manifest from any kind of Essence.

When Essence changes, Phenomena also change accordingly. When Essence appears, Phenomena also appear, and when Essence disappears, Phenomena also disappear. Therefore, Lenin said: “The Essence appears. The appearance is essential.”⁵

The Opposition of Essence and Phenomenon: Essence is that which defines a thing, Phenomenon, or idea, while Phenomena are diversified and conditional. Essence is internal, while Phenomena are external. Essence is relatively stable, while Phenomena continuously change.

Annotation 156

Essence and Phenomenon are simultaneously unified and opposite because neither can exist without the other, yet they have completely opposite features from one another.

Discussing the Essence and Phenomena of physical objects is relatively straightforward. The Essence will typically encompass the physical object or system itself. For example, a car engine is *essentially* a machine; that is to say, the synthesis of all the internal aspects (the engine parts) as well as the obvious and stable relations (the relations between the parts of the engine; how they are assembled and work together in the engine system) that define the existence, motion and development of the engine (the way it works) are what *essentially make it* a car engine. All of these essential characteristics are internal, relatively stable, and remain the same regardless of the condition of the engine (i.e., they continue to exist whether the engine is turned on, turned off, inoperable, etc.).

The Phenomena of the car engine are all the things that we can sense from it, but this can vary a great deal depending on conditions. When the car engine is turned off, it will be silent. It may be cool to the touch. It will be at rest. If the engine is turned on, the parts will move, it will become hot, it will make noise. In some situations it might smoke or even catch on fire. All of these Phenomena are conditional, unstable, and external to the engine itself.

With *ideas* and abstract thought, Essence and Phenomenon becomes more difficult to determine and analyze. Lenin discussed this in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, beginning with a quote from Hegel:

Dialectics in general is “the pure movement of thought in Notions“ (i.e., putting it without the mysticism of idealism: human concepts are not fixed but are eternally in movement, they pass into one another, they flow into one another, otherwise they do not reflect living life.

⁵ *Philosophical Notebooks*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1914–16.

Knowing that Hegel was an idealist, Lenin wanted to strip all idealism from his conception of dialectics, and thus made it clear that “the pure movement of thought” simply refers to the fact that human thoughts are constantly changing, always in motion, within the living human mind, writing:

The analysis of concepts, the study of them, the “art of operating with them” (Engels) always demands study of the movement of concepts, of their interconnection, of their mutual transitions).

This is a description of materialist dialectical analysis of human thought. We must understand that human thoughts are always in motion, always developing, and always mutually impacting other thoughts.

In particular, dialectics is the study of the opposition of the Thing-in-itself, of the essence, substratum, substance — from the appearance, from “Being-for-Others.” (Here, too, we see a transition, a flow from the one to the other: the essence appears. The appearance is essential.) Human thought goes endlessly deeper from appearance to essence, from essence of the first order, as it were, to essence of the second order, and so on without end.

This is where Lenin introduces the concept of Essence and Phenomenon (or “appearance,” as Lenin puts it) as simultaneously oppositional and in unity. Essence refers to the qualities and nature of the “thing-in-itself” (its internal components, relations, etc.) while Phenomena represents “being-for-others” (that which external observers can sense or witness of a subject). However, as Lenin notes, Essence and Phenomena have a dialectical relationship with each other — a “flow from the one to the other.” The Essence “appears” by exuding Phenomena which we can sense.

Conscious thoughts also have Essence and Phenomena of their own. With thought, the development from Essence to Phenomena is constant and inevitable. The Essence of each thought leads to thought-Phenomena which develop in turn into the Essence of new thoughts in a constant flow.

In this sense, Essence and Phenomenon of abstract thought is somewhat different from Essence and Phenomenon of physical objects, but physical objects can have this same dialectical pattern of development. For example, the emissions from the engine of a car can be considered Phenomena of the engine, but as these Phenomena build up in the air (along with the emissions from many other cars), they can develop into a physical subject with a new Essence of its own, which we call “air pollution.”

We can also think of the light which comes from the sun. The light itself can be thought of as Phenomena of the sun, but the light energy can be captured by a solar panel and converted into energy, creating a new subject with its own Essence which we would describe as “solar energy.” In this sense, it is possible for Phenomena to have Phenomena. If you witness light waves in the desert which cause an optical illusion,

then the illusion is a Phenomenon of the light waves (the light waves being the Essence which exuded the Phenomenon of illusion), and the light waves are the Phenomena of the sun (the essential subject which exudes the Phenomena of the light waves).

Essence and Phenomena can also be contextual. In some contexts, physical objects which have their own Essence (and Phenomena) may be the Phenomena of some other entity. For example, archaeologists can't observe prehistoric civilizations directly. They can only study the things which are left behind. In this sense, we can think of an archaeological artifact, like a stone tool, as a Phenomenon of a prehistoric civilization. The tool has its own Essence and Phenomena, but it is also itself a Phenomenon. A single stone tool can't tell archaeologists much about an ancient civilization, however, archaeologists can gather many Phenomena (tools, structural ruins, nearby animal bones and seeds, human remains, etc.) to look for patterns which reveal more insights about the Essence of the prehistoric civilization which exuded those Phenomena.

Dialectics in the proper sense is the study of contradiction in the very essence of objects: not only are appearances transitory, mobile, fluid, demarcated only by conventional boundaries, but the essence of things is so as well.

Lenin, here, points out that proper analysis hinges on understanding the *Essence* of a subject, since the Phenomena are fleeting and subject to change. Most notably, we should look for *contradictions* within the subject (see *Definition of Contradiction and Common Characteristics of Contradiction*, p. 175), because contradictions are what drive dialectical development of a subject over time.

c. Meaning of the Methodology

If we want to be accurately aware of things, phenomena, and ideas, we must not just stop at studying their Phenomena, we have to study their Essence. Only through examining many Phenomena of a subject can we fully and correctly understand the Essence of said subject.

Annotation 157

With physical objects, we must study the Phenomena to know anything about a subject, since Phenomena is, by definition, that which we can observe. Only through systematic, repeated observations can we come to understand the Essence of the object

which exudes the Phenomena. Because Phenomena can change based on conditions, we must observe Phenomena under various conditions in a systematic way. This is the basis of all scientific inquiry.

This is also true for analyzing aspects of human society. To understand a social system, we must observe its Phenomena systematically over time and look for patterns which form under various conditions. We must also keep in mind that social systems develop and change over time, and so the Essence might develop with or without changes in certain Phenomena. For example, the phenomena of the United States of America have changed significantly over the years. The national flag, military uniforms, seals, and other iconography have changed throughout the history of the USA. Similarly, there have been many presidents, and the government and constitution have also been through many changes. That said, the essential nature of the USA's political economy has not changed significantly since its foundation; the USA has been a capitalist bourgeois democracy since the beginning and remains so to this day. Regardless of which bourgeois-dominated political party holds power in the white house and congress — Whig, Republican, Democrat, or otherwise — the essential nature of the USA as a capitalist bourgeois democracy has remained the same.

According to Lenin: “Human thought goes endlessly deeper from appearance to essence, from essence of the first order, as it were, to essence of the second order, and so on, *without end*.”⁶ On the other hand, Essence is what defines a thing, phenomenon, or idea. Therefore, in our perception and practice, we must recognize a thing, phenomenon, or idea based on its Essence, not its Phenomena, to evaluate it correctly, and after that, we can make fundamental improvements.

Annotation 158

For example: Thousands of years ago, people observed that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west everyday. Based on these Phenomena, many human civilizations developed the belief that the Essence of our solar system was that the earth was the center of the universe and the sun rotated around it. Today, thanks to scientific observation and practice, we have proven that the sun is the center of the solar system and that the earth is rotating around it, which is totally opposite to what many believed hundreds of years ago. In this case, the initially observed Phenomena were misleading, and it was only by getting a better grasp of the essential nature of the solar system that we could better comprehend its functioning.

It is usually easy to observe Phenomena (since they are defined by being observable) but it's also easy to misunderstand relationships between Essence and Phenomena. Sometimes people get a false perception of Essence from real Phenomena, such as

⁶ *Philosophical Notebooks*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1914–16.

believing the Sun revolves around the Earth. Sometimes people attribute the wrong Phenomena to Essences as well, such as believing that all poor people are lazy.

Phenomena can easily be mistaken for essence. For example, bourgeois liberal political parties often portray themselves as being pro-worker and therefore exhibit phenomena such as rhetoric, slogans, propaganda, and even platform positions which appeal to workers. These phenomena may confuse many into believing that they are workers' parties when, in reality, they are essentially dominated by the capitalist class. The reverse can also occur. For example, workers may be fooled into believing that a ruthless capitalist politician or celebrity is "working class at heart," falsely believing that the capitalist's class position is merely a phenomenon when in fact it is essential.

Understanding true Essence based on real Phenomena is one of the most important aspects of analysis. It is the primary realm of science. In politics, misunderstanding or mischaracterizing Essence and Phenomena can reinforce false beliefs about the way society works which can lead to promulgation of dangerous and reactionary ideologies like neoliberalism and fascism amidst the working class. For this reason, we must avoid examining Phenomena alone. We have to dive deep to discover and understand the essential nature of things, phenomena, and ideas in our analysis.

6. Possibility and Reality

a. Categories of Possibility and Reality

The *Possibility* category refers to things that have not happened nor existed in reality yet, but that would happen, or would exist given necessary conditions.

The *Reality* category refers to things that exist or have existed in reality and in human thought.

b. Dialectical Relationship Between Possibility and Reality

Possibility and Reality have a unified and inseparable relationship: Possibility can transform into Reality and Reality contains new Possibility; any given Possibility, under specific conditions, can transform into Reality.

Given specific conditions, there could be one or many possibilities for the development of any given thing, phenomenon, or idea: practical Possibility, random Possibility, obvious Possibility, abstract Possibility, near Possibility, far Possibility, etc.

Annotation 159

Excerpt From Marxism-leninism Textbook of Students Who Specialize in Marxism-leninism

Editor's notes in [brackets]

Reality has many aspects. It also has many tendencies of development. These aspects and tendencies of Reality have different roles and positions in the development process of Reality. For example, manifesting any given Possibility into Reality requires us to change a specific subject from one status to a different status. Some subjects are easier to transform and others are more difficult to transform. Some require us to change quality, others only require quantity changes [see Annotation 117, p. 119].

Because Reality has many aspects and tendencies of development, it is useful to classify Possibility. There are at least four types of Possibility, in two separate categories.

[The categorization below draws a distinction between the *obvious* and the *practical*.

The *obvious* is that which will *certainly* occur. If you drop an object, it will *obviously* fall. The *practical* is that which we *certainly could make occur* through human will. If you are holding an object, you could *practically* drop it.]

Obvious Possibility and Random Possibility [see: Obviousness and Randomness, p. 144].

Obvious Possibility refers to Possibility that *will* happen, because conditions to make it happen are set in place so that the Possibility developing into Reality is unavoidable.

[If the conditions arise for a hurricane to form, it eventually becomes *obvious* that a hurricane will form.]

Random Possibility is Possibility which may or may not happen depending on how external factors develop, our actions, the actions of others, etc. [Whether or not a hurricane may develop on any given day is, from our human perspective, random, since we do not have any technology to cause or prevent the development of hurricanes. Other events may be more or less random. We can, for instance, *prepare* for an incoming hurricane to minimize the risk of harm to human communities.]

Second, based on the practical relationships between subjects, we have:

Practical Possibility vs. Abstract Possibility:

Practical Possibility means that conditions in Reality which *could* make something happen are already in place. [If you have all the ingredients, knowledge, and equipment needed to make a pie, you *could* make a pie. The material conditions are in place.]

Abstract Possibility is Possibility which may become Reality in the future but the conditions which would make this Possibility become Reality have not yet developed.

[It is an abstract Possibility that you *could* make a pie, even if you don't have the tools, ingredients, or knowledge. It is possible, in the abstract, that you could buy the ingredients and equipment and learn the necessary skills to make a pie. *Near Possibility* simply refers to Possibility which may become Reality in the shorter term,

far Possibility refers to things which may happen in a more distant future, relative to the subject being discussed.]

In social life, in order to transform a Possibility into Reality, there must be objective conditions and subjective factors. Subjective factors include the ability of humans to change Possibility into Reality. Objective conditions refer to the situations needed to make such a change occur. [In other words, humans are able to *subjectively* change possibility into reality, but only when the *objective* circumstances exist in the external world.]

c. Meaning of the Methodology

We must base our perception and practice on Reality.

Lenin said: “Marxism takes its stand on the facts, and not on possibilities. A Marxist must, as the foundation of his policy, put [forth] *only* precisely and unquestionably demonstrated *facts*.”⁷

However, in our perception and practice, we also need to comprehensively recognize possibilities which could arise from Reality. This will allow us to develop methods of practical operation which are suitable to changes and developments which might occur. We must actively make use of subjective factors in perception and practice to turn Possibility into Reality whenever it would serve our purposes.

Annotation 160

This idea is perhaps best exemplified in the traditional Vietnamese proverb: “you can’t just open your mouth and wait for fruit to drop into your mouth.” We have to actively apply our will, through practice and labor, to develop the best possibilities into manifested Reality. See more about subjective factors in Annotation 207, p. 202.

⁷ To N. D. Kiknadze, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, written after November 5, 1916.

IV. Basic Laws of Materialist Dialectics

Laws are the regular, common, obvious, natural, and objective relations between internal aspects, factors, and attributes of a thing or phenomenon or between things and phenomena.

There are many types of laws in this world and they all have different prevalence, reach, characteristics, and roles in regard to the motion and development processes of things and phenomena in nature, society, and human thought. So, it is necessary to classify different laws for humans to understand and apply them effectively into practical activities. Classifying laws based on prevalence, we have: private laws, common laws, and universal laws [see: *Private and Common*, p. 128].

Private laws are laws that only apply to a specific range of things and phenomena. For example: laws of mechanical motion, laws of chemical motion, laws of biological motion, etc.

Common laws are laws that apply to a broader range of subjects than *private laws*, and they impact many different subjects. For instance: the law of preservation of mass, the law of preservation of energy, etc.

Universal laws are laws that impact every aspect of nature, society, and human thought. Materialist dialectics is the study of these universal laws.

If we classify laws based on the *reach of impact*, we will have three main groups: laws of nature, laws of society, and laws of human thought.

Laws of nature are laws that arise in the natural world, including within the human body. They are not products of human conscious activities.

Laws of society are the laws of human activity in social relations; these laws only apply to the conscious activities of humans, yet they are still objective.

Annotation 161

We have already discussed how relations between human beings are objective [see Annotation 108, p. 112]. By extension, the human relations which compose human societies are objective, and thus, any laws which govern objective human relations must also be objective.

Marx's assertion that human social relations are objective is critical to understanding his work. Marx pointed out that social relations may not be "physical," in the sense that they can't be observed directly with human senses, but that they still have an *objective character* — they exist externally to a given subject, and they have objective impacts on reality. For instance, the class relations between the capitalist class and the working class result in objective manifestations in reality, such as wealth accumulation, modes of circulation, etc.

Laws of human thought are laws of the intrinsic relationships between concepts, categories, judgments, inference, and the development process of human rational awareness.

As the science of common relations and development, materialist dialectics studies the *universal laws* that influence the entire natural world, human society, and human thought, all together as a whole.

These universal laws are:

- The law of transformation between quantity and quality.
- The law of unification and contradiction between opposites.
- The law of negation of negation.

Annotation 162

Each of these laws is considered *universal* because they apply to all things, phenomena, and ideas, and all the internal and external relations thereof, in human perception and practice. All things, phenomena, and ideas change and develop as a result of mutual impacts and relationships in accordance with these universal laws. On a fundamental level, materialist dialectics is the study of these universal laws and their utility.

1. Law of Transformation Between Quantity and Quality

The law of transformation between quantity and quality is a universal law which concerns the universal mode of motion and development processes of nature, society, and human thought.

Annotation 163

Remember that mode refers to *how* something exists, functions, and develops [see Annotation 60, p. 59]. The universal mode of motion and development processes thus refers to *how* all things, ideas, and phenomena move, change, and develop.

Friedrich Engels defined the law of transformation between quantity and quality in *Dialectics of Nature*:

The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa. For our purpose, we could express this by saying that in nature, in a manner exactly fixed for each individual case, qualitative changes can only occur by the quantitative addition or subtraction of matter or motion (so-called energy).

In other words, *quantitative* changes of things, phenomena, and ideas lead to *quality* shifts.

The universal mode of motion and development processes follows the law of transformation between quantity and quality, which states:

Qualitative changes of things, phenomena, and ideas arise from the inevitable basis of the quantitative changes of things, phenomena, and ideas; and, vice versa: quantitative changes of things, phenomena, and ideas arise from the inevitable basis of qualitative changes of things, phenomena, and ideas.

Annotation 164

Put simply: quantity changes develop into quality changes, and quality changes lead to quantity changes [see Annotation 117, p. 119]. We say that these changes to quantity and quality occur on the “inevitable basis” of one another because quality changes always, invariably, arise from quantity changes, and, likewise, quantity changes always, invariably, arise from quality changes.

Just as quantity shifts lead to quality shifts, it is also true that quality shifts lead to quantity shifts. For example, if you have 11 donuts, then add 1 donut, you now have *1 dozen* donuts. If you add 12 more donuts, you would then have *2 dozen*.

Another example of quality shift leading to quantity shift would be a pond filling with rain water. Once enough drops of water collect and the pond is considered full — that is to say, once it is considered to be “a pond” of water — we will no longer think of the pond in terms of “drops.” We would think of the pond as “filled,” “overfilled,” “underfilled,” etc.

Note that both of these examples are related to our human perceptions and understanding of the material world. The material world does not change based on our perceptions, nor how we classify the quantity or quality of a given subject. There are also objective aspects related to quality shifts leading to quantity shifts. For example, if we adjust the quantity of the temperature of a sheet of paper to the point of burning, and the paper burns, then the quantity of paper would be reduced from one sheet to zero sheets. In other words, the quality shift arising from temperature quantity increase (i.e., the paper burning into ash) results in a quantity shift in how many pieces of paper exist (from one sheet to zero sheets). However, even this is ultimately a subjective assessment rooted in human consciousness, since we subjectively think in terms of “sheets of paper,” and the concept of a “sheet of paper” is essentially a classification rooted in human consciousness. It is merely an abstract way of perceiving and considering the quantity and quality of the material subject which we think of as “paper.”

The law of transformation between quantity and quality is an inevitable, objective, and universal relationship that repeats in every motion and development process of all things, phenomena, and ideas in nature, human society, and human thought.

a. Definitions of Quality and Quantity

- *Definition of Quality*

Quality refers to the organic unity which exists amongst the component parts of a thing, phenomenon, or idea that distinguishes it from other things, phenomena, and ideas.

Annotation 165

Note: we have already given basic definitions of quantity and quality in Annotation 117, p. 119. What follows are more comprehensive philosophical definitions of quality and quantity. Our world exists as one continuity of matter. All things and phenomena in our universe exist essentially as one unified system — namely, the entity which we call “the universe.” This unified nature of existence is extremely difficult for human beings to comprehend. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel pointed out that, in this sense, the unity of “pure being” is indistinguishable from “nothingness.” In *Science of Logic*, Hegel noted that if we try to comprehend pure material existence, as a whole, without distinguishing any component thing or phenomenon from any other, then all is incomprehensible. Human consciousness needs to delineate and distinguish the component parts of this unified system from each other in order to make sense of it all.

Pure light and pure darkness are two voids which are the same thing. Something can be distinguished only in determinate light or darkness... [F]or this reason, it is only darkened light and illuminated darkness which have within themselves the moment of difference and are, therefore, determinate being.

The human mind has evolved to perceive various things, phenomena, and ideas as *differentiated*. Quality is the basis on which we perceive subjects as distinct from one another. Every thing, phenomenon, and idea is composed of internal components and relations. The unity of these internal components and relations is what we refer to as *quality*. For example, a human being's *quality* refers to the unity of all the internal components and relationships of which the human being is composed (i.e., the cells, organs, blood, etc., as well as the thoughts, memories, etc., which make the human) *in unity*. Quality is also a subjective phenomenon: a *reflection* of the material world in human consciousness [see Annotation 68, p. 65]. Therefore we may conceive of various qualities for the same subject. We can think of 12 donuts as “a box of donuts,” “a dozen donuts,” or as 12 individual donuts. We could consider a building as “one apartment building” or “forty apartments,” depending on the viewpoint of analysis.

So, objective and inherent attributes form the quality of things, phenomena, and ideas, but we must not confuse quality and attribute with one another. Every thing, phenomenon, and idea has both fundamental and non-fundamental attributes. Only fundamental attributes constitute the quality of things, phenomena and ideas. When the fundamental attributes change, the quality also changes. The distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental attributes of things, phenomena, and ideas must depend on the purpose of the analysis; the same attribute may be fundamental when analyzing with one purpose but non-fundamental when analyzing with another purpose.

Annotation 166

Whether or not an attribute is considered “fundamental” depends entirely on conscious perspective. For example, one baker may consider chocolate chips to be “fundamental” for baking cookies while another baker may not. This subjective characteristic of what might be considered “fundamental” or not is reflected in how we consider quality. If you are trying to determine how much water you need to fill a swimming pool, you may think of a pool in terms of size (i.e., “this is an Olympic sized pool”), but if you just want to go for a swim, you are likely to just think in terms of the water level (i.e., “the pool is empty, we can't swim”).

If you are planning the construction of a school and want to know how many classrooms it will need, you might think in terms of “classrooms of students.” But if you are considering funding for a school year, you might consider the *total number of students*.

The quality of a thing, phenomenon, or idea is determined by the qualities of its component parts.

Annotation 167

Qualities are composed of qualities, combined, in unity. “A swimming pool” may consist of a certain amount of concrete in a specific configuration combined with 5,000 gallons of water. A car may be composed of a body, an engine, four tires, etc. Each individual component exists as a quality — a unity of component attributes — in and of itself.

Quality is also determined by the structures and connections between component parts which manifest in specific relations. Therefore, distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental attributes is also relative.

Annotation 168

It’s not just the component parts of a subject which define its quality, but also the relations of those component parts. For instance, a quantity of wood and nails configured in one set of structural relations may have the quality of a chair, whereas the same component parts arranged with different structures and relations may have the quality of a table. In this sense, quality can be thought of as a synthesis of the Content and Form [see *Content and Form*, p. 147] of a thing, phenomenon, or idea from a certain perspective.

For example, if we see two shoes, we may think of each shoe as an individual qualitative object (two shoes). On the other hand, we may think of the shoes, together, as a single qualitative “object” in terms of its utility and in terms of synthesis of content and form (“a pair of shoes”), so much so that if one shoe is lost then the remaining shoe is considered useless and discarded as trash.

Because there are countless ways in which quality — the configuration and relations and composition of constituent parts of any given subject — can manifest, we must recognize that quality itself, based on the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental attributes, is a relative and subjective phenomenon of human consciousness.

Any given subject will have multiple qualities, depending on the relations which exist between and within that subject and other subjects.

Annotation 169

Any thing, phenomenon, or idea may be perceived from various different perspectives which would cause us to consider it as having different qualities. A single shoe may be considered as: a shoe, 3 pounds of leather, half of a pair, etc., depending on its internal and external relations and the perspective of the person considering the shoe.

We can't consider things, phenomena, and ideas apart from quality. Quality exhibits a subject's relative stability.

Annotation 170

Remember that *quality* is the way in which the human mind conceives of the world as a collection of distinct things, phenomena, and ideas. These perceptions of quality are purely relative, but they are important, because they are what allow us to develop an understanding of the complicated system of things, phenomena, and ideas which make up our universe. In our perception, quality represents the relative stability of a thing, phenomenon, or idea which makes it a subject that we can consider and analyze in and of itself. Understanding how we distinguish between different subjects is crucial in developing a scientific understanding of the world which is rooted in observation and practice.

- *Definition of Quantity*

Quantity refers to the amount or extent of specific attributes of a thing, phenomenon, or idea, including but not limited to:

- The amount of component parts.
- Scale or size.
- Speed or rhythm of motion.

A thing, phenomenon, or idea can have many quantities, with each quantity determined by different criteria. [i.e., a car may be measured by many criteria of quantity, such as: length in meters, weight in kilograms, speed in kilometers per hour, etc.]

Quality and quantity embody two different aspects of the same subject. Both quality and quantity exist objectively [see Annotation 108, p. 112]. However, the distinction

between “quality” and “quantity” in the process of perceiving things, phenomena, and ideas has only relative significance: an attribute may be considered “quantity” from one perspective but “quality” from another perspective.

Annotation 171

If you are filling a box with a dozen donuts, then once you add the 12th donut, one “dozen” may represent the *quality* which you seek. From the perspective of a customer buying donuts for a party, “dozen” may represent the “quantity.” In other words, you need to make an *order* (quality) of *three dozen donuts* (quantity). And the manager of the store, at the end of the day, may tally *twenty orders* (quantity) as the day’s *sales goal* (quality). Quantity and quality, therefore, are both considered *relatively*, based on perspective and the purpose of analysis at hand.

b. Dialectical Relationship Between Quantity and Quality

Every thing, phenomenon, and idea exists as a unity of two aspects: quality and quantity. Quantity and quality do not exist separate from one another. Quantity and quality dialectically and mutually impact one other. Changes in quantity lead to changes in quality. However, not every change in quantity will cause a change in quality.

Annotation 172

In order for quantity change to lead to quality change, a certain amount must be met.

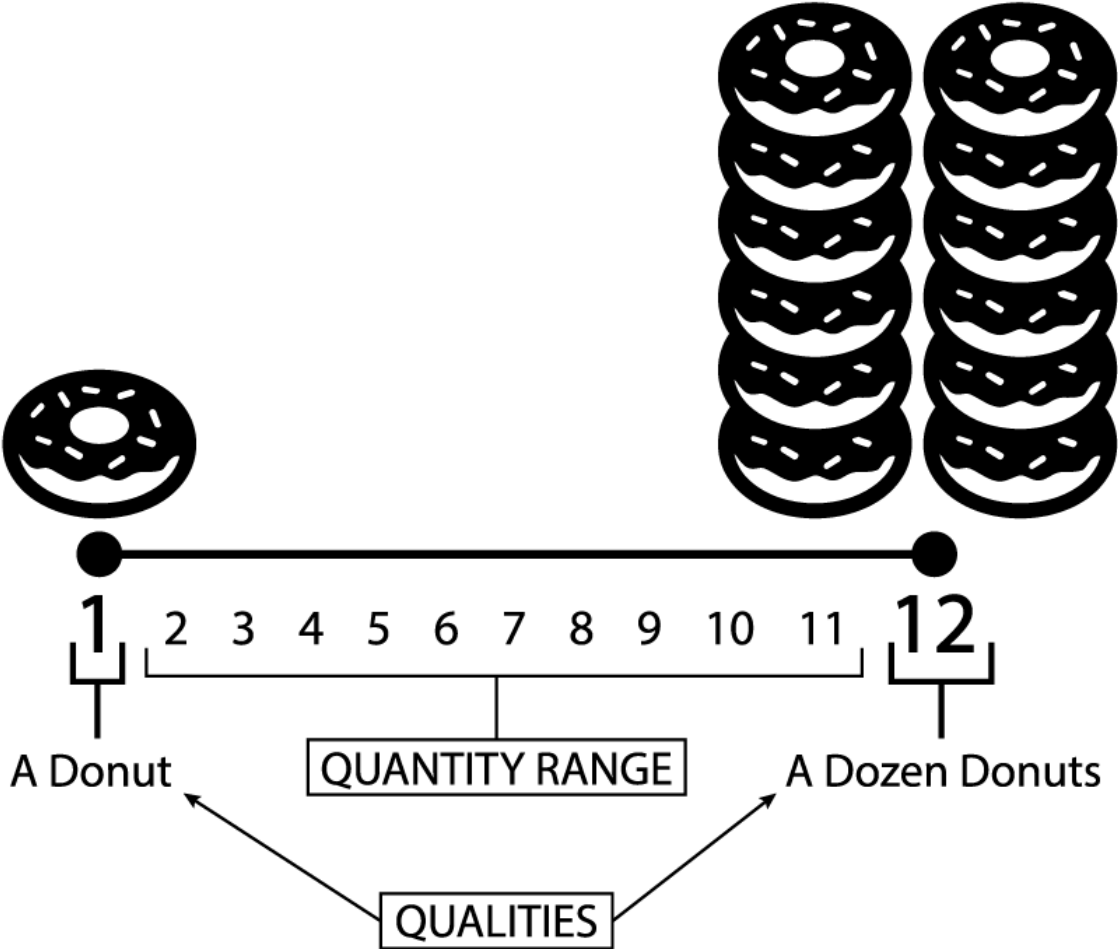
This amount is called the *threshold*, which is explained further below in this section. A threshold may be exact and known (i.e., it takes exactly 12 donuts to make a dozen donuts) or it may be relative and unknown (i.e., a certain quantity of air inflated into a balloon may cause it to burst, but the exact, specific quantity of air may be relative to other factors such as air temperature and may be unknown to the observer until the balloon actually bursts).

With any given subject, there will be a range of quantity changes which can accumulate without leading to change in quality. This range is called the *quantity range*.

Quantity range is defined as a relationship between quantity and quality: the range of intervals in which the change in quantity does not substantially change the quality

of a given subject. Within the limits of a quantity range, the subject retains the same quality.

Annotation 173



The quantity range is a range of quantities between quality shifts.

Quantity range can be thought of as the range of quantities which exists between thresholds. For instance, between the qualities of “one donut” and “one dozen donuts,” there is a quantity range of 10 donuts (2 donuts through 11 donuts) which can be added before the quality shifts to “one dozen donuts.” You can keep adding additional

donuts, up to the quantity of 11 donuts, without reaching the threshold of quality shift to “one dozen donuts.” This is the *quantity range* between the qualities of *donut* and *one dozen donuts*. Again, the quantity range is relative to the perspective and the nature of analysis. One person may only be concerned with “dozens of donuts,” while another may consider the quality of “half dozens,” which would consider a quality shift to “one half-dozen donuts” to occur once the sixth donut (quantity) is added.

Motion and change usually begins with a change in quantity. When changes in quantity reach a certain amount, quality will also change. The amount, or degree, of quantity change at which quality change occurs is called the *threshold*.

Annotation 174

Note that the threshold is an approximate range. At a certain quantity, a glass may be considered “half full” and at another certain quantity, after passing the threshold, the glass will be considered “full,” though there may be a wide range of quantities at which the glass would be considered to have the quality of being “full,” depending on perspective and purpose of analysis.

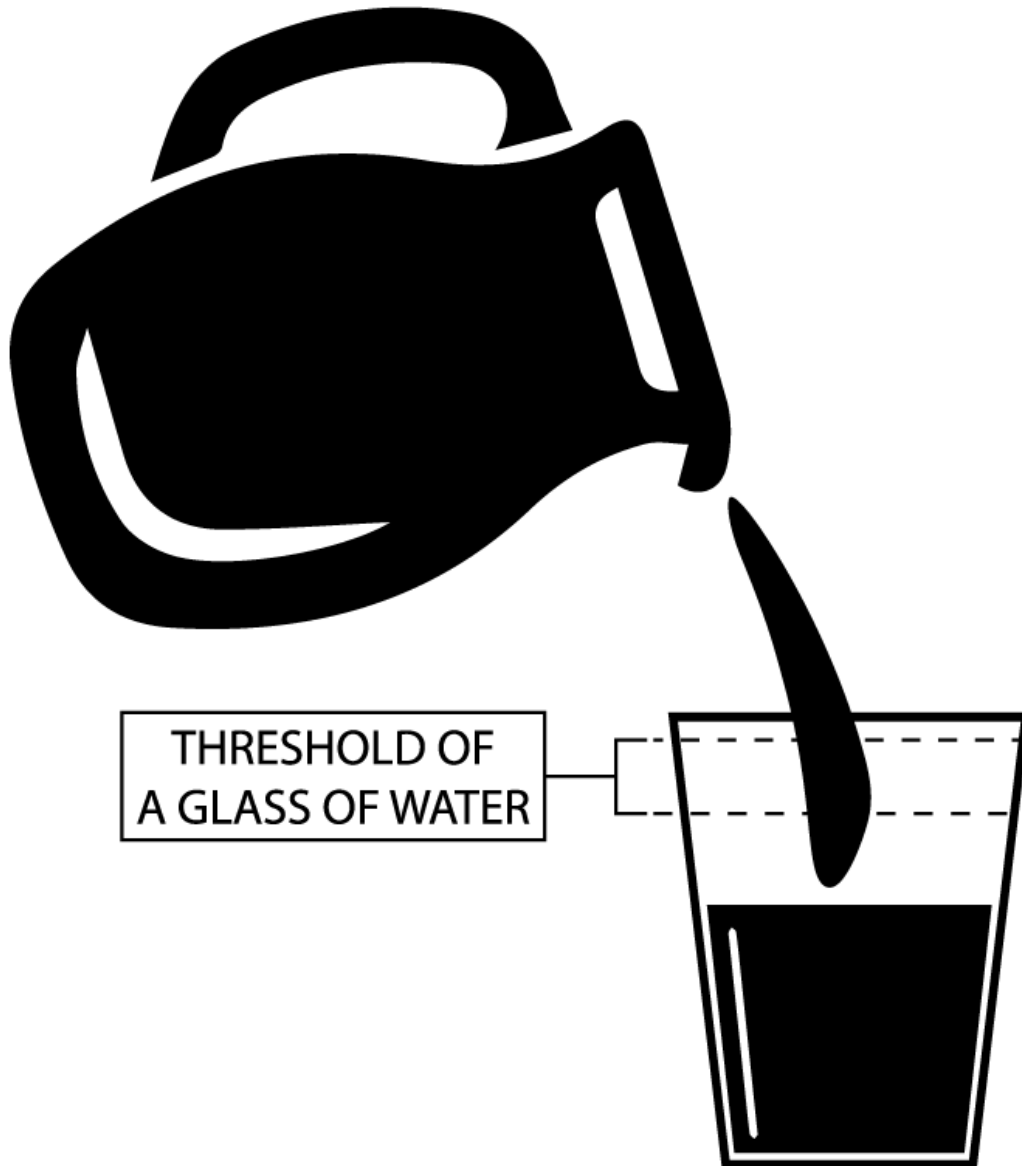
When quantity change meets a threshold, within necessary and specific conditions, quality will change. This change in quality, which takes place in the motion and development process of things, phenomena, and ideas, is called a *quality shift*.

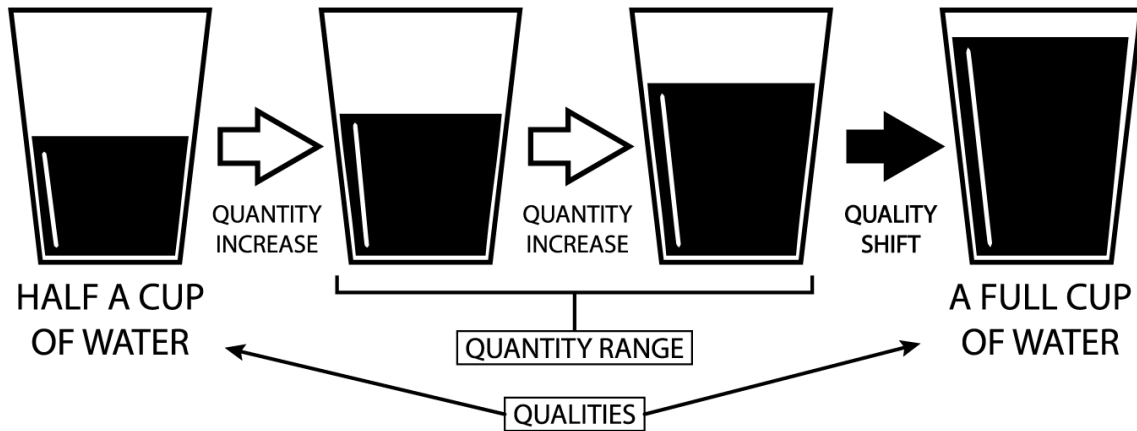
Quality shifts inevitably occur as transformations in the development processes of things, phenomena, and ideas. Qualitative changes can be expressed or manifested through many forms of quality shifts which are determined by the contradictions, characteristics and conditions of a given subject, including such characteristics as: fast or slow, big or small, partial or entire, spontaneous or intentional.

Annotation 175

Quality shifts are *inevitable* because there is no thing, phenomenon, nor idea which can exist statically, forever, without ever undergoing change. Eventually, any given subject will undergo quality shifts, even if such transformation may take millions of years to occur.

Quality shifts can take various forms, depending on the nature of internal and external relationships, contradictions, and mutual impacts. For instance, a river may dry up or it may flood depending on internal and external relations and characteristics, but it will not simply flow at the same level forever without ever undergoing any quality shifts.





A quality shift occurs when a quantity changes beyond a threshold, leading to a change in quality.

The rate and degree of quality shifts can vary considerably based on such internal and external factors, and may be “spontaneous,” that is to say, without human intervention, or may be the result of the intentional, conscious action of human beings.

Quality shifts mark the end of one motion period and the start of a new motion period.

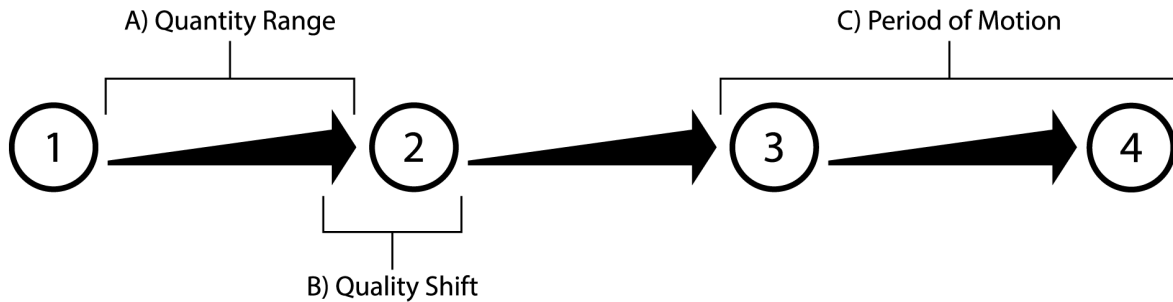
Annotation 176

Period of motion refers to the development which occurs between two quality shifts, including the quality shifts themselves.

Period of motion differs from *quantity range* because quantity range only includes the range of quantity change which can occur *between* quality shifts, without including the quality shifts themselves.

For example, a *period of motion* for a cup filling with water from a half cup would include all of the change which occurs from the cup being half full to the cup becoming entirely full. The *quantity range* of this same process would only include the quantities of water that stand between half-full and full, where the cup is neither considered to be “half full” or “full” but somewhere in between, i.e., between quality shifts.

Quality shift represents *discontinuity* within the continuous development process of things and phenomena. In the material world, all things, phenomena, and ideas are constantly undergoing continuous sequences of quantitative changes leading to quality



The Quantity Range (A) refers to the range of quantities between two qualities in the process of development. The Quality Shift (B) refers to the point at which quantity accumulates to the point of changing the Quality of the developing subject. The Period of Motion (C) includes both the quantity range and the quality shifts themselves.

shifts, creating an endless line of nodes, showing how all things, phenomena, and ideas move and develop to increasingly advanced degrees [see illustration on p. 121 for a visualization of this “endless line of nodes”].

As Friedrich Engels summarised: “merely quantitative changes beyond a certain point pass into qualitative differences.”¹

Annotation 177

Processes of change and development in our universe are continuously ongoing. Whenever a quality shift occurs, it represents a brief *discontinuity* in the sense that we perceive a definite and *distinct* transformation from one thing, phenomenon, or idea into another; in other words, we can *distinguish* between the mode of existence of the thing, phenomenon, or idea before and after the quality shift.

Take, for example, the “lifespan” of a house. A human being could easily distinguish between the empty land which exists before the house is built, the construction site which exists as it’s being built, and the house itself once construction is completed. In reality, this process of change is continuous, but to our human perception, each quality shift represents a definite and distinct period of change and discontinuity in terms of our perception of the “thing” which is the house.

This is related to the *historic perspective* of things, phenomena, and ideas, in which we recognize the continuity of existence between different stages of development of things, phenomena, and ideas [see Annotation 201, p. 195].

When a quality shift occurs, there is an impact on the quantity. Quality impacts quantity in a number of ways, including [but not limited to]:

- Changing the structure, scale, or level of the subject.

¹ *Anti-Dühring*, Friedrich Engels, 1878.

- Changing the rhythm or speed of the motion and development of the subject.

In summary, dialectical unity between quantity and quality exists in every thing, phenomenon, and idea. A gradual quantitative change [through the *quantity range*] will eventually meet the *threshold*, which will inevitably lead to a qualitative change through *quality shift*. Simultaneously, the new quality will mutually impact the quantity, causing new quantitative changes of things, phenomena, and ideas. This process takes place continuously, forming the fundamental and universal mode of movement and development processes of all things, phenomena, and ideas.

Annotation 178

Transformation between quantity and quality is the mode of movement and development of all things, phenomena, and ideas, because it reflects the way in which human consciousness perceives movement and development.

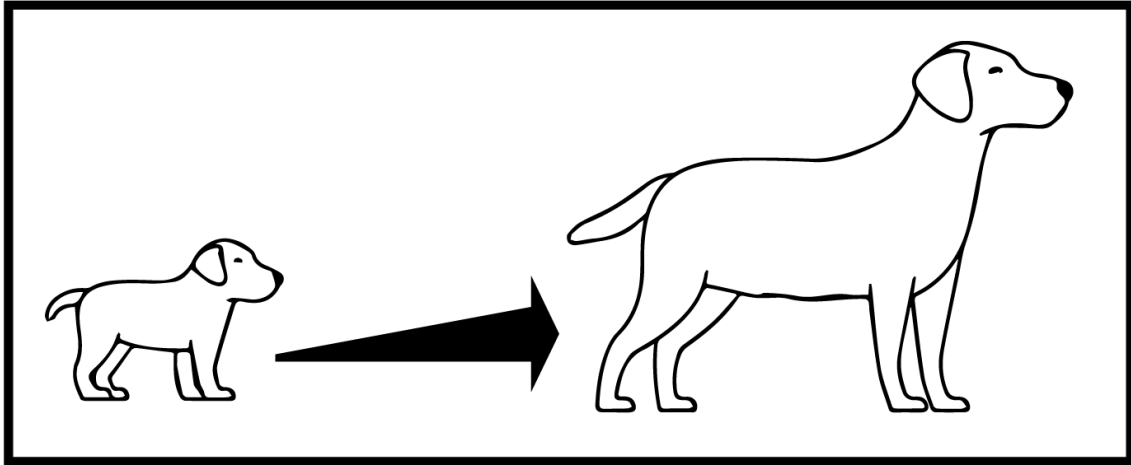
So, it is important to understand that there is no *material manifestation* of quantity and quality. They are simply mental constructs which reflect the ways in which we observe and understand change, motion, and development of things, phenomena, and ideas. Transformation processes in the material world are fully fluid and continuous, but our consciousness perceives change in *stages of development*. Quality simply reflects how we distinguish one subject from another subject, as well as how we recognize the transformation process (and stages of development) of a single subject over time.

There is no specific point, metaphysically distinct point at which a “puppy” becomes an “adult dog,” but human beings will distinguish between a puppy and an adult dog, or recognize at a certain point that a puppy has “become” an adult dog, based on observation of quality.

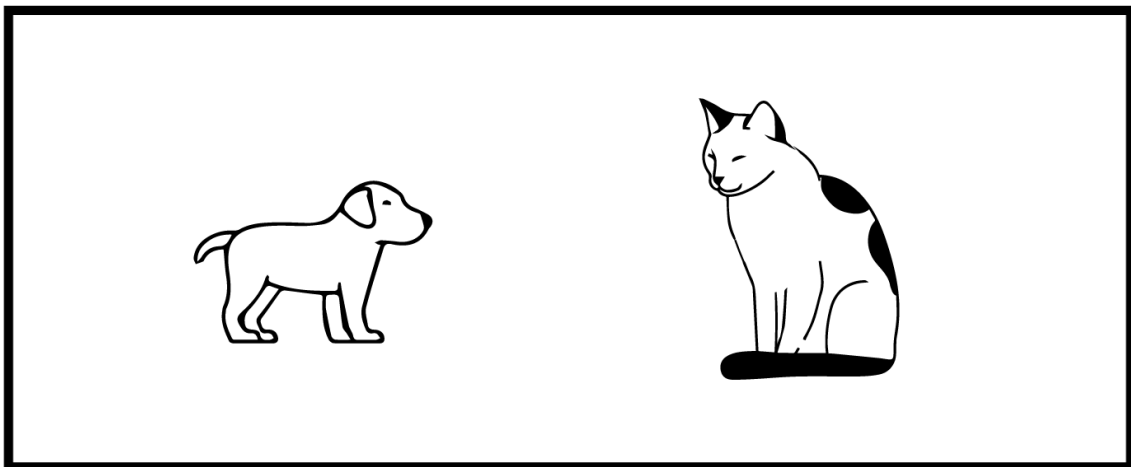
There is no metaphysically distinct point at which a “puppy” becomes an “adult dog,” but human beings will distinguish between a puppy and an adult dog, or recognize at a certain point that a puppy has “become” an adult dog, based on observation of quality. We create categories which reflect quality to organize and systematically understand the world around us, and to distinguish between different subjects, and to distinguish between different stages of development of a given subject.

We can also distinguish differences of quality between different subjects: we can distinguish a cat from a dog, and we can distinguish one dog from another dog. These distinguishing attributes constitute differences in quality. Note that this conception of differentiation of things, phenomena, and ideas into qualities which constantly change and develop over time is fundamentally distinct from *metaphysical* categorization, which seeks to divide all things, phenomena, and ideas into static, perpetually unchanging categories (see Annotation 8, p. 8).

Distinction within the human mind is reflected in the concept of quantity and quality. If we do not observe quality differences between subjects, then we would not be able



QUALITY SHIFT OF A SINGLE SUBJECT OVER TIME



QUALITY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TWO SUBJECTS

Quality refers to the differences which are distinguished in human consciousness between one subject and another, or changes in a subject's form over time.

to distinguish between different subjects at all. If we could not recognize the quality shifts of any given subject, then we would not be aware of change or motion at all.

c. Meaning of the Methodology

Every thing, phenomenon and idea has characteristics of quality and quantity which mutually impact and transform one another. Therefore, in perception and practice, we need to understand and take into account the law of transformation between quantity and quality in order to have a comprehensive viewpoint of things, phenomena, and ideas [see Annotation 114, p. 116].

Quantitative changes of things, phenomena and ideas inevitably lead to qualitative changes in all things, phenomena, and ideas. Therefore, in our perception and practice, as we plan and enact change in our world and in human society, it is necessary to gradually accumulate changes in quantity in order to make changes in quality. At the same time, we must recognize and make use of the fact that quality shifts also lead to changes in quantity.

Annotation 179

We have to understand and utilize the law of transformation between quantity and quality in our activities. For instance, if a group of activists hopes to address hunger in their community, they have to realize that they can't immediately enact a quality shift which solves the entire problem of hunger across the city instantaneously. Instead, the activists must recognize that quantity shifts lead to quality shifts through stages of development. In planning and acting, they may need to set certain development targets, predict thresholds at which quality shifts will occur, etc.

For instance, the first goal for these activists may be to provide free lunches to houseless people in a particular park every weekend. If they can accomplish this, then they will not have completely eliminated hunger in the city, but they will have reached a threshold — a quality shift — in that nobody in that specific park will be hungry at lunch time on weekends. From there, they can continue to build quality shifts through accumulation of changes in quantity, one stage of development at a time.

Quality shifts leading to quantity shifts must also be recognized and utilized in our planning and activities. For example, once an effective strategy is developed for eliminating hunger in one park through quantity changes leading to quality shifts, this

strategy can then be implemented in other parks. Thus the quality shift of “eliminating hunger in one park” can lead to a quantity shift: “eliminating hunger in two parks, three parks, etc.,” until the quantity shift of “eliminating hunger in parks” leads to the quality shift of “eliminating hunger in all the parks in the city.” This entire process of enacting quantity changes to lead to quality shifts, and accumulating quality shifts to change quantity, are all focused toward the ultimate goal of achieving the quality shift of “eliminating hunger in the entire city.”

In short, it’s vital for us to understand the ways in which quantity and quality mutually impact each other so that we can formulate plans and activities which will lead to motion and development which accomplish our goals, step by step, through one stage of development at a time.

Changes in quantity can only lead to changes in quality provided the quantity accumulates to a certain threshold. Therefore, in practice, we need to overcome impatient, left-sided thought. Left-sided thinking refers to thinking which is overly subjective, idealistic, ignorant of the laws which govern material reality. Left-sided thinking neglects to acknowledge the necessity of quantity accumulation which precedes shifts in quality, focusing instead on attempting to perform continuous shifts in quality.

On the other hand, we must also recognize that once change in quantity has reached a threshold, it is *inevitable* that a quality shift will take place. Therefore, we need to overcome conservative and right-sided thought in practical work. Right-sided thinking is the expression of conservative, stagnant thought that resists or refuses to recognize quality shifts even as changes in quantity come to meet the threshold of quality shift.

Annotation 180

“Right-sided thinking” and “left-sided thinking” are Vietnamese political concepts which are rooted in the ideas of Lenin’s book: *Leftwing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*. In Vietnamese political philosophy, “left-sided thinking” is a form of dogmatic idealism which upholds unrealistic conceptions of change and development. Left-sided thinkers don’t have the patience for quantity accumulation which are prerequisite to quality shifts, or expect to skip entire stages of development which are necessary to precipitate change in the real world. An example of left-sided thinking would be believing that a capitalist society can *instantly* transition into a stateless, classless, communist society, skipping over the transitions in quantity and quality which are required to bring such a massive transformation in human society to fruition.

“Right-sided thinking,” on the other hand, is conservative resistance to change. Right-sided thinkers resist quality changes to human society; they either want to preserve society as it exists right now, or reverse development to some previous (real or imagined) stage of development. Right-sided thinkers also refuse to acknowledge quality

shifts once they've occurred, idealistically pretending that changes in material conditions have not occurred. For example, right-sided thinkers may refuse to recognize advances which have been made in the liberation of women, or even attempt to reverse those advances in hopes of returning to previous stages of development when women had fewer freedoms. Here is a practical example of these concepts in use, from the *Vietnam Encyclopedia*, published by the Ministry of Culture and Information of Vietnam:

Opportunism is a system of political views that do not follow a clear direction nor a clear line, do not have a definite stance, and are inclined toward the immediate personal gain of the opportunist. In the proletarian revolutionary movement, opportunism is a politics of compromise, reform, and unprincipled collaboration with the enemy which run contrary to the basic interests of the working class and the working people. In practice, opportunism has two main trends, stemming from right-sided thinking and from left-sided thinking, respectively:

Right-wing opportunism is reformist, favors undue compromise, and aims to peacefully “convert” capitalism into socialism while abandoning the struggle for meaningful victory of the working class. Right-wing opportunism, typified by Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky, has its origins in the Workers' Parties of the Second International era and exists to this day.

Left-wing opportunism is a mixture of extremism and adventurism, dogmatism, arrogance, subjectivity, cults of violence, and disregard for the objective situation.

Both “right” and “left” opportunism push the workers' movement to futile sacrifice and failure.

Quality shifts are diverse and plentiful, so we need to promote and apply quality shifts creatively and flexibly to suit the specific material conditions we face in a given situation. This is especially true in changing human society, as social development processes depend not only on objective conditions but also on subjective human factors. Therefore, we need to be active and take the initiative to promote the process of converting between quantity and quality in the most effective way.

Annotation 181

Put simply, we have to use our human will and labor to actively promote quantity changes which lead to quality changes, and quality changes which lead to quantity changes, which move us towards our goal of ending all forms of oppression in human society. This will involve not just objective factors² (i.e., material conditions which are necessary to accomplish something), but subjective factors³ as well (factors which we, as a subject, are capable of impacting directly).

2. Law of Unification and Contradiction Between Opposites

The law of unification and contradiction between opposites is the *Essence* of dialectics [see: *Essence and Phenomenon*, p. 156]. According to Lenin: “In brief, dialectics can be defined as the doctrine of the unity of opposites. This embodies the Essence of dialectics, but it requires explanations and development.”⁴ According to the law of unification and contradiction between opposites, the fundamental, originating, and universal driving force of all motion and development processes is the inherent and objective contradiction which exists in all things, phenomena, and ideas.

Annotation 182

In other words, *contradiction* (defined further in the next section) is the force which serves as the fundamental, originating, and universal force which drives all motion and development of all things, phenomena, and ideas.

Contradiction is a *fundamental driving force* because it is the most basic driving force which all other forms of motion and development are based upon.

Contradiction is the *originating driving force* because all motion and development arises from contradiction.

Contradiction is the *universal driving force* because *all* things, phenomena, and ideas — without exception — are driven to motion and development by contradiction.

a. Definition of Contradiction and Common Characteristics of Contradiction

- *Definition of Contradiction*

² See Annotation 108, p. 112.

³ See Annotation 207, p. 202.

⁴ *Summary of Dialectics*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1914.

In dialectics, the concept of contradiction is used to refer to the relationship, opposition, and transformation between opposites which takes place *within* all things, phenomena, and ideas, as well as *between* all things, phenomena, and ideas. This dialectical concept of contradiction is fundamentally different from the metaphysical concept of contradiction. The metaphysical concept of contradiction is an illogical conception of opposition without unity and without dialectical transformation between opposites.

Annotation 183

A contradiction is, fundamentally, just a type of relationship. In a contradictory relationship, two things, phenomena, and/or ideas mutually impact one another, resulting in the eventual *negation* of one subject and the *synthesis* of the negator and the negated into some new form.

The metaphysical concept of contradiction is considered illogical because it establishes no connection between that which is negated and the resulting synthesis.

Metaphysical contradiction presents contradicting subjects as isolated from one another and completely distinct, when in reality the relationship between the negated and the negator essentially defines the contradiction. The negated subject is seen as completely negated; that is to say, it is conceived of as essentially “disappearing” into the synthesized result of the contradiction. In this sense, this metaphysical conception of negation is inaccurate in that it is represented as a complete, terminating process.

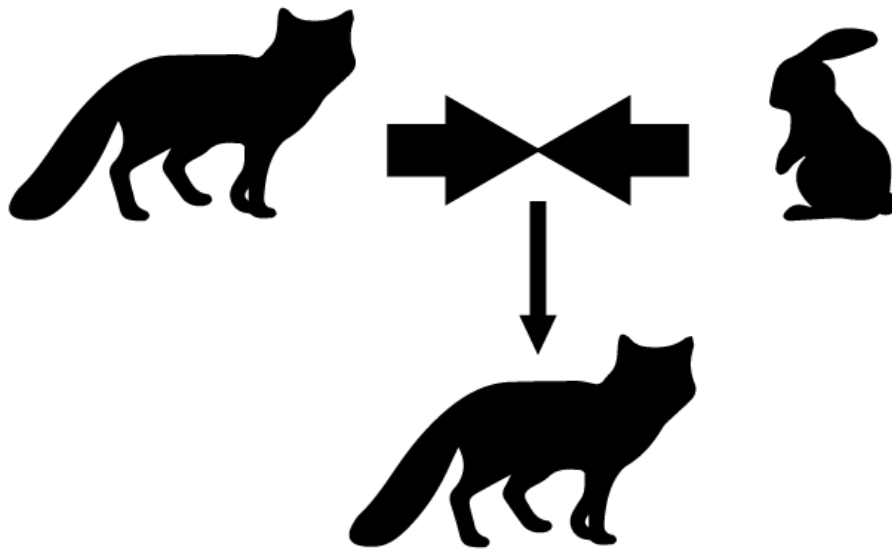
In the above example, once the fox eats the rabbit, the rabbit is considered “gone” after a terminal negation process (see Annotation 196, p. 188) ends the contradiction.

Materialist dialectical contradiction recognizes that every contradiction is defined by the relationship between the negated and the negator. Materialist dialectics also recognizes that attributes and characteristics of the negated subject are carried forward into the synthesized subject [see Annotation 203, p. 198]. Materialist dialectics also recognizes that contradiction continues indefinitely, as the negated becomes negated again, and so on, continuously, forever [see *Negation of Negation*, p. 185].

In the example on the previous page, the fox consuming the rabbit constitutes a negation process in which the fox takes on characteristics from the rabbit (i.e., nutritional and energy content, any diseases which may be carried forward to the fox, etc.).

Contradiction arises from opposition which exists within or between things, phenomena, and ideas. The concept of opposing “sides” refers to such aspects, properties, and tendencies of motion which oppose one another, yet are, simultaneously, conditions and premises of the existence of one another. Examples include:

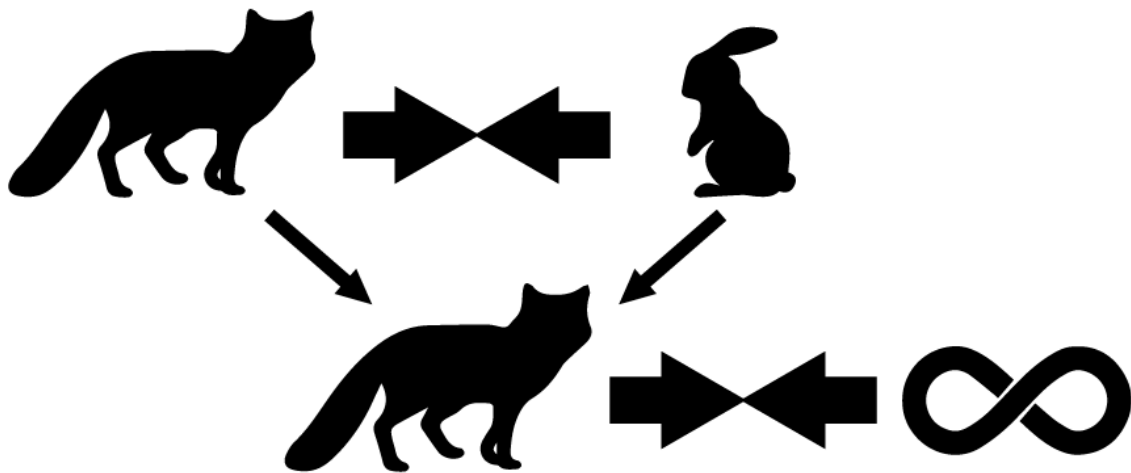
- Negative charge and positive charge within atoms.



METAPHYSICAL CONTRADICTION

- Contradicting subjects are isolated and distinct
- Complete negation of one subject by the other
- Negation ends contradiction once and for all

In the metaphysical conception of contradiction, the negated “disappears” and is not represented in the resulting synthesis.



CONTRADICTION IN MATERIALIST DIALECTICS

- Contradicting subjects are defined by their relationship
- Negated subject impacts negator; characteristics carried forward
- Contradiction and negation cycle continues forever

The materialist dialectical conception of contradiction recognizes that contradicting subjects are defined by their relationship and that the synthesis of the contradiction carries forward attributes and characteristics from both the negator and the negated.

- Anabolism and catabolism within living organisms [anabolism refers to the growth and building up of molecules within an organism, while catabolism refers to the digestion and breaking down of molecules within an organism].
- Production and consumption as socioeconomic activities.
- Trial and error which leads to cognitive development.

Annotation 184

All of the above forms of contradiction *drive motion and development*. These processes exist in *unity and opposition*. For example, in political economics, production is driven by consumption and consumption is facilitated by production. Even though these are fundamentally opposite forces (production adds to the total quantity of products, while consumption reduces the total quantity of products), they can't exist without one another, and they drive each other forward. This is the dialectical nature of contradiction as the driving force of all motion and development as defined in materialist dialectics.

- *The General Properties of Contradictions*

Contradiction is objective and universal. According to Friedrich Engels: "If simple mechanical change of position contains a contradiction, this is even more true of the higher forms of motion of matter, and especially of organic life and its development. We saw above that life consists precisely and primarily in this — that a being is at each moment itself and yet something else. Life is therefore also a contradiction which is present in things and processes themselves, and which constantly originates and resolves itself; and as soon as the contradiction ceases, life, too, comes to an end, and death steps in. We likewise saw that also, in the sphere of thought, we could not escape contradictions, and that, for example, the contradiction between man's inherently unlimited capacity for knowledge and its actual presence only in men who are externally limited and possess limited cognition finds its solution in what is — at least practically, for us — an endless succession of generations, in infinite progress."⁵

Annotation 185

Here, Engels is explaining how contradiction is the driving force in both material and conscious processes of motion and development. The process of life is a process of contradiction — all organic life forms must consume organic matter so that they can produce growth and offspring, must produce certain molecules and metabolic processes so that they can consume nutrients, and so on. Once these contradictory processes stop, as Engels says, "death steps in" (though even death is a transition forward).

⁵ *Anti-Dühring*, Friedrich Engels, 1877.

Conscious motion and development are also rooted in contradictory forces. Engels points out the contradiction between humanity's seemingly infinite capacity for learning with the seemingly infinite amount of knowledge which can be obtained in the world. This great contradiction drives a seemingly endless process of expanding human knowledge, collectively, over countless generations.

Contradictions are not only objective and universal, but also diverse and plentiful. The diverse nature of contradictions is evident in the fact that every subject can include many different contradictions and that contradictions manifest differently depending upon specific conditions. Contradictions can hold different positions and roles in the existence, motion, and development of things, phenomena, and ideas. These positions and roles include [but are not limited to]:

- Internal and external contradictions
- Fundamental and non-fundamental contradictions
- Primary and secondary contradictions

Annotation 186

Internal contradictions are contradictions which exist in the *internal relations* of a subject, while *external* contradictions exist *between* two or more subjects as external relations.

For example: a sports team might have *internal contradictions* between players, between the players and the coach, between the coach and management, etc. External contradictions might exist between the team and other teams, between the team and league officials, between the team and the landlords who own the team's practice space, etc.

A *fundamental* contradiction is a contradiction which defines the Essence of a relationship [see *Essence and Phenomenon*, p. 156]. Fundamental contradictions exist throughout the entire development process of a given thing, phenomenon, or idea. A *non-fundamental* contradiction exists in only one aspect or attribute of a thing, phenomenon, or idea. A non-fundamental contradiction can *impact* a subject, but it will not control or decide the essential development of the subject. Whether or not a contradiction is fundamental is relative to the point of view.

For example: the *fundamental contradiction* of one nation engaged in war against one another might be the war itself. There will exist many other contradictions; one nation at war might have a trade dispute with a third nation which is not participating in the war. From the "war perspective," this contradiction is *non-fundamental*, as it does not define the essential characteristic of the nation at war (though from the perspective of a diplomat charged with ending the trade dispute, the war may be seen as a non-fundamental contradiction while the dispute would be seen as fundamental).

In the development of things, phenomena, and ideas, there are many development stages. In each stage of development, there will be one contradiction which drives the development process. This is what we call the *primary* contradiction. *Secondary* contradictions include all the other contradictions which exist during that stage of development. Determining whether a contradiction is primary or secondary is relative: it depends heavily upon the material conditions and the situation.

For example: when restoring an old car that doesn't run any more, a mechanic may consider the *primary contradiction* to be the non-functioning engine. There may be many *secondary contradictions* which contribute to the problems with the car's engine problems. The battery may be dead, the spark plugs may need to be bad, the tires may need replacement, the timing belt may be loose, etc. Those are all *secondary contradictions* which do not define the stage of development which is "repairing the engine." Some of these secondary contradictions may need to be resolved (such as replacing the spark plugs) before the primary contradiction can be fully addressed; others, such as a cracked windshield, may not need to be addressed before the primary contradiction can be dealt with.

On the other hand, a secondary contradiction may become the primary contradiction: if a mechanic resolves every problem with the engine *except* for one bad spark plug, then the bad spark plug will shift from being a secondary contradiction to being the primary contradiction: the bad spark plug is now the primary reason the car won't start and this stage of development can't be completed.

Within all the various fields of inquiry, there exist contradictions which have a diverse range of different properties and characteristics.

Annotation 187

Different fields of study will focus on different forms of contradictions, and any given thing, phenomenon, or idea may contain countless contradictions which can be analyzed and considered for different purposes. For example, consider a large city, which might contain far too many contradictions to count. Civil engineers may focus primarily on contradictions in traffic patterns, the structural integrity of bridges and roads, ensuring that buildings are safe and healthy for inhabitants, etc. Utilities departments will focus on contradictions related to sewage, electrical, and sanitation systems. The education system will focus on contradictions which prevent students from achieving success in schools.

All of these various methods of analysis may focus on specific forms of contradictions, though there will also be overlap. For instance, designing a school bus system will require the education system and civil engineers to discover and grapple with contradictions which might be hindrances for transporting students safely to school.

b. Motion Process of Contradictions

In every contradiction, the opposing sides are united with each other and opposed to each other at the same time. The concept of “unity between opposites” refers to the fact that a contradiction is a binding, inseparable, and mutually impacting relationship which exists between opposites.

Annotation 188

Contradictions are *binding* and *inseparable* because they hold a relationship together. If two opposing things, phenomena, or ideas simply *separate*, then contradiction, by definition, no longer exists. For example, an economy is bound together by the contradiction of production and consumption; if production exists without consumption (or vice-versa), it can't be considered to be an economy.

Contradictions are said to be *mutually impacting* because any time a contradiction exists between two opposing sides, both sides are mutually impacted for as long as the contradiction exists and develops. Of course, it is possible for two opposing sides to separate from one another; for example, a factory which produced buggy whips may have failed to find consumers after the invention of the car. Thus, there would exist a situation in which production exists without consumption. In this situation, the termination of the contradiction between production and consumption leads to a new contradiction: the factory will now be in the midst of a crisis which will require it to either provide a different product or go out of business.

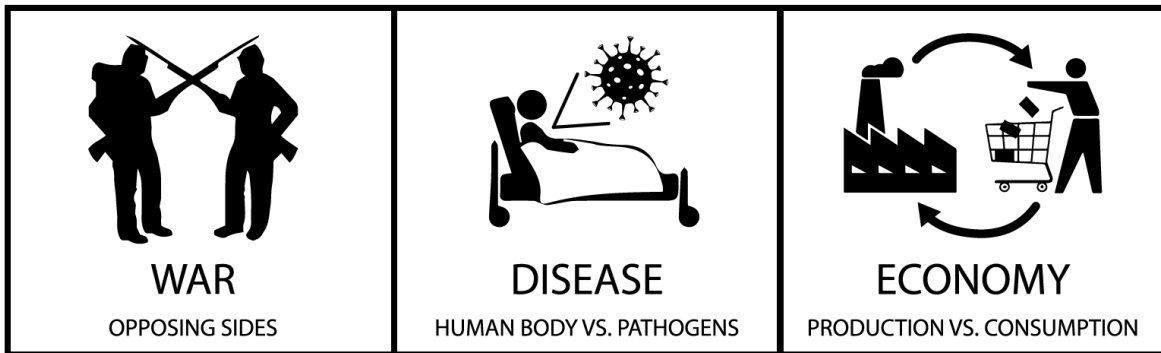
Thus we see that production and consumption can't be separated from one another without leading to a change in the essential nature of the relationship and the opposing subjects, and we see that the opposing sides mutually impact one another (a change in consumption will affect production, and vice-versa).

In any given contradictory relationship, each oppositional side is the premise for the other's existence. Unity among opposites also defines the identity of each opposing side. Lenin wrote: “The identity of opposites (it would be more correct, perhaps, to say their ‘unity,’—although the difference between the terms identity and unity is not particularly important here. In a certain sense, both are correct) is the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, mutually exclusive, opposite tendencies in all phenomena and processes of nature (including mind and society).”⁶

⁶ *On the Questions of Dialectics*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1915.

Annotation 189

Here, Lenin is explaining that *identity* and *unity* are (more or less) the same concept when it comes to understanding the nature of contradiction between opposites. In material processes of nature, social processes, and processes of consciousness, we perceive and define oppositional forces by recognizing mutually exclusive and contradictory tendencies within and between things, phenomena, and ideas. In other words, whenever we think of an oppositional relationship, we *define it* in terms of the opposition.



CONTRADICTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE DEFINED AND UNIFIED BY OPPOSITION

War, disease, and economy are all examples of unity in contradiction.

When we think of a war, we think of the contradictions which exist *between* the opposing nations. When we think of a disease, we define it by the oppositional forces *between* the ailment and the human body. When we think of an economy, we think of the oppositional forces of production and consumption *within* the economy.

In other words, the identity of contradictory relationships is *defined* by the *unity* of the opposing sides with one another.

The concept *struggle of opposites* refers to the tendency of opposites to eliminate and negate each other. There exist many diverse forms of struggle between opposites. Struggle can manifest in various forms based on:

- The nature of a given thing, phenomenon, or idea.
- Relationships within a thing, phenomenon, or idea (or between things, phenomena, and ideas).
- Specific material conditions [see Annotation 10, p. 10].

The process of unity and struggle of opposites inevitably leads to a *transformation between them*. The transformation between opposites takes place with rich diversity,

and such transformations can vary depending on the properties of the opposite sides as well as specific material conditions.

Annotation 190

Opposing sides, by definition, *oppose* one another. If forces or characteristics which exist within or between things, phenomena, or ideas do *not* oppose one another, then they are not, by definition, *opposites*. Thus, it can be understood that opposing sides have a tendency to *struggle against* one another. It is this very struggle which defines two sides as opposites, and as contradictory.

Lenin explained that some contradicting opposite sides can exist in what he described as *equilibrium*, but that this is only ever a temporary state of affairs, as exemplified in his article *An Equilibrium of Forces*.

[See Annotation 64, p. 62 for relevant text and more info on equilibrium.]

Clearly, Lenin sees that this equilibrium of contradictory forces is not permanently sustainable. Indeed, *no* equilibrium of contradictory forces can be permanent. Eventually, one opposing side will overtake the other, and eventually, any given contradiction will result in one opposing side overcoming the other.

According to the law of unification and contradiction between opposites, the struggle between two opposing sides is absolute, while the unity between them is relative, conditional, and temporary; in unity there is a struggle: a struggle in unity. According to Lenin: “The unity (coincidence, identity, equal action) of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative. The struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute.”⁷

Annotation 191

“Absolute” and “Relative” are philosophical classifications which refer to interdependence. That which is *absolute* exists independently and with permanence. That which is *relative* is temporary, and dependent on other conditions or circumstances in order to exist.

So Lenin’s point is that *unity* exists temporarily in any given pair of opposing sides, as the unity only exists as long as the opposing sides are opposing one another. As soon as one side eliminates or negates the other, the unity subsides. However, *opposition*

⁷ *On the Questions of Dialectics*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1915.

is considered absolute, because it is opposition which drives motion and change in all things, phenomena, and ideas through contradictory processes of opposing sides.

In the same text quoted in the passage above, *On the Questions of Dialectics*, Lenin notes:

The distinction between subjectivism (skepticism, sophistry, etc.) and dialectics, incidentally, is that in (objective) dialectics the difference between the relative and the absolute is itself relative. For objective dialectics there is an absolute within the relative. For subjectivism and sophistry the relative is only relative and excludes the absolute...

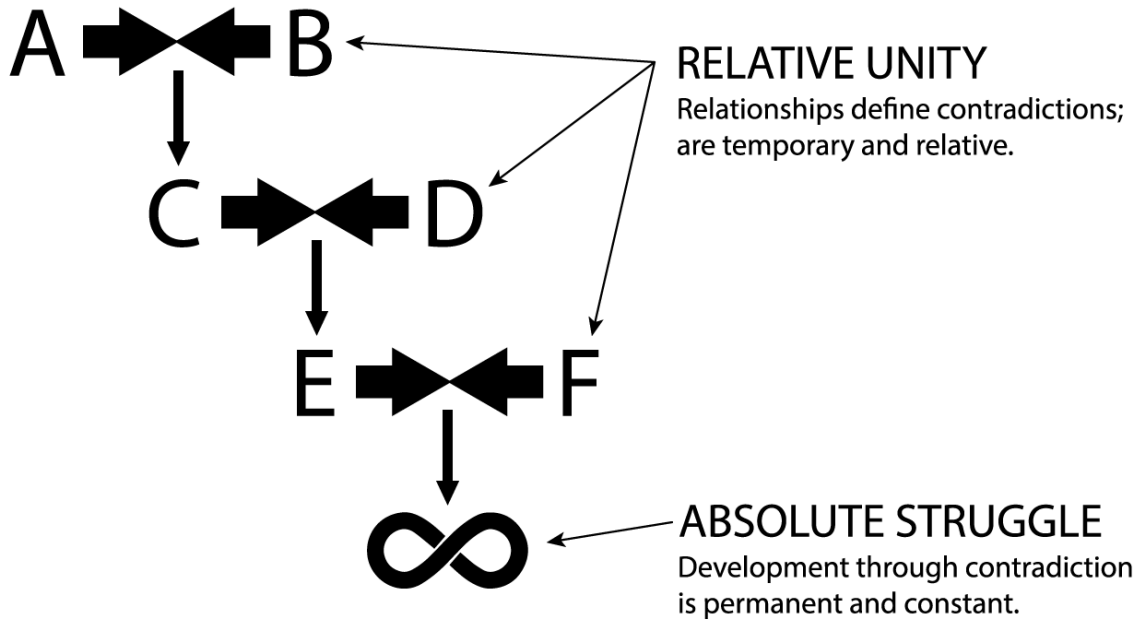
Such must also be the method of exposition (i.e., study) of dialectics in general... To begin with what is the simplest, most ordinary, common, etc., with any proposition: the leaves of a tree are green; John is a man; Fido is a dog, etc. Here already we have dialectics (as Hegel's genius recognised): the individual is the universal.

The individual exists only in the connection that leads to the universal. The universal exists only in the individual and through the individual. Every individual is (in one way or another) a universal. Every universal is (a fragment, or an aspect, or the essence of) an individual. Every universal only approximately embraces all the individual objects. Every individual enters incompletely into the universal, etc., etc. Every individual is connected by thousands of transitions with other kinds of individuals (things, phenomena, processes) etc. Here already we have the elements, the germs, the concepts of necessity, of objective connection in nature, etc. Here already we have the contingent and the necessary, the phenomenon and the essence; for when we say: John is a man, Fido is a dog, this is a leaf of a tree, etc., we disregard a number of attributes as contingent; we separate the essence from the appearance, and counterpose the one to the other.

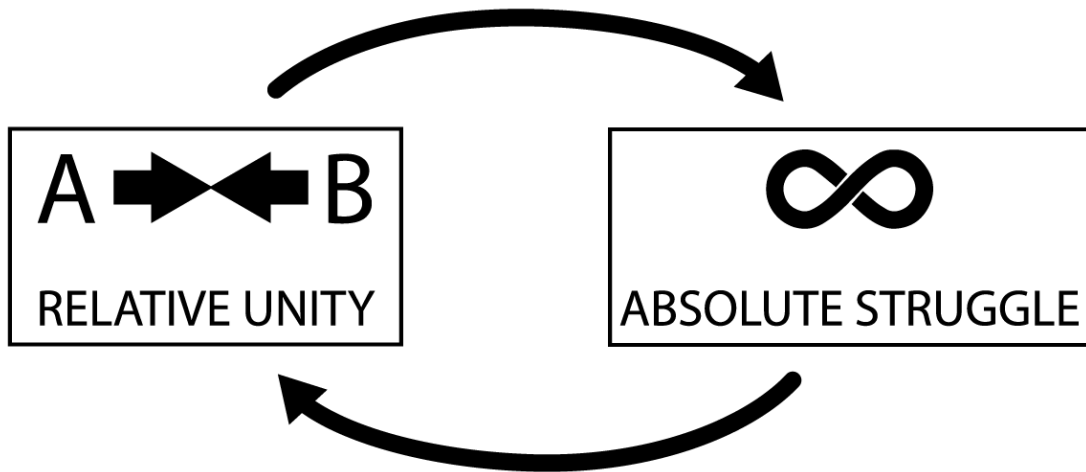
In other words, we must understand that in materialist dialectics, the absolute and the relative exist within one another; in other words, the absolute and the relative have a *dialectical relationship* with one another in all things, phenomena, and ideas.

Relative unity refers to the nature of *unity* between contradictory subjects. Contradictory subjects are *unified* in the sense that any given contradiction is essentially defined by the contradiction between two subjects. Thus, the two subjects are *unified* in contradiction. However, this unity is *relative* in the sense that this unification is temporary (the unity will end upon negation and synthesis) and relative (i.e., defined by the relationship between the two contradicting subjects).

Absolute struggle refers to the fact that contradiction, negation, and synthesis will go on forever; in this sense, contradictory processes are *absolute* because such struggle exists *permanently*; struggle has no set beginning or end point, and exists independently of any specific thing, phenomenon, or idea.



Relative Unity refers to the temporary and relative nature of specific relationships which define and unify specific contradictions; Absolute Struggle refers to the permanent, constant nature of development through contradiction.



DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELATIVE UNITY AND ABSOLUTE STRUGGLE

The relationship between relative unity and absolute struggle defines and drives change, motion, and development through contradiction.

This applies to contradictions. The *relative unity* and the *absolute struggle* between opposing sides have a dialectical relationship with one another. The permanent absoluteness of struggle — the fact that all things, phenomena, and ideas are constantly undergoing processes of change through contradictory forces — can only manifest in the relative unity of opposing sides, which can only exist through the temporary existence of conditional relations between opposing sides.

The interaction that leads to the transformation between opposites is a process. At the beginning, contradictions manifest as differences and then develop into two opposing sides. When the two contradictions are fiercely matched and when the conditions are ripe, they will transform each other, and finally, the conflict will be resolved. As old contradictions disappear, new contradictions are formed and the process of mutual impact and transformation between opposites continues, which drives the motion and development of all things, phenomena, and ideas. The relationship, impact and transformation between opposites are the source and driving force of all movement and development in the world. Lenin affirmed: “Development is the ‘struggle’ of opposites.”⁸

Annotation 192

Any given process of development — that is to say, of transformation or motion — can be seen as a struggle between opposites. Various forms of struggle can exist simultaneously for any given subject, and the way we interpret struggle can depend on our point of view.

For an engineer, a car moving along a road might be seen as a struggle between the power generated by the engine against the mass of the car itself and the friction of the tires on the ground. The driver of the car might see the process in terms of the struggle between the driver and the environment as they navigate across town avoiding accidents and following traffic laws.

An organism’s life can be seen as a struggle between the organism’s life processes and its environment, or it might be seen as a struggle of contradictory forces within the organism itself (i.e., forces of consumption of nutrition vs. forces of expending energy to survive, forces of disease vs. forces of the organism’s immune system, etc.).

Materialist dialectics requires us to identify, examine, and understand the opposing forces which drive all development in our universe. Only through understanding such contradictions can we intercede and affect changes in the world which suit our purposes.

⁸ *On the Questions of Dialectics*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1915.

For example, in order to fight against capitalism and other forms of oppression, we must first understand the contradictory forces which exist within and between those oppressive social structures. Only then can we determine how we might best apply our will, through labor processes, to dismantle such oppressive structures. We might do this by exacerbating existing contradictions within oppressive structures, by introducing new contradictions, by negating contradictions which inhibit our own progress, etc.

c. Meaning of the Methodology

Given that contradictions are objective and universal, and that they are the source and driving force of movement and development, it is therefore necessary to detect, recognize, and understand contradictions, to fully analyze opposing sides, and to grasp the nature, origin and tendencies of motion and development in our awareness and practice.

Lenin said: “The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts... is the *essence...* of dialectics.”⁹

Annotation 193

In other words, materialist dialectics is simply a system of understanding the world around us by viewing all things, phenomena, and ideas as collections of relationships and contradictions which exist within and between all things, phenomena, and ideas.

Since contradictions exist with such rich diversity, it is necessary to have a historical point of view [see Annotation 114, p. 116] — that is, to know how to analyze each specific type of contradiction and have appropriate methods for resolving them. In our perception and practice, it is necessary to properly distinguish the roles and positions of different types of contradictions in each situation and condition; we must also distinguish between different characteristics which contradictions might have in order to find the best method of resolving them.

Annotation 194

The historical viewpoint is vital because in order to fully understand any given contradiction, we must understand the process of development which led to its formation.

⁹ *On the Questions of Dialectics*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1915.

For example, before a car engine can be repaired, we must first find out what caused the engine to stop working to begin with. If the car is out of fuel, we must determine what caused it to run out of fuel. Did the driver simply drive until the fuel tank was empty, or is there a hole or leak in a fuel line, in the tank, etc.?

It is vital to know the history of development of a given pair of opposing sides, as well as the characteristics and other properties of both opposing sides, to fully understand the contradiction. Since all conscious activity (like all processes of motion and change) ultimately derives from the driving force of contradiction, it is vital for us to develop a historical and comprehensive perspective of any contradictions we hope to affect through our conscious activities.

3. Law of Negation of Negation

The law of negation of negation describes the fundamental and universal tendency of movement and development to occur through *dialectical negation*, forming a cyclical form of development through what is termed “*negation of negation*.”

a. Definition of Negation and Dialectical Negation

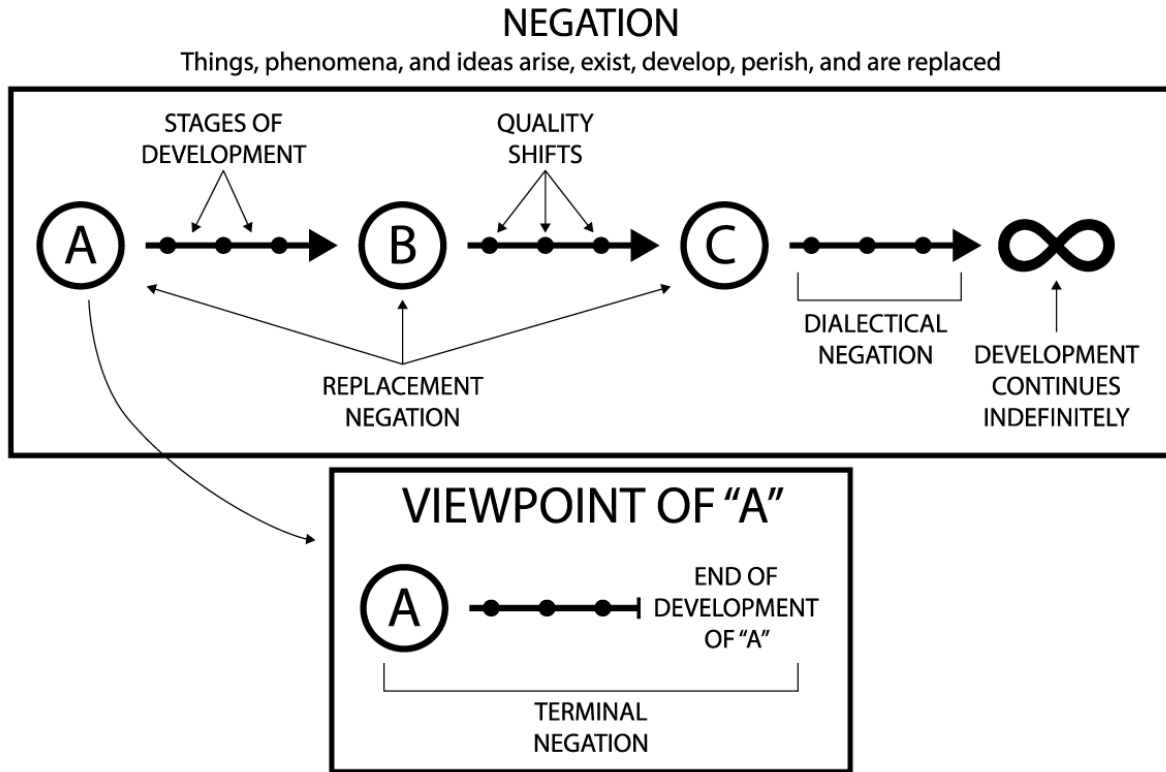
The world continuously and endlessly changes and develops. Things, phenomena, and ideas that arise, exist, develop and perish, are replaced by other things, phenomena, and ideas; one form of existence is replaced with another form of existence, again and again, continuously, through this development process. This procedure is called *negation*.

All processes of movement and development take place through negation. From certain perspectives, negations can be seen as end points to the development (and thus, existence) of a given thing, phenomenon, or idea [which we can think of as “terminal negations;” see Annotation below]. But from other perspectives, negations can also create the conditions and premises for new developments. Such negations, which create such conditions and premises for the development of things and phenomena, are called *dialectical negation*.

Annotation 195

Negation refers to any act of motion or transformation which arises from contradiction. Specifically, negation is what occurs when one opposing side completely overcomes the other. Nothing in our universe can transform or move all by itself, without any contradiction. Thus, negation drives all development and motion of all things, phenomena, and ideas [see Annotation 119, p. 123]. There are various forms of negation,

and the same negation process may be seen to take different forms depending on viewpoint of analysis [see Annotation 11, p. 12, and Annotation 114, p. 116], as depicted in the diagram below.

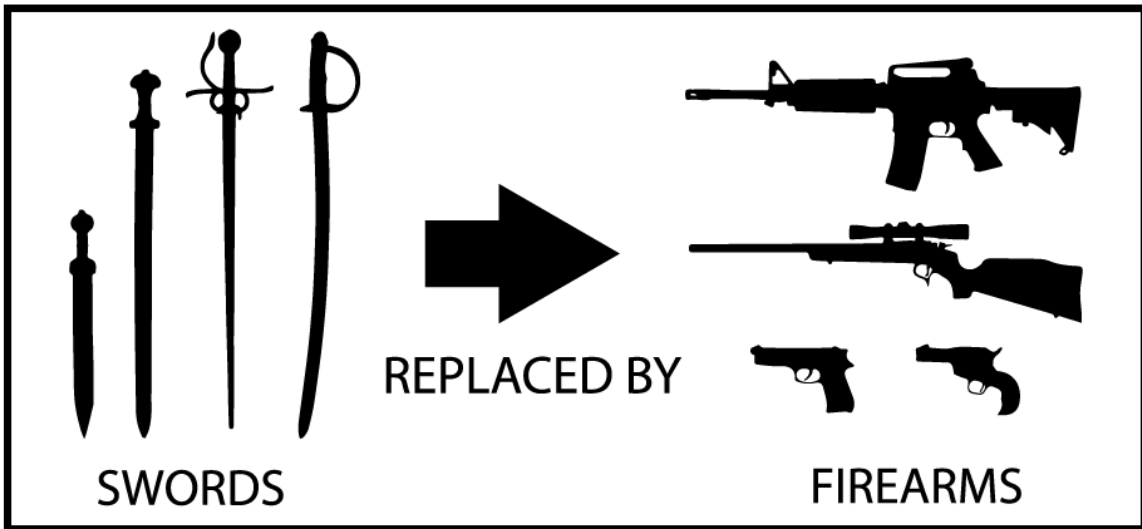


An overview of various forms of negation as they relate to dialectical development.

Dialectical negation occurs when the end of development leads directly to some new development process. Dialectical negation occurs through quality shifts [see Annotation 117, p. 119], which, themselves, occur through negation of opposite sides.

Translation Note: *The terms “terminal negation” and “replacement negation” do not appear in the original Vietnamese text. We chose to assign terms to these concepts for clarity.*

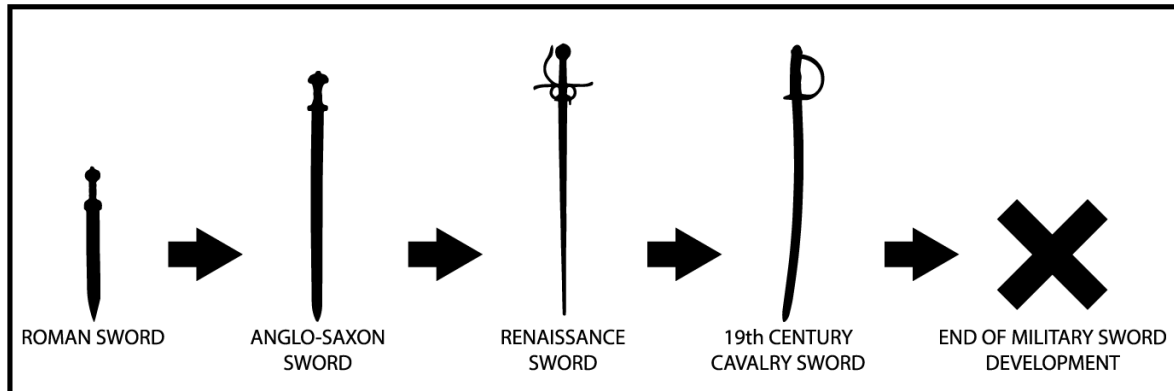
Replacement negation occurs when one thing, phenomenon, or idea takes the place of another. Replacement negation is always a dialectical process, where one subject is replaced gradually by another. Replacement may be relatively fast or slow, but it is never instantaneous — nothing can pop in and out of existence instantaneously. For example: swords were gradually replaced by firearms as the primary weapons of war over the course of many centuries. Today, swords have been completely replaced by firearms on the battlefield. This was a process of *replacement negation* — weapons are still used in war, but the type of weapon used has been completely replaced. Develop-



REPLACEMENT NEGATION PERSPECTIVE OF MILITARY WEAPONS

Replacement negation refers to the replacement of one thing, phenomenon, or idea with another through dialectical negation.

ment continues, even though development of swords as battle weapons has essentially ended.



TERMINAL NEGATION PERSPECTIVE OF SWORD DEVELOPMENT

Terminal negation refers to the end of a specific cycle of development.

Terminal negation is what happens when development completely ends for a given thing, phenomenon, or idea. For example, from one viewpoint, the development of swords as weapons of war can be seen as having ended — having been *terminally negated* — due to the innovation of firearms. In essence, swords are no longer developed, nor implemented, in modern warfare.

Replacement negation and terminal negation must be considered in relative terms. From one viewpoint, we can see the rise of firearms as the underlying reason for the *terminal negation* of military use of swords. Today, no army on Earth uses swords as primary battlefield weapons and militaries no longer develop sword technology for battlefield use. However, from another viewpoint, the development of battlefield weapons has continued on long after the end of the primacy of swords, and it could be said that firearms have *replaced* swords as the primary battlefield weapon.

Consider the death of a human being. From one perspective, death is a *terminal negation* — the person's consciousness has ended, and no further development of consciousness will occur for that individual. From other perspectives, development continues. The individual may have had children who will continue their familial lineage, they may have contributed ideas which will continue to impact other people for centuries to come, and so on. In that sense, replacement negation may be viewed as dialectical negation. For example, someone studying modes of transportation in the history of the USA may see the process of steam locomotives replacing horses, and then cars replacing steam locomotives, as processes of dialectical negation from the overarching perspective of the transportation system.

Materialist dialectics is concerned with all forms of negation, but focuses primarily on dialectical negation. Therefore, materialist dialectics is not just a theory of transformation in general, but fundamentally a theory of development

Annotation 196

All transformation is driven by negation. Development is a process, specifically, of *dialectical* negation, which is a specific form of transformation in which an end of development creates the conditions for new development, either through internal quality shifts or through replacement by some external subject.

Materialist dialectics is primarily concerned with dialectical negation (which drives development) because it is *development* which brings forth continuous change in our world. Terminal negations and other forms of transformation which do not drive further development are of limited utility, and can only represent certain limited viewpoints [i.e., the viewpoint of that which is terminated].

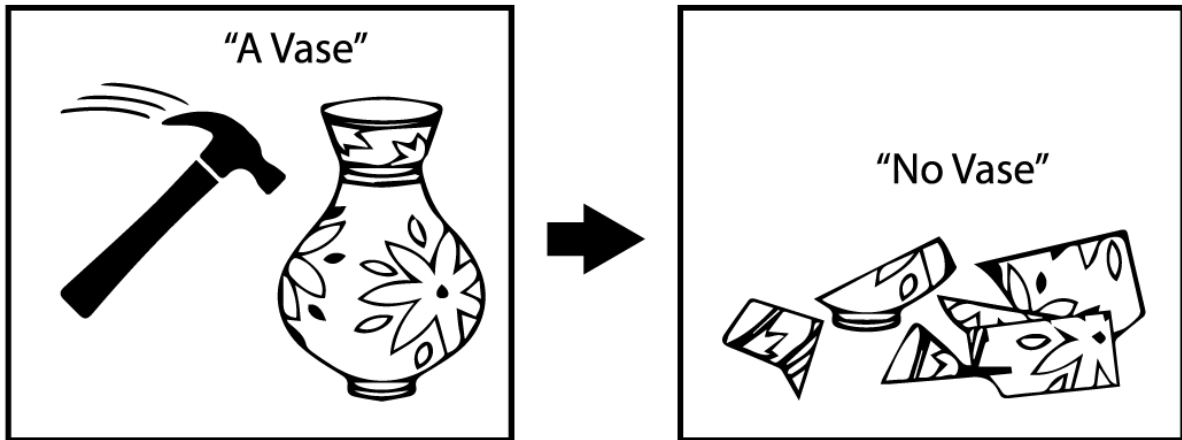
From a broader perspective, nearly all “terminations” are replaced in some way or another by some other form of development. For instance, even when a person dies, although the consciousness of that person may terminate, there will be continuous impacts which will be carried forward from the deceased person’s lifetime of consciousness, as well as from the developments which arise from the death itself.

This dialectical definition of negation differs greatly from metaphysical conceptions of development [see Annotation 201, p. 195], which are essentially viewed as terminal. From the metaphysical perspective, all things, phenomena, and ideas are viewed as separate from one another; therefore negations are viewed as terminal processes which bring development processes to their ends.

In the above example, the metaphysical framework would present smashing a vase with a hammer as a terminal negation from the perspective of the observer. Once the vase is smashed, the vase is considered to no longer exist, and the broken shards are not considered to be “a vase” any more. Materialist dialectics, on the other hand, view “the shards” as merely a developed form of the vase; a transition to a new stage of development; the negation was only terminal from the perspective of the vase itself.

Excerpt From Vietnam’s High School Freshman Civic Education textbook:

Metaphysical and dialectical negation share one commonality: they both see development as the replacement of an old subject with a new subject. However, metaphysical negation happens when outside forces impact on a subject, deleting completely the existence of the old subject. According to this metaphysical perspective, the old subject and the new subject which replaces it do not have any connection.



Metaphysical Perspective of Terminal Negation

The metaphysical perspective of terminal negation views negation as an essentially terminal process representing the end point of the existence of a static and isolated thing, phenomenon, or idea.

Dialectical negation fundamentally differs from metaphysical negation because it views development as a process of internal development. Dialectical negation does not view complete erasure or deletion of any former subject; instead, dialectical development sees the older subject, which is replaced (negated), as the premise or basis of existence for the new subject.

Comparison Examples:

Metaphysical Negation

The earthquake destroyed the house.

Water eroded the mountain.

The car has a new tire because it ran over a nail.

When you add water, sunlight, and nutrition to a seed, it will grow into a plant.

Dialectical Negation

The house was impacted by the external force of an earthquake, which caused it to collapse, due to internal characteristics of the house itself (which could not withstand the forces of the earthquake). The debris from the collapsed house will be cleared away, and will continue to develop. The space where the house stood will also continue to develop in some way, with the earthquake and the resulting collapse serving as the basis for this further development.

The external force of water caused erosion by transferring material away from the mountain, due to the internal characteristics of the mountain's composite material. The water, the material which was washed away, and the mountain will all continue to develop. The erosion process will be the basis for this further development.

The external force of the nail caused the tire to permanently deflate, due to the internal characteristics of the tire, which could not withstand running over a nail. This served as the basis for further development: the old tire was removed and will be disposed of, which will serve as the basis for further development (i.e., the tire may be recycled or sent to a landfill); the removal of the tire serves as the basis for the further development of a new tire being installed.

The seed went through a process of negation as a sprout grew, through various stages of development, into a plant, facilitated by outside forces (such as water, nutrition, sunlight, etc. — the seed would not grow in isolation) as well as the internal characteristics of the seed itself; the seed served as the basis of the sprout's development. The sprout then served as the basis for the growth of a seedling, and the seedling served as the basis for the growth of a fully grown plant. All of this development was driven by negation processes as quantity shifts gradually led to quality shifts through those various stages of development.

As you can see from the examples above, the metaphysical perspective focuses on external forces affecting a given subject and views every development process as terminal, with a beginning, middle, and end. The metaphysical perspective thus views negation as a termination of the subject (and, by extension, of development).

Materialist dialectics, on the other hand, views development as a continuous and never-ending process of mutual impact, negation, and further negation of each negation. A comprehensive and historical viewpoint [see Annotation 114, p. 116] must thus be sought to fully comprehend development and negation processes.

Dialectical negation has two basic characteristics: *objectivity* and *inheritance*.

Dialectical negation is *objective* because negation arises from contradictions which exist between two opposite sides. These opposing sides may exist within a thing, phenomenon, or idea, but the opposing sides are still, by definition, externally opposed to one another from the perspective of either side.

Annotation 197

Though any given negation may be viewed as terminal from a certain perspective, materialist dialectics is most concerned with processes of development wherein the end of one stage of development creates the conditions for further development [see Annotation 117, p. 119].

Therefore, every development is simultaneously an *internal* and an *external process*, depending on perspective. Development processes may, from certain perspectives, be seen to take place *within* a subject or *between* two subjects, but they are always *external* (and, therefore, objective — see Annotation 108, p. 112) from the perspective of either opposing side while simultaneously *internal* to the relationship.

For example: The relationship between a husband and wife may be seen as an *internal process of development* of “the marriage” from the perspective of a marriage counselor. However, from their own perspectives, each “opposing side” (i.e., the husband and the wife) see one another as external to each other.

Therefore, the development of a marriage may be seen as an internal process, but the mutual impacts and negations which occur within the relationship are objective and external forces from the perspective of either opposing side.

This is important because it means that all development and all negation are essentially objective processes; therefore no entity has complete, omniscient control over any development process. We must, therefore, understand the nature of development and negation in order to be able to properly plan and affect change in our world.

Dialectical negation is, therefore, the result of the process of resolving inevitable contradictions within a subject [i.e., a relationship] itself. Dialectical negation allows for

the old to be replaced by the new, thereby creating trends of development. Therefore, dialectical negation is also self-negation.

Annotation 198

To reiterate: from the perspective of either opposing side, development is an *external, objective* process. From the perspective of the contradictory *relationship*, processes of development are *internal* processes of *self-negation*. Thus, dialectical negation is both an objective process which no entity can completely control, while, simultaneously, an internal process of self-negation and self-development.

If two nations go to war, either nation may view the war as an objective, external development process, but from a wider perspective, the war is an internal development process of the diplomatic relationship between the two warring nations. This is drastically different from the metaphysical perspective, which views any negation process as a purely external process of development wherein one subject is permanently deleted from existence, then replaced by another subject [see Annotation 196, p. 188]. From the metaphysical perspective, a war is simply a conflict between two distinct and separate nations, and the conclusion of the war is a terminal negation which ends development of the war. From the materialist dialectical perspective, on the other hand, the end of the war would be seen as the basis of future development of the relationship between the two formerly warring nations.

Dialectical negation also has an *inheritance* characteristic: when one opposing side negates another, the remaining side inherits factors from the negated side which are suitable with present conditions.

Annotation 199

Every negation process arises from contradictions between two opposing sides. Within any such negation process, we can think of one side as the “negator” and the other side as the “negated.” Negation, like all relational processes, leads to mutual impact between both sides [see Annotation 136, p. 138]. Therefore, the negated will impact the negator; in other words, the negated side will be somehow *reflected* in the negator [see Annotation 68, p. 65]. This means that the negator will inherit and carry forward certain attributes, factors, and characteristics which it receives from the negated side.

Again, consider a war between two nations. Even if one nation completely conquers and subjugates the other in total victory, the victorious nation will still inherit certain

factors from the defeated nation. Which factors are inherited will depend on the conditions. The victorious nation may pick up some cultural aspects from the defeated nation, such as cuisine, fashion, etc., they may incorporate tactics and strategies which they observed the defeated enemy using on the battlefield, and so on. The point is that the victorious nation will be impacted in some way by the defeated nation.

The factors which are adopted will be *suitable with the present conditions*. Take, for example, a car breaking down due to engine failure. This can be seen as an opposing relationship between the car itself and the car's owner. If the present conditions are suitable [i.e., the owner has the funds and resources available, and the desire to repair the car], then the car may be repaired and continue operating for years to come. If, on the other hand, conditions aren't suitable [i.e., the owner does not have the funds or resources or the owner no longer wants the car], then the car may be sent to the scrapyard.

As another example, if a fox eats a rabbit, it will inherit certain characteristics from the rabbit. It will inherit nutrition from the rabbit's body. It may also inherit other characteristics, such as a disease the rabbit was carrying, if the conditions of the fox's biological composition are suitable [i.e., if the disease can be transferred from the rabbit to the fox].

Dialectical negation is not a complete negation [i.e., deletion] of the old. Rather, dialectical negation is a continuity of growth in which the old develops into the new. In processes of dialectical negation, "the new" forms and develops on its own [see Annotation 62, p. 59], through the process of filtering out unsuitable factors, while retaining suitable content. Vladimir Lenin described dialectical negation as:

"Not empty negation, not futile negation, not skeptical negation, vacillation and doubt is characteristic and essential in dialectics — which undoubtedly contains the element of negation and indeed as its most important element — no, but negation as a moment of connection, as a moment of development, retaining the positive, i.e., without any vacillations, without any eclecticism."¹⁰

Annotation 200

The passage from Lenin above comes from Clemence Dutt's popular English translation of one of Lenin's notebooks. Below is our translation from the Vietnamese version of this text from the original text of this book, which we hope might be somewhat easier to understand:

Dialectical negation is not empty negation, it's not negation without any thoughts, it's not skeptical negation, it's not hesitation. Skepticism is not

¹⁰ *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1914.

a feature of the essence of the dialectic — of course, dialectics include the negative, it even plays as one of the important factors of a given subject — no, it is negation as the moment of development. Dialectical negation retains the positive, meaning there is no hesitation, there is no eclecticism.

In order to understand what Lenin is saying here, we should first understand what Lenin is responding to. The above notes are referring to the chapter titled “The Absolute Ideal” within Hegel’s *Science of Logic* [see note at the end of this Annotation]. In this chapter, Hegel recounts various critiques of dialectics and counters them.

Skepticism, here, refers to the tendency to address all human knowledge with doubt.

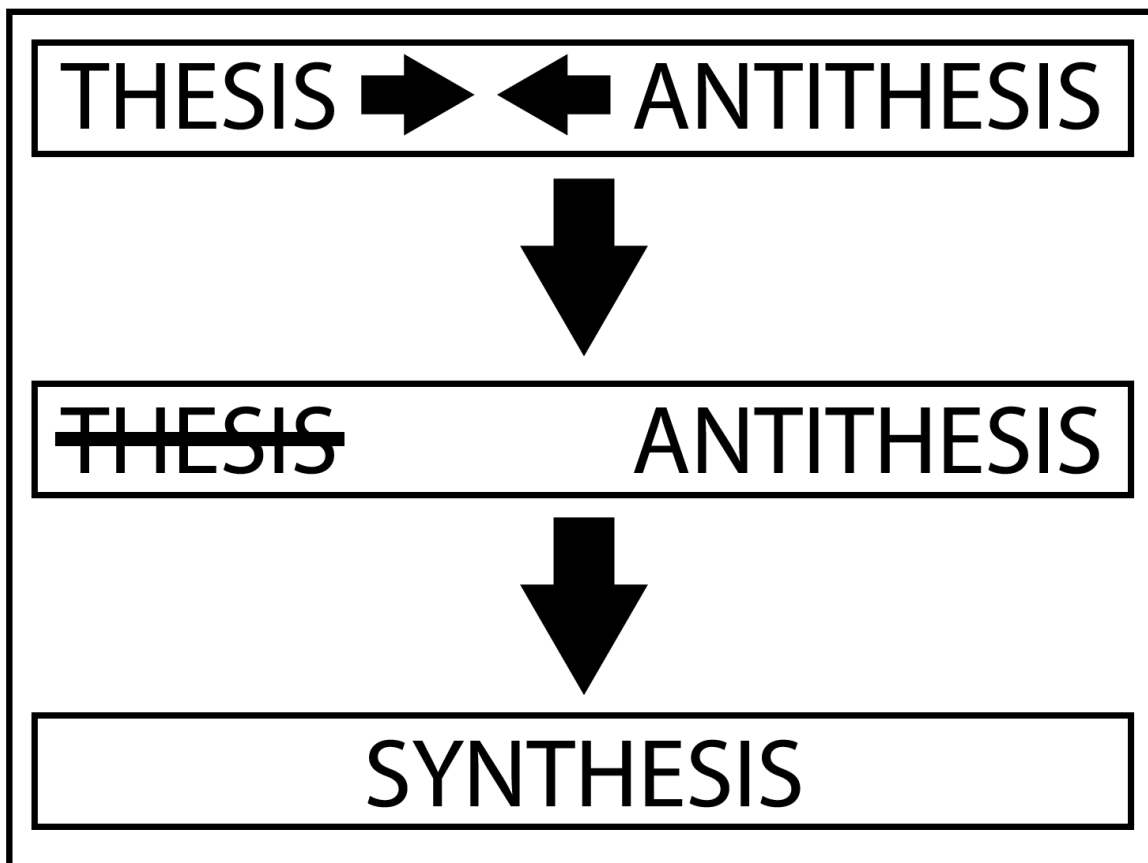
Philosophical skepticism never moves past two questions: 1. “Is this knowledge true?” 2. “Will human beings ever obtain true knowledge?” Skeptics of this nature engage in a sort of metaphysical inquisition in which every thesis that is ever encountered is immediately and utterly refuted and thus “negated” in the metaphysical sense of termination [see Annotation 196, p. 188].

Eclecticism refers to philosophical and ideological conceptions which draw from a variety of theories, styles, and ideas in an unsystematic manner. Lenin contends that dialectical negation is non-eclecticist because it rises above mere rhetorical combativeness and “total negation.” [This concept is explained more below within this annotation.]

With all this in mind, we see that Lenin is refuting the notion that dialectics are and can only be *negative* in nature. The metaphysical-skeptic conception of dialectics holds that negation takes the form of rhetorical arguing and refutation, in which one idea is presented, and a second idea is offered to counter the first idea, which completely and totally negates the first idea. According to this argument, dialectics is, therefore, a *totally negative process*.

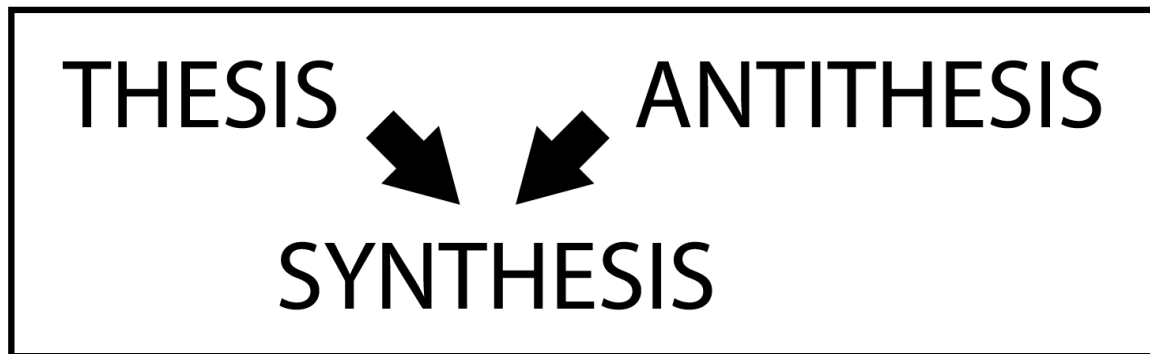
In the chapter from *Science of Logic* which Lenin is responding to in the referenced text, Hegel is arguing that the conception of dialectics as *only negative* — i.e., a system of thinking in which counter-arguments are presented to completely negate initial arguments — is inaccurate. Hegel explains that when one opposing side negates another, it thereafter “contains in general the determination of the first [opposing side] within itself.” In other words, after one opposing side negates another, it retains features and aspects from the opposing side which was negated. Lenin found this particular point to be so important that he wrote “this is very important for understanding dialectics” in the margin of his notebook.

The reason both Hegel and Lenin found this idea, that the “negator” contains elements of the “negated” after negation [see Annotation 231, p. 227], is that this counters the accusation that dialectics are “only negative.” This is why Lenin’s notes highlight the importance of the negator “retaining the positive” after negation. Lenin is pointing out the importance of the retention of features of the negated in the negator because it is this retention which prevents dialectical development from becoming a purely negative process.



Inaccurate “Fully Negative” View of Dialectics

A common misperception of dialectical development is that it is “fully negative,” insomuch as the initial thesis (initial subject) is completely negated by the antithesis (impacting subject). In fact, characteristics from both the thesis and antithesis are carried forward into the synthesis.



Accurate “Retention” View of Dialectics

In materialist dialectics, it is understood that negation is a process of retention: characteristics from both the thesis (initial subject) and antithesis (impacting subject) are retained in the resulting synthesis

We must also understand what Lenin means when he refers to “skepticism” in his notes. Lenin, here, is referring to the philosophical view that we can never know whether or not our beliefs are true. This belief was popularly known as Machism, or Empirio-Criticism, in Lenin’s time (see Annotation 32, p. 27).

A common critique of dialectics is that it is an inherently skeptical system of thought, since dialectics is seen as a process of presenting counter-arguments to suppositional arguments. Lenin, in his notes, presents the idea that such skepticism is “not a feature of dialectics” precisely because nothing is ever completely, totally, and entirely negated. In other words, the accusation that dialectical analysis is essentially skeptical is rooted in the mistaken notion that one opposing side (i.e., a counter-argument) *completely negates* the original supposition. In fact, according to materialist dialectics, the negator *always* retains features and aspects from the negated side, which counters this critique. Thus, dialectical development, which occurs through dialectical negation, is a process of forward motion — not a process of “vacillating” back and forth from one position to another — and there is no skeptical “hesitation” preventing forward progress.

This same idea (that the negator retains features from the negated) also counters another common critique of materialist dialectics: that dialectical analysis is simply a system of rhetorical sophistry [see Annotation 36, p. 33] and eclecticism.

Eclecticism is a conceptual approach that is completely unsystematic, drawing from a variety of theories, styles, and ideas without any cohesive and all-encompassing philosophical framework.

Some critics claim that dialectics must be eclecticist and sophistic in nature. These critics claim that dialectics is simply rhetorical disputation in which any given supposition is counter-argued, and that this counter-argument is negation. But materialist

dialectics defines negation as one contradicting side overtaking the other while retaining traces and characteristics from the negated side — it is in no way simply an act of rhetorical dispute or refutation.

In summary, materialist dialectics upholds that nothing is ever completely and utterly deleted or erased from existence through negation. Instead, any time one opposing side negates another, aspects of the negated side are *inherited* by the negating side.

Note: For reference, here is Hegel's passage which Lenin is referring to from *Science and Logic* in the cited notes above:

...a universal first, considered in and for itself, shows itself to be the other of itself. Taken quite generally, this determination can be taken to mean that what is at first immediate now appears as mediated, related to an other, or that the universal appears as a particular. Hence the second term that has thereby come into being is the negative of the first, and if we anticipate the subsequent progress, the first negative. The immediate, from this negative side, has been extinguished in the other, but the other is essentially not the empty negative, the nothing, that is taken to be the usual result of dialectic; rather is it the other of the first, the negative of the immediate; it is therefore determined as the mediated — contains in general the determination of the first within itself. Consequently the first is essentially preserved and retained even in the other. To hold fast the positive in its negative, and the content of the presupposition in the result, is the most important part of rational cognition; also only the simplest reflection is needed to furnish conviction of the absolute truth and necessity of this requirement, while with regard to the examples of proofs, the whole of Logic consists of these.

Therefore, dialectical negation is the inevitable tendency of progression of the inner relationship between the old and the new. It is the self-driving assertive force of all motion and development of all things, phenomena, and ideas.

b. Negation of Negation

In the perpetual movement of the material world, dialectical negation is an inexhaustible process. It creates a development tendency of things from lower level to higher level, taking place in a cyclical manner in the form of a “spiral.”

Annotation 201

The concept of the “spiral” form of development in dialectical materialist philosophy stands in contrast to the metaphysical conception of “linear” development.

Metaphysical Conception of Linear Development

The metaphysical viewpoint holds that development is more or less a straight line: as one subject is negated, it is replaced by another. This subject will then be negated by another, and so on, in what is essentially conceived of as a straight line of development [see Annotation 196, p. 188].

In the above example, metaphysical line development simply sees raw aluminum as being negated and “replaced” in the real world. Once the aluminum can is created, the “raw aluminum” as a metaphysical entity is considered no longer to exist. Likewise, when the soda can is transformed into recycled aluminum, the can is considered “replaced,” and is no longer considered to have a metaphysical existence.

This conception of metaphysical line development directly contradicts the materialist dialectical concept of *historical viewpoint* [see Annotation 114, p. 116].

Dialectical Materialist Conception of Development

The dialectical materialist conception of cyclical development stems from essential attributes of dialectical negation processes:

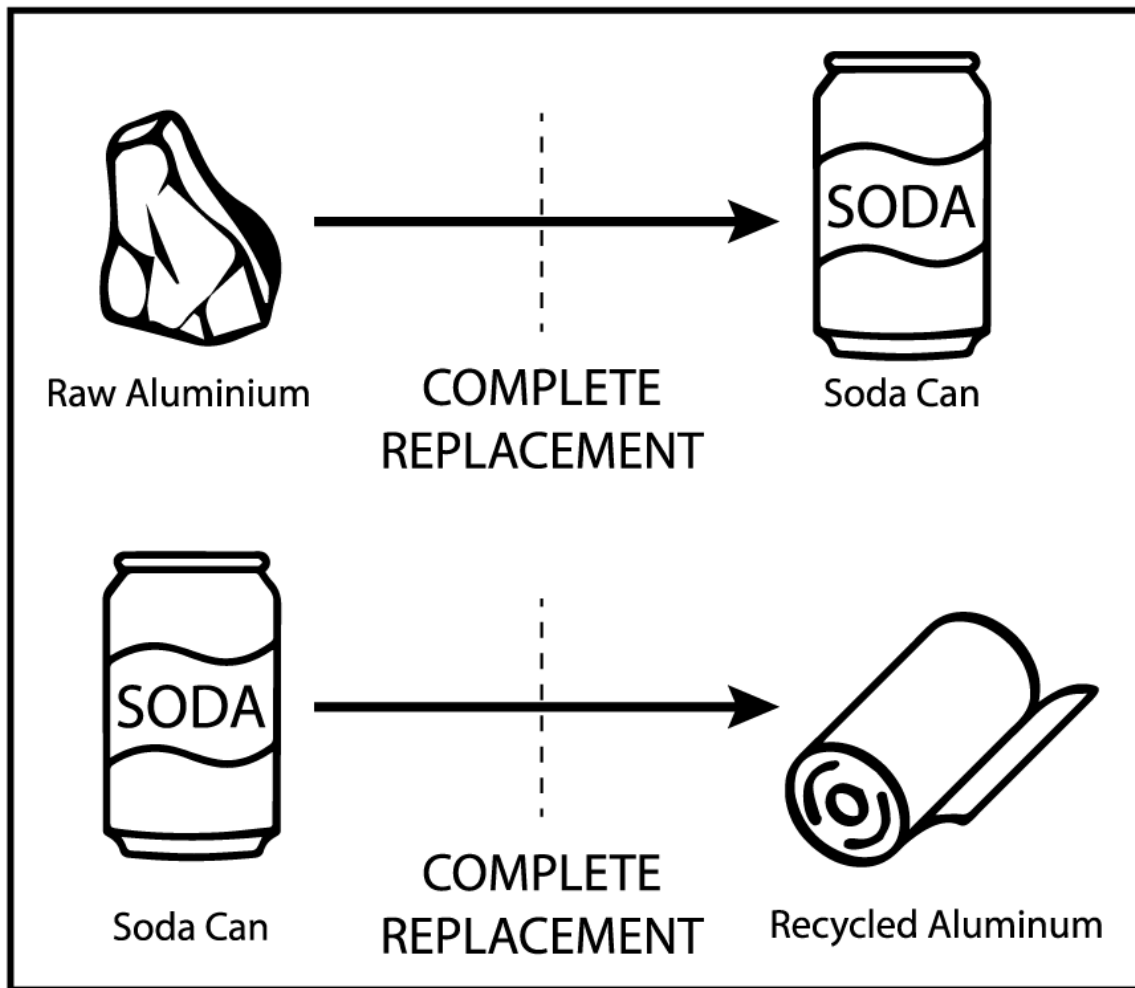
1. In every dialectical negation, the negating side inherits features and characteristics from the negated side.
2. When the negating side is, itself, negated (i.e., *negation of the negation*), the new negating side will retain features and aspects of the old negator.
3. This development process will continue indefinitely, so that negation is not simply a straight line of complete negation, but rather takes the shape of a “spiral” of negations of negations which always inherit features from previous forms.

Note that this conception of development as a spiral is simply an abstraction to help understand the essential characteristics of dialectical development and to distinguish this form of development from metaphysical conceptions of “linear development.”

In the example below, we see a depiction of the spiral development of aluminum through various stages of development. After raw aluminum is mined from the Earth, it begins a repeating spiral development process of being refined into usable goods, then recycled into raw material.

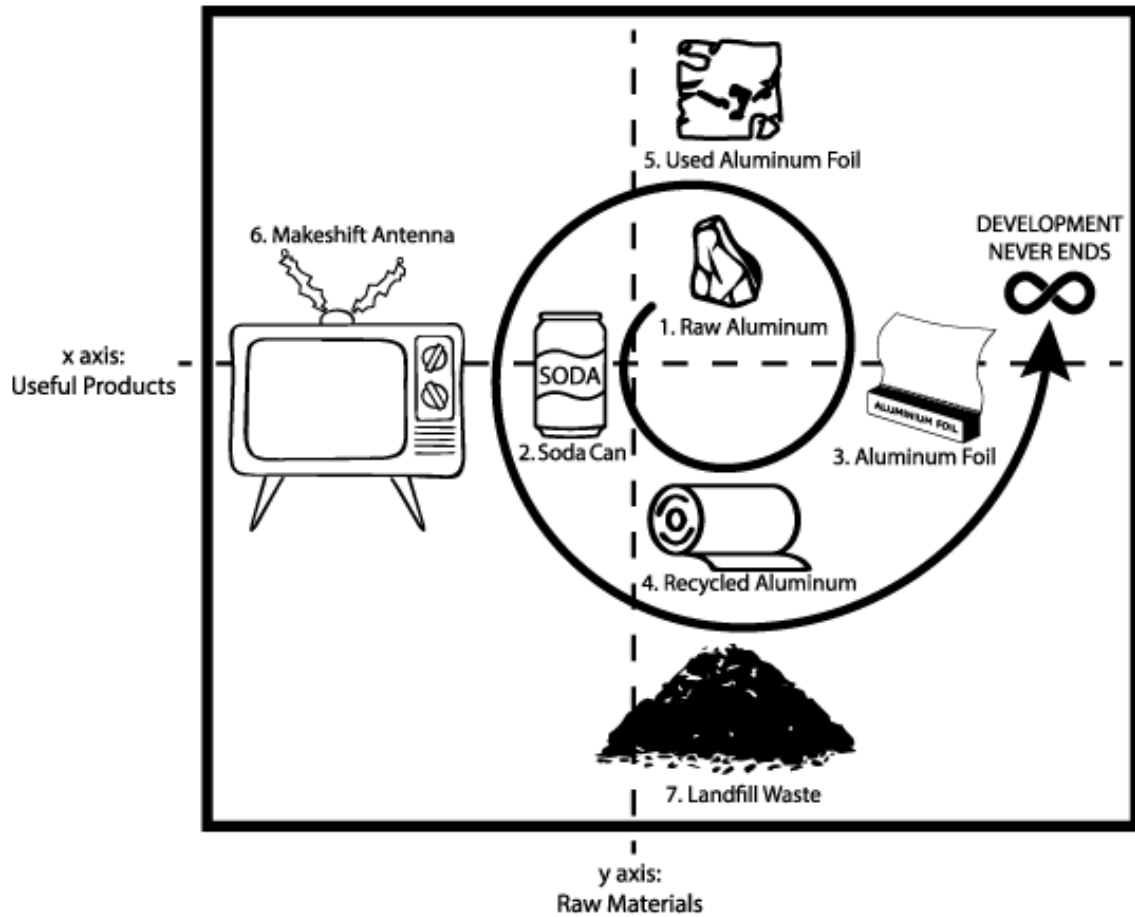
The illustrated example on the previous page plots the spiral development of aluminum as it cycles between stages defined as raw materials and refined products. Another perspective might depict development differently. For example, if we are examining development in terms of external relations between aluminum other elements,

Metaphysical Line Development: Complete Replacement



The metaphysical "line development" model sees an initial form as being "replaced" or entirely negated into a completely distinct entity.

Materialist Dialectical Spiral Development



The "Spiral Development" model of materialist dialectics sees every stage of development as a higher form of the previous stage which carries forward characteristics from previous stages.

the development pattern would look different. In reality, all subjects have countless internal and external relations and development processes which can be examined.

The “raw aluminum” stage of development pictured in the illustration is not truly the beginning of this development process; there were millions of years of development which occurred before it was first discovered by humans. Similarly, the landfill will not be the end of this development process; there will be continued development forever for as long as motion in the universe continues.

This is a simplified and abstract model of development of aluminum. A more accurate representation might show any number of interim steps between each step depicted in the graphic above. For example: it must also be recognized that in reality the molecules of aluminum which the development process began with will be scattered and mixed with other subjects throughout the development process, and various other complexities exist in terms of the mutual impacts of internal and external relationships.

Determining the amount of detail to include or exclude in materialist dialectical analysis is crucial: too much detail and analysis might become unwieldy; too little detail and analysis might become too abstract and idealized to be useful in the real world. So, the idea of development as a spiral should not be taken literally; it is simply a way of conceptualizing the differences between dialectical negation and development as opposed to “straight-line” development upheld by metaphysical conceptions of negation and development, always carrying forward traces of previous stages of development.

In the chain of negations that make up the development processes of things, phenomena, and ideas, each dialectical negation creates the conditions and premises for subsequent developments. Through many iterations of negation, i.e., “negations of negations,” dialectical negation will inevitably lead to a *forward tendency of motion*.

Annotation 202

The *forward tendency of motion* describes the tendency for things, phenomena, and ideas to move from less advanced to more advanced forms through processes of motion and development.

As a reminder, “lower level” and “higher level,” i.e., “less advanced” and “more advanced,” should not be taken to have any connotations of “good” and “bad,” nor of “desirable” and “undesirable,” nor even of “less complex” and “more complex.”

Development from “lower levels” to “higher levels” is simply a shorthand for understanding the fact that development processes always move “forward,” that is to say, development can never happen in reverse, just as time itself can never be reversed. For example, society in Italy will never go back to the civilization of the Roman empire. It is conceivable that Italian society could develop to be *more similar* to Ancient Rome,

but it would be impossible for Roman society to ever take on the *exact characteristics* of the Roman Empire ever again.

Cyclicity of development processes usually takes place in the form of a spiral, which is another result of “negation of negation.” Negations of negations lead to a development cycle in which things, phenomena, and ideas often undergo two fundamental negations carried through three basic forms. Through this negation pattern, basic features of the initial form are ultimately inherited by the “third form,” but at a higher level of development.

Annotation 203

Dialectical development tends to take place through a cyclical pattern in which development is carried through a triad of forms which develop through a pair of dialectical negation processes:

The graphic above illustrates this cyclical pattern, in which:

1. The initial form (the Assertion) begins the pattern. Contradiction within the initial subject or between it and another subject leads to the first negation.

2. The first negation leads to a second form (the Negation). This second form inherits some features or characteristics from the initial form.

3. The second form then encounters opposition, which leads to a second negation.

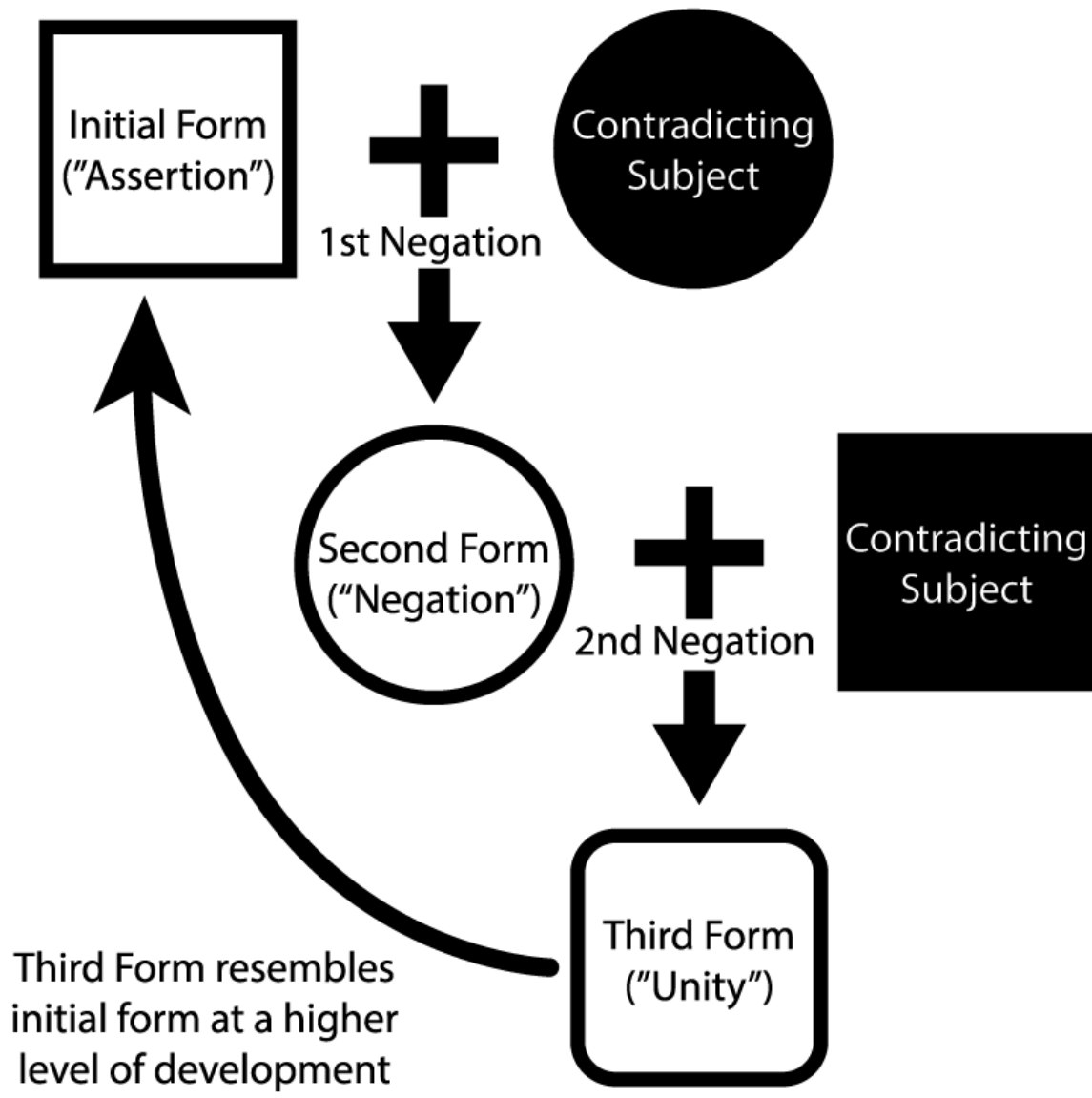
4. The second negation leads to a third form (Unity), which retains the features or characteristics of the second form, but now more closely resembles the first, initial form, only at a higher level of development.

Imagine a new car (initial form) crashes into another car (contradicting subject). The new car is dialectically developed (negated) into a second form: a wrecked car. This second form is now contradicted by a new subject — a recycling center — and negated into a third form: new steel. The third form possesses characteristics of the first form, but in a more developed form: after being recycled, the resulting steel is newly made, in good condition for sale, etc., similarly to the first form of the new car.

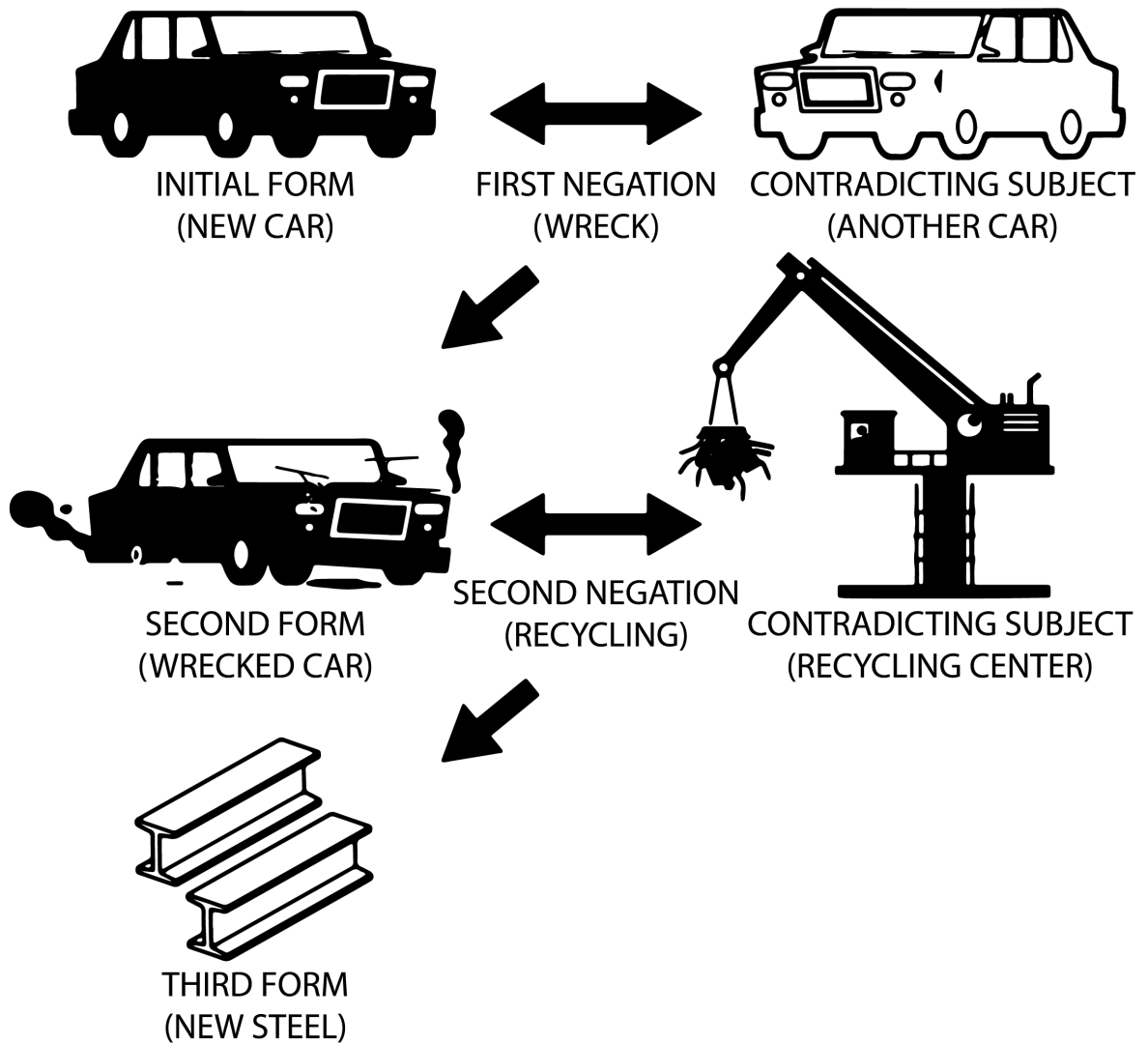
Keep in mind that this is relative to one’s perspective. If you consider the wrecked car to be the first form, then the steel would be the second form. The new steel will then need to be developed in some way (melted, hammered, cut, etc.) in order to be processed into some new product. From this perspective, the third form (i.e., molten steel) will have characteristics of the first form (i.e.: “unrefined”).

According to Marx and Engels, the development of capitalism from feudalism assumed this cyclical pattern:

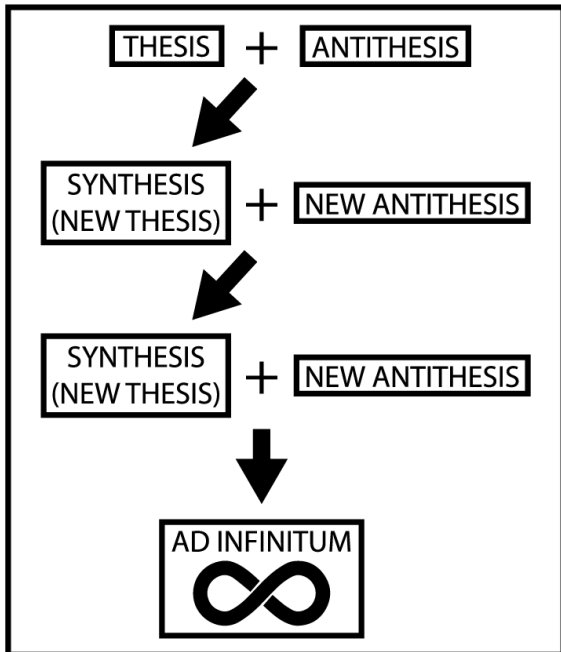
Note that this is only an abstract description of a tendency of dialectical development; exceptions can and do occur. Presumably, the development of communism as a stateless, classless society would constitute the negation of the “Class Society” form of



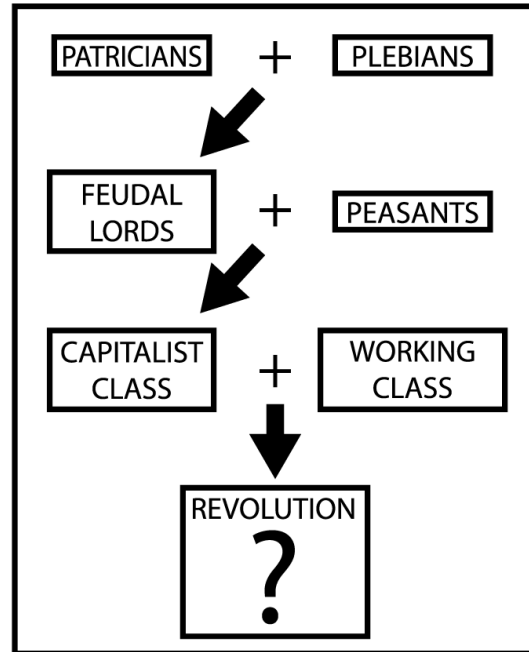
The cyclical pattern of development is an abstract pattern of dialectical change over time.



In this example, a new car goes through a cyclical pattern of development in which the third form (new steel) possesses characteristics of the first form (a new car).



MATERIALIST DIALECTICAL
DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



DIALECTICAL DEVELOPMENT
OF CLASS STRUCTURE

The development of class structure is a dialectical process in which different classes synthesize to form the next era of class society. For example, the capitalist class emerged primarily as a synthesis of the feudal lords and peasants of the medieval era.

human civilization. The Post-Class stage of development which follows would, itself, be a higher form — a unity — of pre-class human civilization, carrying forward traces from the Class Society stage of development.

Also note that determining which form is the “first” or “initial” pattern is entirely relative. Using the example of the development of class society: from one perspective, the Patricians may be seen as the initial form, but from another perspective the Plebeians might be considered the initial form. This depends entirely on the viewpoint and purpose of analysis. These conceptions of “spirals of development” and the pattern of “three forms through two negations” are, in essence, models which describe general tendencies and patterns of development and which help us understand the basic characteristics of dialectical negation and development.

Lenin describes this cycle of dialectical development as going “[f]rom assertion to negation — from negation to ‘unity’ with the asserted — without this, dialectics becomes empty negation, a game, skepsis [examination, observation, consideration].”¹¹

Annotation 204

Here, “assertion” simply refers to the initial form of a dialectical development cycle. The negation is the second form, and the “unity” is the third form, which resembles the first form (the assertion) at a higher stage of development. So, in this quotation, Lenin is simply recounting the “three steps” of a typical dialectical development cycle, and indicating that it is necessary to recognize this process, which is rooted in the inheritance of properties of prior forms through development into ever-higher forms, to prevent dialectics from becoming “empty negation,” or otherwise falling prey to the critiques that dialectics are purely negative, skeptical, and eclectic in nature [see Annotation 200, p. 192 and Annotation 36, p. 33].

The law of negation of negation generalizes the pervasive nature of development: dialectical development does not take the form of a straight path, but rather in the form of a spiral path. Lenin summarised that this path is “[a] development that repeats, as it were, stages that have already been passed, but repeats them in a different way, on a higher basis (‘the negation of the negation’), a development, so to speak, that proceeds in spirals, not in a straight line...”¹² The tendency to develop in a spiral curve demonstrates the dialectical nature of development; i.e., the cycle of inheritance, repetition, and progression. Each new round of the spiral appears to be repeating, but at a higher level. The continuation of the loops in a spiral reflects an endless progression from lower levels to higher levels of things, phenomena, and ideas.

¹¹ *Conspectus of Hegel’s Science of Logic*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1914.

¹² *Karl Marx*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1914.

In short, the law of negation of negation in materialist dialectics reflects the dialectical relationship between the negative and the assertion [i.e., the second and first forms of a dialectical development cycle; see Annotation 203, p. 198] in the development process of things, phenomena and ideas. Dialectical development is driven by dialectical negation; in the development of all things, phenomena, and ideas, the new is the result of inheriting characteristics from prior forms. This process of inheritance, repetition, and progression through negation leads to cyclical development. Engels wrote: “what is the negation of the negation? An extremely general — and for this reason extremely far-reaching and important — law of development of nature, history, and thought.”¹³

Annotation 205

In the same text quoted above, Engels elaborates that dialectical development is composed of “processes which in their nature are antagonistic, contain a contradiction; transformation of one extreme into its opposite; and finally, as the kernel of the whole thing, the negation of the negation.”

c. Meaning of the Methodology

The law of negation of negation is the basis for correct perception of the tendency of motion and development of things, phenomena, and ideas. Development and motion processes do not take place in a straight line; rather, it is a winding, complex road, consisting of many stages, and each process can be broken down into many different sub-processes. However, it must be understood that this complexity of development is only the manifestation of the general tendency to move forward [see Annotation 118, p. 122]. It is important to understand the nature of motion and development so that we can systematically change the world according to our revolutionary viewpoint. In order to consciously impact the development of things, phenomena, and ideas, we need to know their characteristics, nature, and relationships so that we can influence their motion and development in the direction that suits our purposes. We must comprehend and leverage the tendency of forward movement — in accordance with a scientific and revolutionary worldview — in order to effectively and systematically change the world.

¹³ *Anti-Dühring*, Friedrich Engels, 1878.

Annotation 206

Understanding the forward tendency of motion is vital for cultivating a worldview which is both *scientific* and *revolutionary*. Such a worldview is *scientific* because it recognizes the material reality that all things, phenomena, and ideas are constantly undergoing change and development. Nothing in our universe is static, and all things are connected and defined by internal and external relationships (which are also constantly developing). Furthermore, this development progresses with a *forward tendency*, meaning that no process can be completely “reversed.” For example, you can clean rust from a car [which would be forward progress], but you can’t reverse the temporal process of rust.

Once we understand that all things, phenomena, and ideas in our universe are constantly developing and moving forward, we can then begin to find ways to *impact* motion and development systematically to consciously change the world around us. This is the foundation of a *revolutionary* worldview, since revolutionary change requires us to leverage and influence development processes to suit our needs and revolutionary ambitions. Thus, materialist dialectics are an applied system of observation and practice through which we seek to understand development processes and consciously impact them to suit our needs.

According to the rule of negation of negation, in the objective world, the new must inevitably come to replace the old. In nature, the new develops according to objective laws. In social life, new things arise from the purposeful, self-conscious, and creative actions of human beings. Therefore, it is necessary to leverage *subjective factors* as we seek to consciously impact the development of things, phenomena, and ideas.

Annotation 207

Subjective factors are factors which we, as a subject, are capable of impacting. This may seem confusing, since we have previously established that all external things, phenomena, and ideas have *objective* relationships with all other things, phenomena, and ideas [see Annotation 108, p. 112], meaning that any given subject is *external* to every other subject, and thus no subject can directly and completely control the motion and development of any other subject.

However, from the perspective of any given individual, there are certain things, phenomena, and ideas [as well as processes of motion and development] which we can *impact*. For example, if I see an apple on a table, the apple is *objective* to me. I can’t simply will the apple to move with my consciousness alone. However, I can *impact* the apple through conscious activity — I can consciously will my hand to pick up the apple and move it to another location.

Thus, factors which an individual can consciously impact are *subjective factors*. As revolutionists, we must focus on subjective factors. In other words, we must concentrate on *that which we are capable of changing*, since our purpose is to change the world. Focusing on factors which we can't impact is a waste of time; we must simply determine what *can be changed* and then determine the most efficient and effective ways of impacting development processes and changing the world.

As revolutionists, we must have faith that we can introduce the “new,” faith in the success of the “new,” we must support the “new,” and fight for the victory of the “new.” Therefore, it is necessary to overcome conservative, stagnant, and dogmatic thoughts which restrain the development of the “new” and resist the law of negation of negation.

Annotation 208

Change is inevitable. All things, phenomena, and ideas undergo processes of motion and development. Any philosophy, ideology, or strategy which attempts to restrain motion and development is doomed to failure because change can neither be halted nor restrained. Thus, our strategies and actions must align with the material reality that change is inevitable, and we must seek to change the world by *impacting* processes of development and motion rather than attempting to reverse, restrain, or halt such processes.

Ideologies which erroneously strive to restrict change and development include *rigidity* (see Annotation 222, p. 218) and *conservativism* (see Annotation 236, p. 233).

In the process of negating the old we must leverage the principle of inheritance with discretion: we must encourage the inheritance of factors that are beneficial to our goals as we simultaneously attempt to filter out, overcome, and reform factors which would negatively impact our goals.

Annotation 209

If we understand the principle of inheritance, we can impact inheritance processes which derive from negation. For example, when repairing a car, we can seek out parts of the car which do not function properly or which do not suit the use-case of the car and add or replace parts which are more suitable.

In the same way, we can impact inheritance processes in our revolutionary political activities. We can seek to inherit characteristics from previous stages of development of our political organizations, social institutions, culture, etc., while simultaneously seeking to prevent the inheritance of traits and characteristics which are unsuitable

for our revolutionary purposes. Over time, we can attempt to impact the inheritance of traits and aspects which are more conducive to our purposes while limiting and filtering out traits and aspects which are hindrances.

In an article titled “New Life” written in 1947, Ho Chi Minh wrote about the dialectical relationship between the new and the old in building a new society, writing:

Not everything old must be abandoned. We do not have to reinvent everything. What is old but bad must be abandoned. What is old but troublesome must be corrected appropriately. What is old but good must be further developed. What is new but good must be done.

... Growing up in the old society, we all carry within us more-or-less bad traces of the old society in terms of our ideas and habits... Habits are hard to change. That which is good and new is likely to be considered bad by the people because it is strange to them. On the contrary, that which is evil yet familiar is easily mistaken as normal and acceptable.

Ho Chi Minh understood the principles of development very well, as well as the difficulties we will face as revolutionaries as we try to change ourselves and our society. We must strive to develop a similar understanding as we move forward and attempt to affect the development of our world through practice and struggle.

Chapter 3: Cognitive Theory of Dialectical Materialism

In Marxism, epistemological reasoning (or epistemology) is the foundation of dialectics. Dialectical materialist epistemology is a theory of applying human cognitive ability to the objective world through practical activities. It explains the nature, path and general laws of the human process of perceiving truth and objective reality to serve human practical activities.

Annotation 210

Epistemology is the theoretical study of knowledge. It also deals with the philosophical question of: “how do we know what is true?”

Throughout history, philosophers have tried to determine the nature of truth and knowledge. In the era of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, there was an ongoing dispute between the materialists, who believed that truth could only be sought through sense experience of the material world, and the idealists, who believed that truth could only be sought through reasoning within the human mind.

Marx and Engels developed the philosophical system of dialectical materialism to resolve this dispute. Dialectical materialism upholds that the material and the ideal have a dialectical relationship with one another: the material *determines* the ideal, while the ideal *impacts* the material [see *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*, p. 88].

However, it’s important to understand that Marx and Engels didn’t develop the system of dialectical materialism simply to understand the world. As Marx wrote in *Theses on Feuerbach*:

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.

So, Marxist dialectical materialist epistemology is developed specifically to enable human beings to not only perceive truth and objective reality, but to then be able to apply our conscious thought, through practical activity, in order to bring about change in the world.

1. Praxis, Consciousness, and the Role of Praxis in Consciousness

a. Praxis and Basic Forms of Praxis

Praxis includes all human material activities which have purpose and historical-social characteristics and which transform nature and society. Unlike other activities, praxis is activity in which humans attempt to materially impact the world to suit our purposes. Praxis activities define the nature of human beings and distinguish human beings from other animals. Praxis is objective activity, and praxis has been constantly developed by humans through the ages.

Annotation 211

In English, the words “practice” and “praxis” are often distinguished from one another. “Practice” is often used to refer to human activity which provides more information about the world around us and improves our knowledge and understanding, whereas “praxis” often refers to conscious human activity which is intended to change the world in some manner. In their original German, Marx and Engels used the same German word — *Praxis* — to refer to both concepts. Similarly, in the original Vietnamese text of this book, the same word — *thực tiễn* — is used for both “practice” and “praxis.”

One reason that these concepts are so closely related is that all conscious activity serves both rolls by simultaneously telling us more about reality *and* consciously changing reality in some way. For example, by pushing a heavy stone, you may be able to move the stone a small amount — constituting praxis — while simultaneously learning how heavy the stone is and how difficult it is to move — constituting practice. The main point of distinction, therefore, is *intention*. Virtually all conscious activity is practice, but only activity which has *purpose* and *historical-social characteristics* might be considered praxis:

Purpose simply describes a goal or desired outcome; specifically: a desired change in nature or human society. Activities with *historical-social characteristics* are activities which contribute in some way to the development of human society.

In this translation, we use “practice” and “praxis” interchangeably to mean “conscious activity which improves our understanding, and which has purpose and historical-social characteristics.” You are likely to find these words used differently (as described above, or in other ways) in other texts. Engels explains the importance of practice/praxis in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. From the moment we [use] these objects, according to the qualities we perceive in them, we put to an infallible test the correctness or otherwise of our sense-perceptions. If these perceptions have been wrong, then our estimate of the use to which an object can be turned must also be wrong, and our attempt must fail. But if we succeed in accomplishing our aim, if we find that the object does agree with our idea of it, and does answer the purpose we intended it for, then that is positive proof that our perceptions of it and of its qualities, so far, agree with reality outside ourselves.

Marx wrote in *Theses on Feuerbach* that “the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice [German: *revolutionäre Praxis*].” Engels further expounds upon this concept in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, writing:

The most telling refutation of this as of all other philosophical fancies is practice [original German: *Praxis*], viz., experiment and industry. If we are able to prove the correctness of our conception of a natural process by making it ourselves, bringing it into being out of its conditions and using it for our own purposes into the bargain, then there is an end of the Kantian incomprehensible or ungraspable.

Praxis defines the nature of human beings because human beings are (to our present knowledge) the only beings which undertake actions with conscious awareness of our desired outcomes and comprehension of the historical development of our own society, which distinguishes human beings from all other animals. Praxis is *objective* activity, meaning that all praxis activities are performed in relation to external things, phenomena, and ideas [see Annotation 108, p. 112].

Praxis has been constantly developed by humans through the ages, meaning that as we learn more about the nature of reality, of human society, and the laws of nature, we are able to develop our praxis to become more efficient and effective.

Praxis activities are very diverse, manifesting with ever-increasing variety, but there are only three basic forms: material production activities, socio-political activities, and scientific experimental activities.

Material production activity is the first and most basic form of praxis. In this form of praxis activity, humans use tools through labor processes to influence the natural

world in order to create wealth and material resources and to develop the conditions necessary to maintain our existence and development.

Socio-political activity includes praxis activity utilized by various communities and organizations in human society to transform political-social relations in order to promote social development.

Scientific experimental activity is a special form of praxis activity. This includes human activities that resemble or replicate states of nature and society in order to determine the laws of change and development of subjects of study. This form of activity plays an important role in the development of society, especially in the current historical period of modern science and technological revolution.

Annotation 212

The three basic forms of praxis activities listed above obviously do not include all forms of human activity, as praxis only includes activities which have *purpose* and *historical-social characteristics*.

Material production activity has a very clear purpose: to improve the material conditions of an individual human being or a group of human beings. Material production activity has historical-social characteristics because developing material conditions for human beings leads directly to the development of human society. For example, as food production increases in terms of yield and efficiency, society can support a larger number of human beings and a wider range of human activities, which leads to the development of human society.

Socio-political activity has the purpose of promoting social development, which is obviously inherently historical-social in nature. An example of socio-political activity would include any sort of political campaign, liberation struggle, political revolutionary activity, etc.

Scientific experimental activity has the purpose of expanding our understanding of nature and human society, which leads directly to historical-social development in a variety of ways. For example, improving our scientific understanding of medicine through scientific experimental activity leads to longer lives and improved quality of life. Improving our scientific understanding of chemistry through scientific experimental activity leads to all sorts of materials which improve the quality of life and enable human beings to solve a variety of social problems.

In order to qualify as praxis activity, a given human activity must have a purpose and it must have historical-social characteristics. For instance, drawing is not always praxis in the sense of the word used in this text, but it would be praxis if it would qualify as material production activity (i.e., making art in order to sell, so as to make a living) or if the art is made with the intention of invoking social change.

Every basic praxis activity form has an important function, and these functions are not interchangeable with each other. However, they have close relationships with each other and different praxis activity forms often interact with each other. In these relationships, material production is the most important form of praxis activity, playing a decisive role in determining other praxis activities because material production is the most primitive activity and exists most commonly in human life. Material production creates the most essential, decisive material conditions for human survival and development. Without material production there cannot be other praxis activities. After all, all other praxis activities arise from material production praxis and all praxis activities ultimately aim to serve material production praxis.

Annotation 213

Without material production activity, human beings would not be able to live at all.

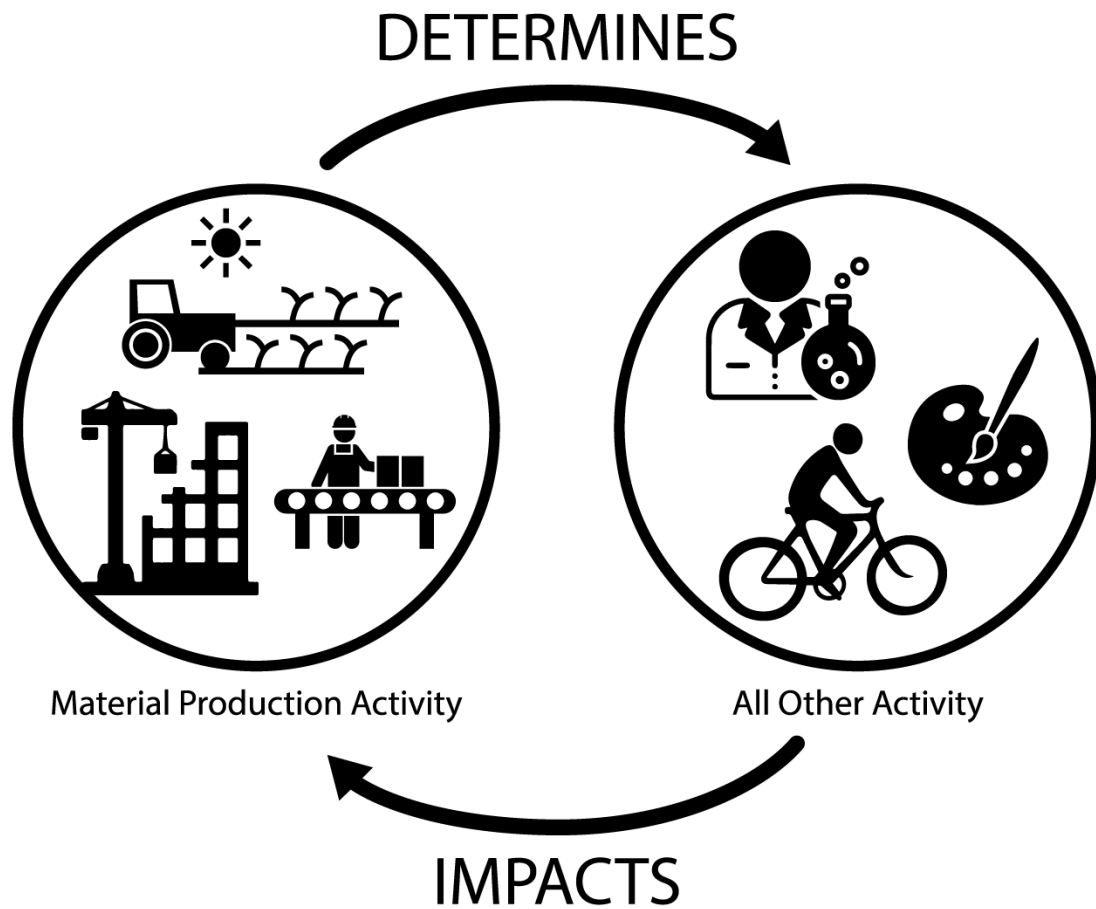
Thus, material production activities make all other forms of human activities possible. In addition, the primary reason we participate in socio-political activity is to ensure material security (food, water, shelter, etc.) for members of society, which ultimately relies on material production activity. Therefore, the primary reason we engage in scientific experimental activity is to improve material production activities in terms of efficiency, yield, effectiveness, etc

Of course, we engage in scientific experimental activity and material production activity for other reasons (art, entertainment, recreation, etc.), but these activities require that material security be secured first for those participating in the production and consumption of such products. In other words, material production activity is a prerequisite for all other forms of activity, since without some measure of material security humans cannot survive.

Thus, material production activity has a dialectical relationship with other forms of praxis activities, in which material production activity determines both socio-political and scientific experimental activity while socio-political and scientific experimental activity impact material production activity.

b. Consciousness and Levels of Consciousness

The dialectical materialist perspective sees consciousness as a process of reflecting the objective world within the human brain on a practical basis to create knowledge



Material production activity has a dialectical relationship with all other praxis activity, with material production activity determining, while being impacted by, all other forms of praxis activity.

about the objective world. Consciousness is a self-aware process that is productive and creative.

This view stems from the following basic principles:

- The dialectical materialist worldview acknowledges that the material world exists objectively and independently of human consciousness.
- The dialectical materialist worldview recognizes the following human abilities:

☒ To perceive the objective world.

☒ To reflect the objective world into the human mind, which enables human subjects to learn about external objects. [see Annotation 66, p. 64]

☒ To admit that there are no material things nor phenomena which are unrecognizable, but only material things and phenomena that humans have not yet recognised. [see *The Opposition of Materialism and Idealism in Solving Basic Philosophical Issues*, p. 48]

The dialectical materialist worldview affirms that conscious reflection [see Annotation 67, p. 64] of the objective world is a dialectical, productive, self-aware, and creative process. This reflection process develops from the unknown to the known, from knowing less to knowing more, from knowing less profoundly and less comprehensively to knowing more profoundly and more comprehensively.

Annotation 214

The above principle (that human knowledge develops from less, and less comprehensive, to more, and more comprehensive states) stands in contrast to various other philosophical systems of belief, including:

Hegel's *Absolute Idealism* upholds a belief in an "absolute ideal" which constitutes an ultimate limit or "end point" of knowledge which humanity is moving towards. Dialectical materialism upholds that there is no such absolute ideal and thus no such terminal end point of human understanding. [See Annotation 234, p. 230] As Engels wrote in *Anti-Dühring*:

If mankind ever reached the stage at which it should work only with eternal truths, with results of thought which possess sovereign validity and an unconditional claim to truth, it would then have reached the point where the infinity of the intellectual world both in its actuality and in its potentiality had been exhausted, and thus the famous miracle of the counted uncountable would have been performed.

Fideism, which is the belief that knowledge is received from some higher power [i.e., God]. Fideism upholds that all knowledge is pre-existing, and that humanity simply receives it from on high. Dialectical materialism, on the other hand, argues that knowledge is developed over time through dialectical processes of consciousness and human activity.

Positivism, or empiricist materialism, which holds that there are hard limits to human knowledge, or that human knowledge — which can only be obtained from sense data — can't be trusted. Dialectical materialism upholds that all things and phenomena can be known and understood, and that sense data can be trusted as an objective reflection of reality. For more information about skepticism about human sense data as well as positive and empiricist materialism, see Annotation 10, p. 10, and Annotation 58, p. 56].

The dialectical materialist worldview considers praxis as the primary and most direct basis of consciousness, and as the motive and the purpose of consciousness, and as the criterion for testing truth. [See: *The Relationship Between Praxis and Consciousness*, p. 216]

Annotation 215

Given the above principles — that human consciousness exists independently from the material world yet is capable of accurately perceiving and reflecting the material world, and that knowledge develops over time through a synthesis of consciousness and practical activity — we can conclude that consciousness is a self-aware process which is productive and creative.

Consciousness is productive and creative in the sense that conscious processes, in conjunction with practical experience and activity in the material world, leads to the development of knowledge and practical experience which allows humans to develop our understanding of the world as well as our own material conditions through the application of knowledge to our own labor activities.

Next, we will examine different ways of categorizing conscious activities as they pertain to developing knowledge and practical understanding of our world.

From the dialectical materialist point of view, consciousness is a process of development. Consciousness develops from *empirical consciousness* to *theoretical consciousness*; and from *ordinary consciousness* to *scientific consciousness*.

Annotation 216

In dialectical materialist philosophy, all systems of relation exist as processes of development in motion [see Annotation 120, p. 124]. Thus, consciousness can be defined as a system of relations between human brain activity and two forms of data input:


- *Sense experience*: observations of the external world detected by our senses.
- *Knowledge*: information which exists in the human mind as memories and ideas.

Consciousness is thus a process of the development of knowledge through a combination of human brain activity and human practical activity in the physical world (i.e., labor).

In the section below, we will explore different forms of consciousness, the development of consciousness, and the relationship between consciousness and knowledge. Note that these are *abstractions* of consciousness and knowledge, meant to help us understand how knowledge and consciousness develop over time. Thought processes are extremely complex, so we seek to develop a fundamental understanding of how consciousness develops and how knowledge develops because these processes are fundamental to the development of human beings and human societies.

Just as consciousness is a process of developing knowledge through brain activity, consciousness itself also develops over time. The development of consciousness can be considered based on the criteria of *concrete/abstract* and of *passive/active*.

Consciousness develops from a state of direct and immediate observation of the world which results in concrete knowledge to a higher stage which constitutes a more abstract and general understanding of the world. We call consciousness which is focused on direct, immediate, concrete, empirical observation of the world *empirical consciousness*, and we call consciousness which is focused on forming abstract generalizations about the world *theoretical consciousness*.

Concrete	 develops into	Abstract
Empirical Consciousness		Theoretical Consciousness

Empirical consciousness is a process of collecting data about the world, which we call knowledge. We can gather two forms of knowledge through empirical consciousness: ordinary knowledge, and scientific knowledge.

Passive and Direct	 develops into	Active and Indirect
Ordinary Consciousness		Scientific Consciousness

Ordinary knowledge is the knowledge we accumulate through our everyday experiences in the world. Scientific knowledge is gathered through more systematic scientific

observations and experiments. Scientific knowledge usually develops from ordinary knowledge, as we begin to seek a more formal and systematic understanding of the things we witness in our daily lives.

According to *Themes in Soviet Marxist Philosophy*, edited by T. J. Blakely:

Ordinary knowledge notes what lies on the very surface, what happens during a certain event. Scientific knowledge wants to know why it happens in just this way. The essence of scientific knowledge lies in the confirmed generalization of facts, where it becomes necessary rather than contingent, universal instead of particular, law-bound, and can serve as a basis for predicting various phenomena, events and objects...

The whole progress of scientific knowledge is bound up with growth in the force and volume of scientific prediction. Prediction makes it possible to control processes and to direct them. Scientific knowledge opens up the possibility not only of predicting the future but also of consciously forming it. The vital meaning of every science can be expressed as follows: to know in order to predict and to predict in order to act.

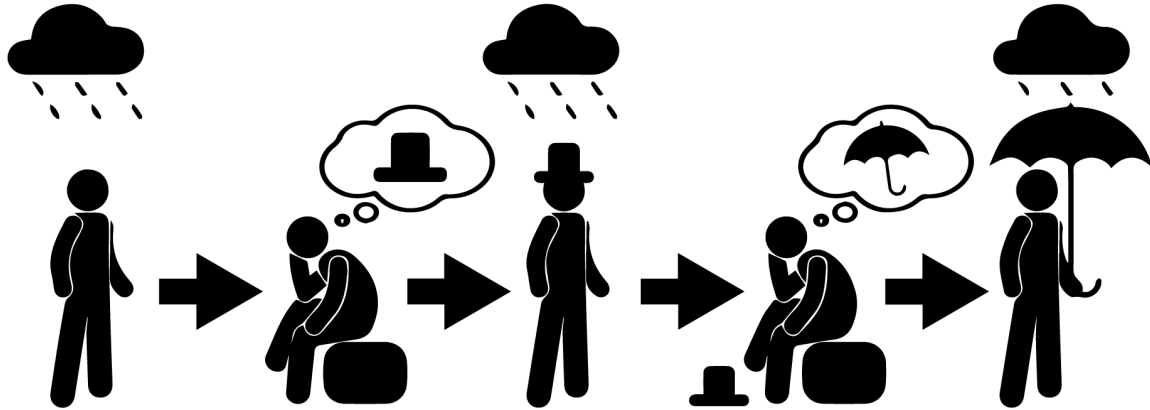
An essential characteristic of scientific knowledge is that it is systematic, i.e., it is a set of information which is ordered according to certain theoretical principles. A collection of unsystematized knowledge is not yet science. Certain basic premises are fundamental to scientific knowledge, i.e., the laws which make it possible to systematize the knowledge. Knowledge becomes scientific when the collection of facts and their descriptions reach the level where they are included in a theory.

Theoretical consciousness arises from conscious reflection on accumulated knowledge, as human beings seek to develop general and abstract understanding of the underlying principles of processes we experience in the world. Once general principles of natural and social law are established, human beings then test those general conclusions against empirical reality through further observation (i.e., through empirical consciousness).

Thus, there is a dialectical relationship between empirical consciousness and theoretical consciousness, as one form leads to another, back and forth, again and again, continuously.

Consciousness also develops from passive and surface-level observation and understanding of the world (i.e., simply considering what, where, and when things happen) to more active pursuit of the underlying meaning of the world (i.e., trying to understand how and why things happen).

Consciousness which passively observes the world, directly, in daily life is referred to as *ordinary consciousness*. Ordinary consciousness often develops into more active consciousness. This active pursuit of understanding through systematic observation



Empirical and theoretical consciousness have a dialectical relationship in which empirical consciousness and theoretical consciousness lead to and mutually develop one another.

and indirect experiences (i.e., experiences that do not occur in daily activity — such as scientific experimentation) is referred to as *scientific consciousness*.

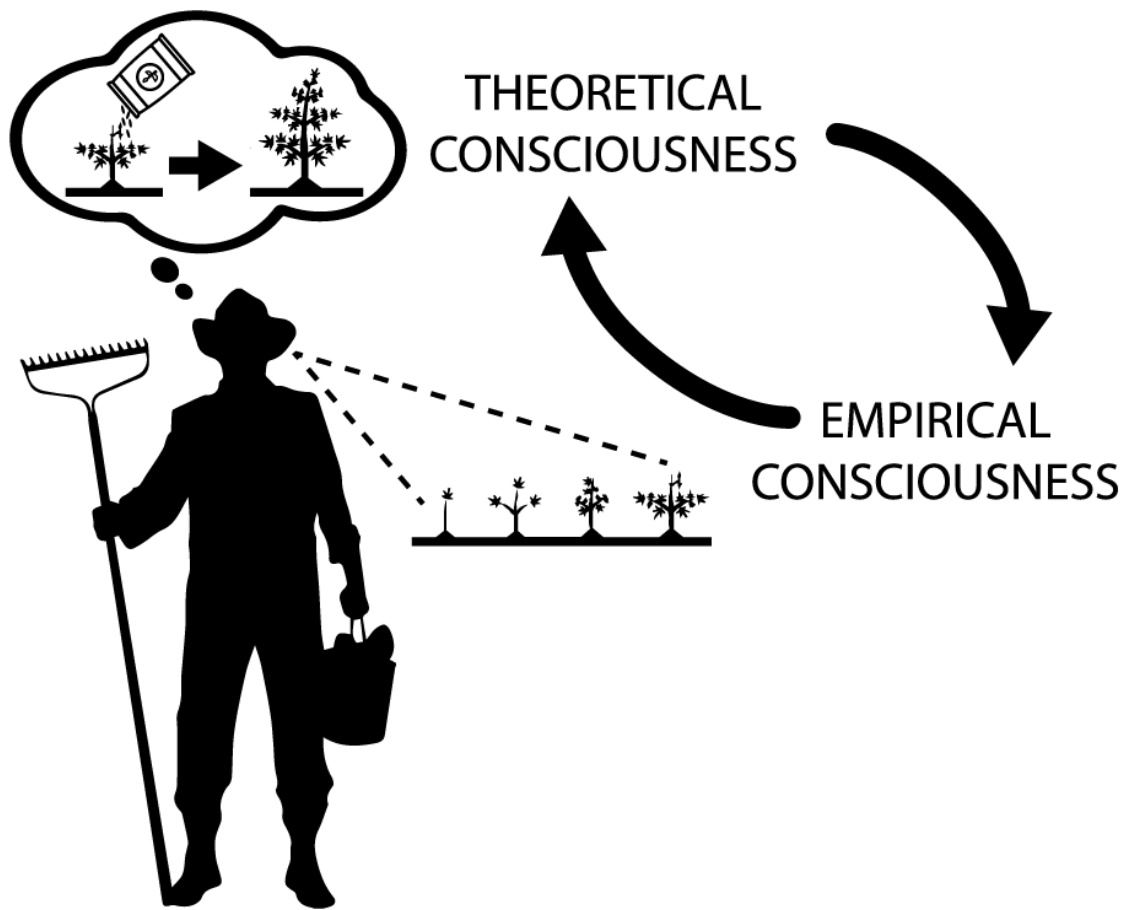
These concepts will be discussed in further detail below.

Empirical consciousness is the stage of development of consciousness in which perceptions are formed via direct observations of things and phenomena in the natural world, or of society, or through scientific experimentation and systematic observation. Empirical consciousness results in *empirical knowledge*.

Empirical knowledge has two types: *ordinary empirical knowledge* (knowledge obtained through direct observation and in productive labor) and *scientific empirical knowledge* (knowledge obtained by conducting scientific experiments). These two types of knowledge can be complementary, and can enrich one other.

Theoretical consciousness is the indirect, abstract, systematic level of perception in which the nature and laws of things and phenomena are generalized and abstracted.

Empirical consciousness and Theoretical consciousness are two different cognitive stages but they have a dialectical relationship with each other. In this dialectical relationship, empirical consciousness is the basis of theoretical consciousness; it provides theoretical consciousness with specific, rich material [i.e., knowledge]. Empirical consciousness is linked closely to practical activities [since practical activity in the material world is the chief method of gathering knowledge through empirical consciousness], and forms the basis for checking, correcting, and supplementing existing theories and summarizing, and generalizing them into new theories. However, empirical consciousness is still limited in that empirical consciousness stops at the description and classification of data obtained from direct observation and experimentation. Therefore, empirical



consciousness only brings understanding about the separate, superficial, discrete aspects of observed subjects, without yet reflecting the essence of those subjects nor the underlying principles or laws which regulate those subjects.

Therefore, empirical consciousness, alone, is not sufficient for determining the scientific laws of nature and society. To determine such laws and abstractions, theoretical consciousness must be applied. So, theoretical consciousness does not form spontaneously, nor directly from experience, although it is formed from the summation of experiences.

Annotation 217

The knowledge we gain from our daily activity often inspires scientific inquiry and more systematic observation, which can yield scientific knowledge which will enrich and improve our daily practice and allow us to experience daily life with a deeper understanding of what we're experiencing. Thus, the ordinary knowledge we gain through daily practice can enrich and yield scientific knowledge (and vice versa).

Empirical consciousness and theoretical consciousness have a dialectical relationship with each other in which empirical consciousness provides the basis for theoretical consciousness. Theoretical consciousness attempts to derive general abstractions and governing principles from empirical knowledge which is gained through empirical consciousness. Once theoretical principles, generalities, and abstractions are determined, they are then tested against reality through empirical consciousness (i.e., practical observation and systematic experimentation) to determine if the theory is sound.

Empirical consciousness and theoretical consciousness have a dialectical relationship with one another. Our observations of the material world lead to conscious activity which we then test in reality through conscious activity, and so on, in a never-ending cycle of dialectical development.

For example, a farmer may notice that plants grow better in locations where manure has been discarded — an act of empirical consciousness. The farmer might then form the theory that adding manure to the soil will help plants grow — an act of theoretical consciousness. This theory could then be tested against reality by mixing manure into the soil and observing the results, which would be another act of empirical consciousness. The farmer may then theorize that *more* manure will help plants grow *even more* — another act of theoretical consciousness — continuing the cycle of testing and observing.

This dialectical relationship between ordinary and theoretical consciousness is what allows human beings to develop and improve knowledge through practical experience, observation, and theoretical abstraction and generalization of knowledge.

Theoretical consciousness is relatively independent from empirical consciousness. Therefore, theories can precede expectations and guide the formation of valuable empirical knowledge. Theoretical consciousness is what allows human beings to sort and filter knowledge so as to best serve practical activities and contribute to the transformation of human life. Through this process, knowledge is organized and therefore enhanced, and develops from the level of specific, individual, and solitary knowledge to a higher form of generalized and abstract knowledge [what we might call *theoretical knowledge*].

Annotation 218

Knowledge which comes from empirical observations (empirical consciousness) is *empirical knowledge*. *Theoretical knowledge* is a product of theoretical consciousness. Over time, as repeated and varied observations are made through theoretical consciousness activities, knowledge becomes more generalized and abstract; this general and abstract knowledge is what we call *theoretical knowledge*.

Note that empirical and theoretical knowledge can be *ordinary* or *scientific* in nature; if the knowledge arises passively from daily life activities, it will be ordinary knowledge, regardless of whether or not it is empirical or theoretical in nature. If, on the other hand, the knowledge arises from methodological measurement and/or systematic observation, then it is scientific knowledge. So far, we have discussed ways of understanding consciousness based on the criteria of directness vs. abstractness. Next, we will discuss another way of looking at consciousness, based on the criteria of passiveness vs. activeness.

Ordinary consciousness refers to perception that is formed *passively* and *directly* from the daily activities of humans. Ordinary consciousness is a reflection of things, phenomena, and ideas, with all their observed characteristics, specific details, and nuances. Therefore, ordinary consciousness is rich, multifaceted, and associated with daily life. Therefore, ordinary consciousness has a regular and pervasive role in governing the activities of each person in society.

Scientific consciousness refers to perception formed *actively* and *indirectly* from the reflection of the characteristics, nature, and inherent relationships of research subjects. This reflection takes place in the form of logical abstraction. These logical abstractions include scientific concepts, categories, and laws. Scientific consciousness is objective, abstract, general, and systematic, and must be grounded in evidence.

Scientific consciousness utilizes systematic methodologies to profoundly describe the nature of studied subjects as well as the principles which govern them. Therefore, scientific consciousness plays an increasingly important role in practical activities, especially in the modern age of science and technology.

Annotation 219

Logical abstraction refers to an understanding of the underlying rules which govern things, phenomena, and ideas which underly objective processes, relationships, and characteristics. Logical abstraction is the result of scientific inquiry. Over time, our understanding of the rules which govern the things, phenomena, and ideas in our lives become more reliable and applicable in practical activities. This attainment of understanding and practical ability through scientific practice is *scientific consciousness*.

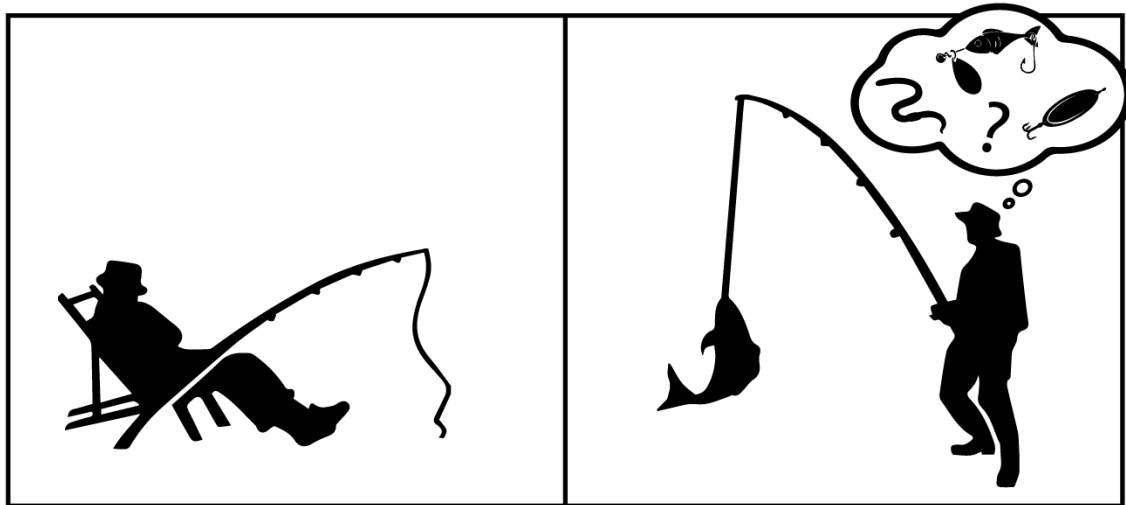
Ordinary and scientific consciousness are two different qualitative steps of cognitive processes which, together, allow humans to discover truth about our world. Ordinary and scientific consciousness have a strong dialectical relationship with each other. In this relationship, ordinary consciousness precedes scientific consciousness, as ordinary consciousness is a source of material for the development of scientific consciousness.

Although it contains the seeds of scientific knowledge, ordinary consciousness mainly stops at the reflection of superficial details, seemingly random events, and non-essential phenomena [see *Essence and Phenomenon*, p. 156]. Ordinary consciousness, therefore, cannot transform effortlessly into scientific consciousness. To develop ordinary consciousness into scientific consciousness, we must go through the process of accurate summarizing, abstracting, and generalization using scientific methods. Likewise, once scientific consciousness has been developed, it impacts and pervades ordinary consciousness, and therefore develops ordinary consciousness. Scientific consciousness therefore enhances our everyday passive perception of the world.

Annotation 220

For example, before developing scientific consciousness of farming, a farmer might go through daily life having no idea what makes plants grow to be larger and more healthy and might have no idea how to avoid common problems such as pests. After developing scientific consciousness of farming through scientific experimentation and other systematic methodologies, the farmer will look at things differently in daily life activities. They may see signs of pest infestation and immediately recognize it for what it is, and they may see other indications that plants are unhealthy and know exactly what to do to remedy the situation.

In this way, scientific consciousness enhances ordinary consciousness. Meanwhile, ordinary consciousness — passive observation of the world during daily activities — will lead to scientific consciousness by inspiring us to actively seek understanding of the world through scientific consciousness.



ORDINARY CONSCIOUSNESS

SCIENTIFIC CONSCIOUSNESS

Ordinary consciousness refers to the passive observation of reality which takes place in our daily lives. Scientific consciousness refers to the systematic application of consciousness to solve specific problems in a methodological manner.

c. The Relationship Between Praxis and Consciousness

Praxis serves as the *basis, driving force, and purpose* of consciousness. Praxis serves as the criterion of truth by testing the truthfulness of our thoughts. [See Annotation 230, p. 226]

Praxis is able to serve these roles because reality is the direct starting point of consciousness; it sets out the requirements, tasks, and modes of consciousness, as well as the movement and development tendencies of consciousness. Humans have an objective and inherent need to explain the world and to transform it.

Annotation 221

Remember that the material world defines consciousness while consciousness allows us to impact the material world through conscious activity [see *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*, p. 88]. Consciousness itself arose from the physical needs of the material world [see *The Source of Consciousness*, p. 64], and these physical needs continue to serve as the basis and driving force for all conscious activities, as we must act consciously to survive.

Our inherent need to explain the world and to transform it arises from our material needs to eat, seek shelter, cure and prevent disease, and so on. These physical needs, which stem from the material world, drive conscious activity and lead to the development of consciousness and knowledge.

Therefore, humans must necessarily impact things in the material world through our practical activities in order to survive. The impacts of our practical activities on the world cause things and phenomena to reveal their different properties, including their internal and external relationships [for example, hitting a rock will tell you properties about the rock; attempting to build something out of wood will provide data about the wood, etc.]. In this manner, praxis produces data for consciousness to process, and also helps consciousness to comprehend nature and the laws of movement and development which govern the world.

Scientific theories are formed on the basis of the dialectical relationship between practical activity and consciousness. For example: mathematics developed to allow us to count and measure things for practical activities such as agriculture, navigation, and building structures. Marxism also arose in the 1840's from the practical activities of the struggles of the working class against the capitalist class at that time. Even recent scientific achievements arise from practical needs and activities. For example, the discovery and decoding of the human genome map was born from practical activities and needs, such as the need to develop treatments for incurable diseases. In the end, there is no field of knowledge that is not derived from reality. Ultimately, all knowledge arises from and serves practice. Therefore, if we were to break from reality or stop relying on reality, consciousness would break from the basis of reality that nurtures our growth, existence and development. Also, the cognitive subject cannot have true and profound knowledge about the world if it does not follow reality.

Practice also serves as the basis, driving force, and purpose of consciousness because, thanks to practical activities, our human ability to measure and observe reality improves increasingly over time; our logical thinking ability is constantly strengthened and developed; cognitive means become increasingly developed. All of these developments "extend" the human senses in perceiving the world [for example, by developing new tools to measure, perceive, and sense the world such as telescopes, radar, microscopes, etc.].

Reality is not only the basis, the driving force, and the purpose of discovering truth but also serves as the *standard of truth*. Reality also serves as the basis for *examining the truthfulness of the cognitive process* [i.e., we can test whether our thoughts match material reality through experimentation and practice in the real world]. This means that practice is the measure of the value of the knowledge we gain through perception. At the same time, practice is constantly supplementing, adjusting, correcting, developing, and improving human consciousness. Marx said: "The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical

question. Man must prove the truth — i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice.”¹

Thus, practice is not only the starting point of consciousness and a decisive factor for the formation and development of consciousness, it is also a target where consciousness must always aim to test the truth. To emphasize this role which practice plays, Lenin said: “The standpoint of life, of practice, should be first and fundamental in the theory of knowledge.”²

The role of practice in consciousness requires that we always grasp the practical point of view. This point of view requires that we derive our ideas from practice, our ideas must be based on practice, and our ideas must deeply explore practice. In our conscious activities, we must attach a lot of importance to the summarization of practice [i.e., developing theoretical knowledge through theoretical consciousness which reflects practical experience]. Theoretical research must be related to practice, and learning must go hand in hand with practicing. If we diverge from practice, it will lead to mistakes of subjectivism, idealism, dogmatism, rigidity, and bureaucracy.

Annotation 222

Subjectivism occurs when one centers one’s own self and conscious activities in perspective and worldview, failing to test one’s own perceptions against material and social reality. Subjectivists tend to believe that they can independently reason their way to truth in their own minds without practical experience and activity in the material world. Related to subjectivism is *solipsism*, a form of idealism in which one believes that the self is the only basis for truth. As Marxist ethicist Howard Selsam wrote in *Ethics and Progress: New Values in a Revolutionary World*: “If I believe that I alone exist and that you and all your arguments exist only in my mind and are my own creations then all possible arguments will not shake me one iota. No logic can possibly convince [the] solipsist.”

Idealism has a strong connection with a failure to incorporate practical activity into theoretical consciousness, since idealism holds that conscious activity is the sole basis of discovering truth.

Dogmatism occurs when one only accounts for commonalities and considers theory itself as the sole basis of truth rather than practice [see Annotation 239, p. 235]. Dogmatists ignore practical experience and considering pre-established theory, alone, as unalterable truth. This results in a breakdown of the dialectical relationship between theoretical consciousness and empirical consciousness, which arrests the development process of knowledge and consciousness.

¹ *Theses On Feuerbach*, Karl Marx, 1845.

² *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1908.

Rigidity is an unwillingness to alter one's thoughts, holding too stiffly to established consciousness and knowledge, and ignoring practical experience and observation, which leads to stagnation of both knowledge and consciousness.

Bureaucracy arises when theory becomes overly codified and formalized, to the extent that practical considerations are ignored in favor of codified theory. Bureaucracy can be avoided by incorporating practical experience and observations continuously into the development of practical systems and methodologies so that theory and practice become increasingly aligned over time to continuously improve efficiency and effectiveness of practical activities in the material world.

On the contrary, if the role of practice is absolutized [to the exclusion of conscious activity], it will fall into pragmatism and empiricism.

Annotation 223

In this context, *pragmatism* refers to a form of subjectivism [see Annotation 222, above] in which one centers one's own immediate material concerns over all other considerations. For example, workers may place their own immediate needs and desires above the concerns of their fellow workers as a whole. This may offer some temporary gains, but in the long run their lack of solidarity and class consciousness will be detrimental as workers collectively suffer from division, making all workers more vulnerable to exploitation and ill treatment by the capitalist class.

Empiricism is a faulty form of materialism in which *only* sense experience and practical experience are considered sources of truth. This is opposed to the dialectical materialist position that the material *determines* consciousness, while consciousness *impacts* the material world through conscious labor activity. [See *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*, p. 88]

Thus, the principle of the *unification* of practice and theory must be the basic principle in practical and theoretical activities. Theory without practice as its basis and criterion for determining its truthfulness is useless. Vice versa, practice without scientific and revolutionary theory will inevitably turn into blind practice. [As Ho Chi Minh once said: "Study and practice must always go together. Study without practice is useless. Practice without study leads to folly."]

2. Dialectical Path of Consciousness to Truth

a. Opinions of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin about the Dialectical Path of Consciousness to Truth

Annotation 224

The section below outlines and explains *the Universal Law of Consciousness*, which holds that consciousness is a process of dialectical development in which practical activity leads to conscious activity, which then leads back to practical activity, in a continuous and never-ending cycle, with a tendency to develop both practical and conscious activity to increasingly higher levels.

In his *Philosophical Notebook*, Lenin generalized the dialectical path towards the realization of truth as development from vivid visualization to abstract thinking, and then from abstraction back to practice. This process, according to Lenin, is the dialectical path towards the realization of truth, and the realization of objective reality.

According to this generalization, the dialectical path towards the realization of truth (“truth,” here, referring to a correct and accurate reflection of objective reality) is a process. It is a process that starts from “vivid visualization” (emotional consciousness) to “abstract thinking” (rational consciousness).

Annotation 225

Given that consciousness has a material basis, and that practical activities are the driving force of consciousness [see Annotation 230, p. 226], it follows that we must strive to align our conscious thoughts and ideas with the material world. The more accurately we can reflect reality in our consciousness, the more effectively and efficiently our practical activities can become.

For example, through learning more about the mechanical, material, and physical processes which take place inside of an automobile engine, the more we can improve engines to make them more efficient and effective for practical applications.

Lenin explained that consciousness develops from “emotional consciousness” to “rational consciousness.” Thought about a subject begins at a base level of consciousness that is rooted in emotional and sense-oriented conscious activity, i.e., “vivid visualization,” which then leads to rational, abstract reflection.

By “vivid visualization,” Lenin is referring to the active, real-time experience of seeing (and hearing, smelling, and otherwise sensing) things and phenomena in the world.

When a person experiences something through practical activity, the first conscious activity will tend to occur at the emotional and sensory level — in other words, the conscious activities which occur simultaneously along with practical activities. Only after this initial period of emotional consciousness will one be able to reflect on the experience on a more rational and abstract level.

For example, if a zoologist in the field sees a species of bird they have never encountered before, their first conscious activity will be at the sensory-emotional level: they will observe the shape, coloration, and motion of the bird. They may feel excitement, happiness, and other emotions. This is emotional conscious activity.

This emotional conscious activity will then develop into rational conscious activity, as the zoologist may begin to consider things more abstractly, attempting to interpret and understand this experience through reason and rational reflection, asking such questions as: “Where does this bird nest? What does it feed on? Is this a new discovery?” and so on.

Such abstractions are not the end point of a cognitive cycle, because consciousness must then continue to develop through practice. It is through practice that perception tests and proves its own correctness so that it can then continue on to repeat the cycle.

This is also the general rule of the human perception of objective reality.

Annotation 226

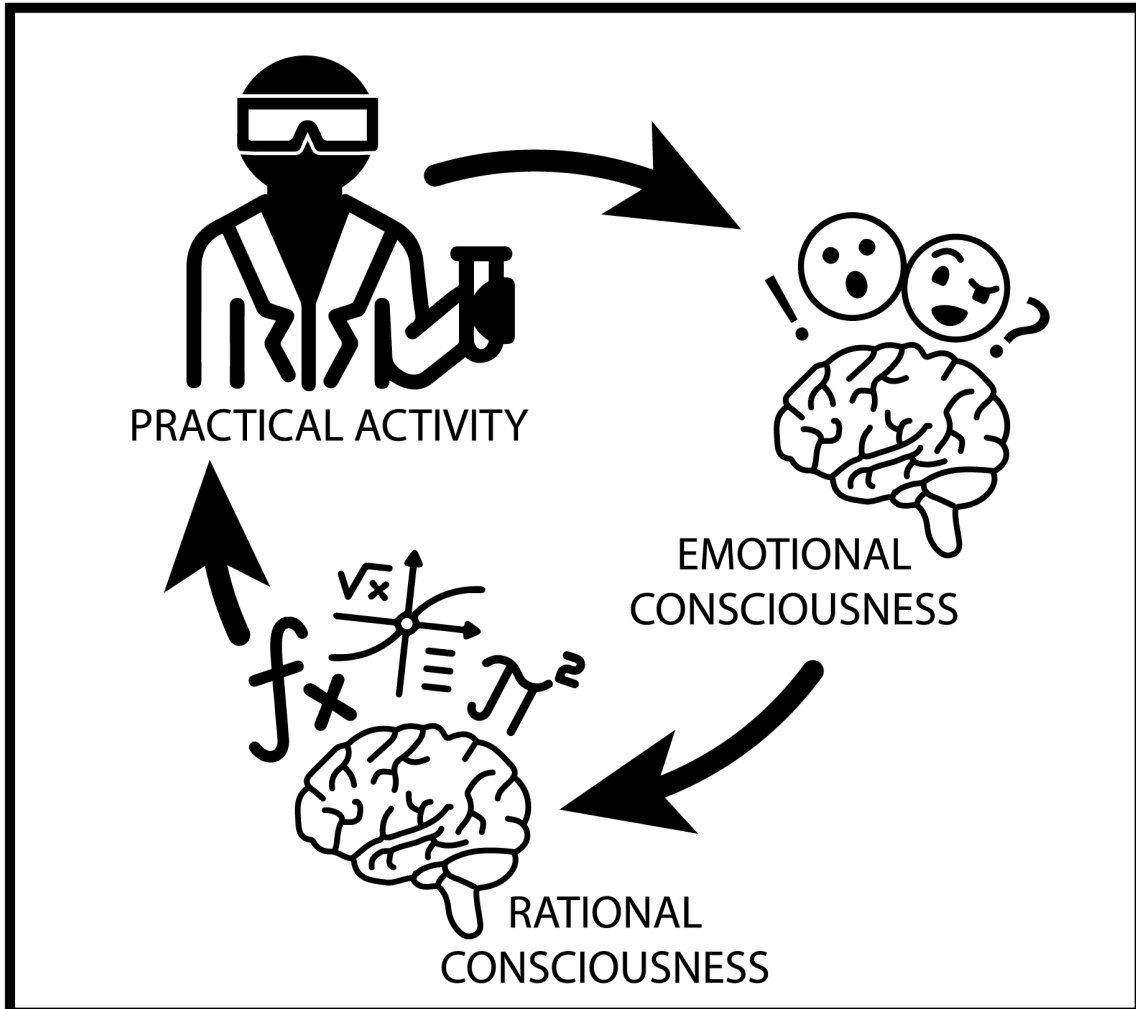
Thus there is a dialectical relationship between emotional consciousness (linked to practical activity) and rational consciousness (linked to purely conscious activity).

This dialectical relationship is a cycle, in which one engages in practical activity, which leads to emotional consciousness, which leads to rational consciousness, which then leads back to practical activity to test the correctness of the conclusions of rational conscious activity.

We call this cycle of development of consciousness the cognitive process.

The cognitive process is explained in more detail below.

- Development From Emotional Consciousness to Rational Consciousness



COGNITIVE PROCESS CYCLE

The cognitive process is a continuous cycle which describes the dialectical development of consciousness and practical activity.

Emotional consciousness is the lower stage of the cognitive process. In this stage of cognitive development, humans use — through practical activity — use our senses to reflect objective things and phenomena (with all their perceived specific characteristics and rich manifestations) in human consciousness. During this period, consciousness only reflects the phenomena [i.e. *phenomena*, as opposed to *essence* — see *Essence and Phenomenon*, p. 156] — the external manifestations — of the perceived subject. At this stage, consciousness has not yet reflected the *essence* — the nature, and/or the regulating principles — of the subject. Therefore, this is the lowest stage of development of the cognitive process. In this stage, consciousness is carried out through three basic phases: *sensation*, *conception*, and *symbolization*.

Human *sensation* of an objective thing or phenomenon is the simplest, most primitive phase of the emotional consciousness stage of the cognitive processes, but without it there would not be any perception of objective things or phenomena. Every human sensation of objective things and phenomena contains objective content [see *Content and Form*, p. 147], even though it arises as subjective human conscious reflection. Sensation is the subjective imagining of the objective world. It is the basis from which the next phase of emotional consciousness — *conception* — is formed.

Conception is a relatively complete reflection within human consciousness of objective things and phenomena. Conception is formed on the basis of linking and synthesizing sensational experiences of things and phenomena [i.e., *sensation*]. Compared with sensation, conception is a higher, fuller, richer form of consciousness, but it is still a reflection of the outward manifestations of objects. Conception does not yet reflect the essence, nature, and regulating principles of the perceived subject.

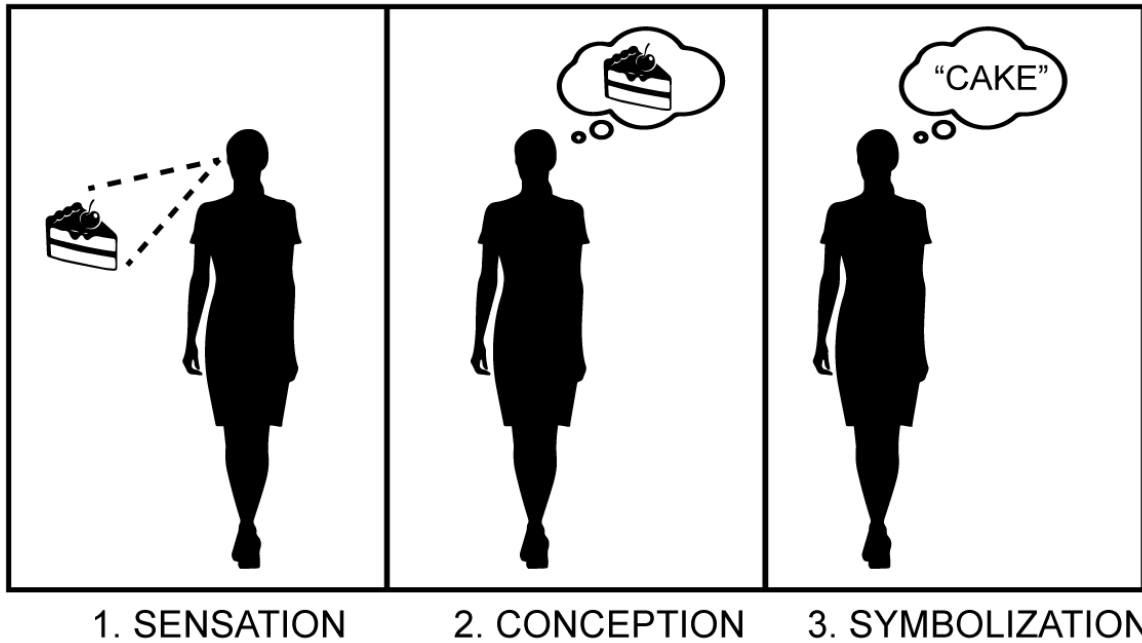
Symbolization is the representation of an objective thing or phenomenon that has been reflected by sensation and conception. It is the most advanced and most complex phase of the stage of emotional consciousness. At the same time, it also serves as the transitional step between emotional consciousness and rational consciousness. The defining characteristic of symbolism is the ability to reproduce symbolic ideas of objective things and phenomena within human consciousness. Symbolization describes the act of recreating the outward appearances of material things and phenomena within human consciousness, which is the first step of abstraction, and thus the first step towards rational consciousness.

Annotation 227

Here is an example of the three phases of the emotional consciousness stage of the cognitive process:

1. *Sensation*: Jessica *senses* a cake in the window of a bakery. She *sees* the frosting, the shape of the cake, and the decorations which adorn the cake. She *smells* the cake.

EMOTIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS STAGE of the COGNITIVE PROCESS



During this phase, objective data about the cake is received into her consciousness, developing into an immediate and subjective sense perception of the cake. The beginnings of this cognitive activity will be purely sensory in nature; she may have been thinking of other things as she walked by the bakery, but the sight and smell of the cake, upon registering in her mind, will lead to the beginning of a new cognitive process cycle.

2. Conception: Jessica begins to *conceive* of the cake in her mind more fully. She will associate the immediate sense experiences of seeing and smelling the cake with other experiences she has had with cake, and a complete mental image and concept of the cake will form in her mind.

3. Symbolization: The word “cake” may now form in her mind, and she may begin thinking of the cake more abstractly, as “food,” as a “temptation,” and in other ways. This is the beginning of abstraction in Jessica’s mind, which will then lead to rational conscious activities.

Note that all of these phases of emotional consciousness activity may take place very quickly, perhaps in a fraction of a second, and may coincide with other conscious activity (i.e., Jessica may simultaneously be thinking of a meeting she’s running late to and any number of other things). At this point, Jessica will transition to the *rational consciousness* stage of the cognitive process, which is explained in more detail below.

By the end of the emotional stage of the cognitive process, consciousness has not yet reflected the essence — the nature, regulating principles, etc. — of the perceived subject. Therefore, at the emotional stage, consciousness is not yet able to properly *interpret* the reflected subject. That is to say, emotional conscious activity does not meet the cognitive requirements to serve practical activities, including the need to creatively transform the objective world. To meet these requirements, emotional consciousness must develop into *rational consciousness*.

Rational consciousness is the higher stage of the cognitive process. It includes the indirect, abstract, and generalized reflection of the essential properties and characteristics of things and phenomena. This stage of consciousness performs the most important function of comprehending and interpreting the *essence* of the perceived subject. Rational consciousness is implemented through three basic phases: *definition*, *judgment*, and *reasoning*.

Definition is the first phase of rational consciousness. During this phase, the mind begins to interpret, organize, and process the basic properties of things and phenomena at a rational level into a conceptual whole. The formation of definition is the result of the summarization and synthesis of all the different characteristics and properties of the subject, and how the subject fits into the organized structure of knowledge which exists in the mind. Definition is the basis for forming judgments in the cognitive process.

Judgment is the next phase of rational consciousness, which arises from the definition of the subject — the linking of concepts and properties together — which leads to affirmative or negative ideation of certain characteristics or attributes of the perceived subject.

According to the level of development of consciousness, judgment may take one of three forms: unique judgment, general judgment, and universal judgment [see Annotation 105, p. 107]. Universal judgment is the form of judgement that expresses the broadest conception of objective reality.

Reasoning is the final phase of rational consciousness, formed on the basis of synthesizing judgments so as to extrapolate new knowledge about the perceived subject. Before reasoning can take place, judgments must be transformed into knowledge. A judgment can be transformed into knowledge through one of two logical mechanisms: deductive inference (which extrapolates the general from the specific), and inductive inference (which extrapolates the specific from the general).

Annotation 228

Here is an example of the three phases of the rational consciousness stage of the cognitive process, continuing from our previous example of the emotional consciousness stage [see Annotation 227, p. 222].

RATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS STAGE
of the COGNITIVE PROCESS



1. *Definition*: Jessica’s conception of the cake will transition into the rational conscious activity of *definition*. Jessica will begin to define the concept of the cake more wholly and concretely, summarizing and synthesizing all of the features and characteristics of the cake into a cohesive mental reflection of the cake. The word “cake” may become more pronounced and defined in Jessica’s consciousness, prompting her to think of the object which she defines as a “cake” more fully and rationally.

2. *Judgment*: Jessica will begin to form basic judgments about the cake. “That cake looks good,” “that cake smells good,” and so on. Next, these judgments will begin to transform into knowledge through inductive or deductive inferences. An inductive inference might be: “I generally enjoy eating cakes, therefore, I might enjoy eating this cake!” An example of a deductive inference might be: “This cake looks very delicious, therefore, there might be other delicious things in this bakery!”

3. *Reasoning*: Processes of inductive and/or deductive inference will begin to transform Jessica’s judgments into the form of knowledge. For instance, she may now possess such knowledge as: “This bakery has delicious looking cakes, this is a cake I would like to eat,” and so on. With this newly acquired knowledge, Jessica can begin reasoning; that is to say, she can begin making rational conclusions and decisions. She might conclude: “I will go into this bakery and buy that cake.”

Note that this is not the “end” of the cognitive process, because the final phase of the reasoning stage of the cognitive process (reasoning) will lead directly into a new cycle of the cognitive process. In this example, Jessica might engage in the practical activity of checking her watch to see the time, which will begin a new cycle of cognitive process, beginning with the *sensation* phase of the emotional stage as the visual sense data of her watch and carrying through to the final *reasoning* phase of the rational stage, and so on.

It should also be noted that this is merely an abstraction of the cognitive process; in reality, the human mind is incredibly complex, capable of carrying out a variety of cognitive processes simultaneously. At any given moment, a person might be considering various different subjects, and each different subject might be at a different stage

of the cognitive process. This abstract model of the cognitive process is presented to help us comprehend the component functions of consciousness more easily in the wider context of dialectical materialist philosophy.

Specifically, this model of the cognitive process is intended to help us understand how human consciousness leads to “truth.” And “truth,” here, refers to the alignment of human consciousness with the material world, so that our perceptions and understanding of the world is accurate and representative of actual reality.

- *The Relationship Between Emotional Consciousness, Rational Consciousness, and Reality*

Emotional consciousness and rational consciousness are stages that make up the cognitive cycle. In reality, they are often intertwined within the cognitive process, but they have different functions. If *emotional consciousness* is associated with reality, and with the impact of sense data received from observing the material world, and is the basis for cognitive reason, then *rational consciousness*, based on higher cognitive understanding and abstraction, allows us to understand the essence, nature, regulating principles, and development processes of things and phenomena. Rational consciousness helps direct emotional consciousness in a more efficient and effective direction and leads to more profound and accurate emotional consciousness.

Annotation 229

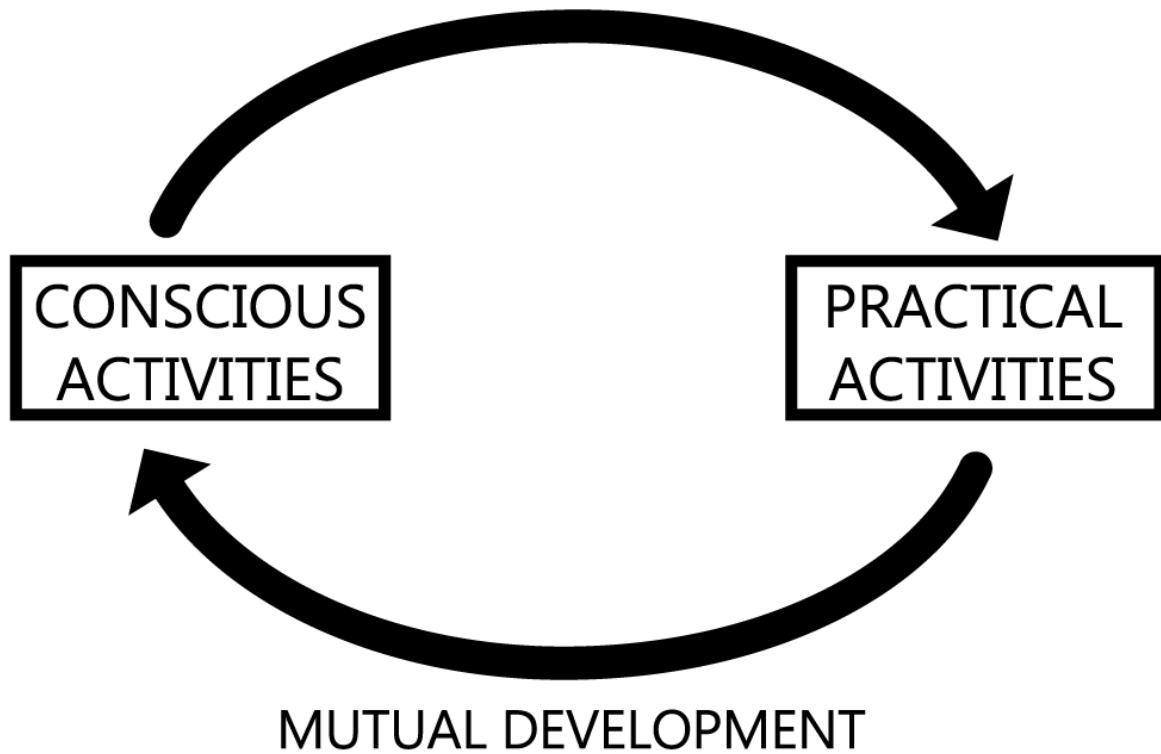
In other words, considering a subject at the level of rational consciousness allows us to then view the same subject, at an emotional consciousness level, with more depth and awareness.

For example, the more time we have spent rationally considering something like a bicycle, the more quickly and accurately we can examine a bicycle at the level of emotional consciousness. If someone is looking at a bicycle for the first time, they might not be able to distinguish its component parts or functions. On the other hand, if someone has spent more time considering bicycles at the level of rational consciousness, they may be able to immediately and rapidly understand and process a bicycle at the emotional conscious level, so that they can perceive and comprehend the different parts of a bicycle, as well as their functions, immediately and at the emotional-sensory level.

However, if we stop at rational consciousness, we will only have knowledge about the subjects we perceive, but we still won't really know if that knowledge is truly accurate or not. In order to be useful in practical activity, we must consciously determine whether knowledge is *truth* [i.e., whether the knowledge accurately reflects reality]. In order to determine the truth of knowledge, consciousness must necessarily return to reality. Consciousness must use reality as a criterion — a measurement — of the authenticity of knowledge gained through purely cognitive processes. In other words, all

consciousness is ultimately derived from practical needs, and must also return to serve practical activities.

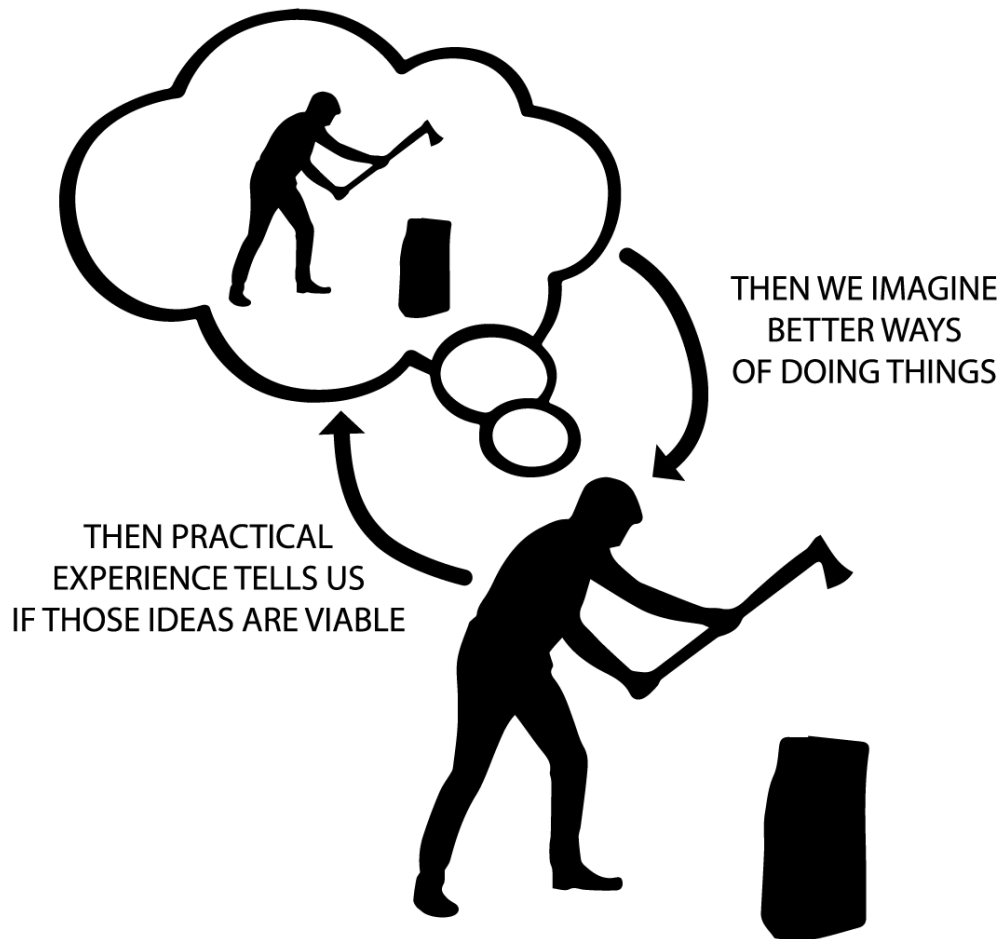
Annotation 230



The dialectical relationship between consciousness and practical activities means that conscious activities develop practical activities, and vice versa, in a continuous feedback loop.

One of the fundamental principles of dialectical materialism is that the material determines the ideal, and the ideal impacts the material [see *The Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness*]. The fact that the material determines consciousness is reflected in the fact that material needs led to the development of consciousness, and conscious activity stems from material needs [see *Social Sources of Consciousness*].

The fact that the ideal impacts the material is reflected in the fact that consciousness must always return to the service of practical activities; as our consciousness



The dialectical relationship between consciousness and practical activity is what drives the development of humanity. We imagine better ways of doing things, then test those ideas against reality through practical activity.

develops (along with knowledge), our ability to impact and transform the material world becomes more efficient and effective.

This dialectical relationship between consciousness and practical activity is thus cyclical. Conscious activity arises from practical activity, and returns to practical activity, in an endless process of developing both conscious ability as well as practical ability.

Therefore, it can be seen that the general, cyclical nature of the process of movement and development of consciousness develops from practice to consciousness — from consciousness to practice — from practical activity to the continued process of cognitive development, and so on. This process is repeated continuously, without end. The development level of consciousness and practice in the next cycle are often higher than in the previous cycle, and the cognitive process gradually develops more and more accuracy, as well as fuller and deeper knowledge about objective reality.

The universal law of consciousness [see Annotation 224, p. 219] is also a concrete and vivid manifestation of the universal laws of materialist dialectics, including: the law of negation of negation, the law of transformation between quantity and quality and the law of unity and contradiction between opposites. The process of cognitive motion and development, governed by these general laws, is the process of human progress towards absolute truth [see Annotation 232, p. 228].

Annotation 231

The universal law of consciousness is governed by the three universal laws of materialist dialectics:

The Law of Negation of Negation dictates that the new will arise from the old, but will carry forward characteristics from the old. This is reflected in the universal law of consciousness in that conscious activity arises from practical activity. This conscious activity then develops into improved practical activity, and so on, in a never-ending cycle of development. Throughout this development process, characteristics of previous cycles of cognitive and practical activities are carried forward and transferred on to newer cycles of cognitive and practical activities.

The Law of Transformation Between Quantity and Quality recognizes that quantity changes develop into changes in quality, and vice versa. This is reflected in the universal law of consciousness in the development of both conscious and practical activities. Conscious development also develops from quantitative changes to quality changes, and vice versa. For example, once a person accumulates a certain quantity of knowledge, the quality of their knowledge will change. For example, once a person has learned the

function of every component part of a car engine, they will have a *quality shift* in their understanding of car engines — they will now have competency of the functioning of the engine as a whole. This is also true of practical activities. A quantity of practical experience will lead to quality shifts in practical ability. For example, once a person has practiced riding a bicycle enough that they can reliably ride the bicycle without falling, we would say that the person “knows how to ride a bicycle,” which represents a quality shift from the state of “learning how to ride a bicycle.”

The Law of Unity and Contradiction Between Opposites states that all things, phenomena, and ideas are defined by internal and external contradictions. This is reflected in the universal law of consciousness by the fact that practical needs serve as the basis for conscious activity, and that cognitive processes serve, in essence, to negate contradictions between consciousness and material reality through practical experience. In other words, the cognitive process is defined by a never-ending process of contradiction between the material and the ideal, as human beings seek to negate contradictions between our conscious understanding of the world and our practical experiences in search of *truth* - the accurate alignment of consciousness with the material world.

b. Truth, and the Relationship Between Truth and Reality

- *Definition of Truth*

All cognitive processes lead to the creation of *knowledge*, which is what we call human understanding of objective reality. But not all knowledge has content consistent with objective reality, because consciousness exists as the subjective reflection of objective reality in the human mind. The collective cognitive practice of all of humanity throughout history, as well as the cognitive practice of each individual human being, has demonstrated that the knowledge which people have gained and are gaining is not always consistent with objective reality. On the contrary, there are many cases of misalignment between consciousness and reality, and even complete contradiction between human thought and objective reality.

Within the theoretical scope of Marxism-Leninism, the concept of *truth* is used to refer to knowledge which is aligned with objective reality. This alignment is tested and proven through practice. In this sense, the concept of truth is not identical with the concept of “knowledge,” nor with the concept of “hypothesis.” According to Lenin: “The coincidence of thought with the object is a **process**: thought (= man) must not imagine truth in the form of dead repose, in the form of a bare picture (image), pale (matte), without impulse, without motion...”¹

¹ *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1914.

Annotation 232

Here, Lenin is dispelling Hegel's conception of "absolute truth," which is not to be confused with Lenin's concept of "absolute truth" as "objective truth" which aligns consciousness with objective reality [see Annotation 58, p. 56]. For Hegel, "absolute truth" was the idea that there will eventually be some end point to the process of rational consciousness at which we will finally arrive at some final stage of knowledge and consciousness. This rational end point of consciousness, at which the dialectic ends and all contradictions are negated, is Hegel's "absolute truth."

Lenin is also pushing back against the metaphysical conception that all "truths" exist as static categories of information which do not change. Instead, Lenin points out that seeking truth — i.e., aligning consciousness with material reality — is a never-ending process, in particular because reality is constantly developing and changing. Thus, the alignment of consciousness with reality — the pursuit of truth — is a living and dynamic process which will never end, since the development of reality will never end.

- *The Properties of Truth*

All truths are *objective, relative, absolute, and concrete.*

The *objectivity* of truth is the independence of its content from the subjective will of human beings. The content of knowledge must be aligned with objective reality, not vice versa. This means that the content of accurate knowledge is not a product of pure subjective reasoning. Truth is not an arbitrary human construct, nor is truth inherent in consciousness. On the contrary, truth belongs to the objective world, and is determined by the objective world. The affirmation of the objectivity of truth is one of the fundamental points that distinguishes the concept of absolute truth of dialectical materialism from the concept of absolute truth of idealism and skepticism — the doctrines that deny the objective existence of the physical world and deny the possibility that humans are able to perceive the world.

Annotation 233

The Dialectical Materialist conception of objective truth stands in contrast to *idealism*, which states that conscious reasoning alone leads to truth, and that the subjective ideal determines material reality [see Annotation 7, p. 8].

This objectivity of truth also refutes *skepticism*, which states that truth is essentially undiscoverable, because human consciousness is ultimately unreliable and incapable of accurately reflecting material reality [see Annotation 32, p. 27].

Distinction must also be drawn between the concept of absolute truth as it is understood in dialectical materialist philosophy and the conception of absolute truth in Hegel's idealist dialectics. Dialectical materialism defines absolute truth as "objective truth;" that is to say: a complete alignment between objective reality and human

consciousness (as compared to relative truth, which is a partial alignment between consciousness and objective reality).

Hegel, on the other hand, views absolute truth as a final point at which human consciousness will have achieved absolute, complete, and final understanding of our universe (see Annotation 232, p. 228) with the ideal serving as the first basis and primary mechanism for bringing absolute truth to fruition.

Truth is not only objective, but also *absolute* and *relative*. Absolute truth [see Annotation 58, p. 56] refers to truth which reflects a full and complete alignment of consciousness and reality. Theoretically, we can reach absolute truth. This is because, in the objective world, there exists no thing nor phenomenon which human beings are completely incapable of accurately perceiving. The possibility of acquiring absolute truth in the process of the development of conscious understanding is theoretically limitless. However, in reality, our conscious ability to reflect reality is limited by the specific material conditions of each generation of humanity, of practical limitations, and by the spatial and temporal conditions of reflected subjects. Therefore, truth is also *relative*.

Annotation 234

Dialectical materialist philosophy recognizes that it must be theoretically possible to know everything there is to know about a given subject, since we are theoretically capable of accurately perceiving, sensing, and measuring all data which pertains to a subject. However, dialectical materialism also recognizes the practical limitations of human beings. As Engels writes in *Anti-Dühring*:

If mankind ever reached the stage at which it should work only with eternal truths, with results of thought which possess sovereign validity and an unconditional claim to truth, it would then have reached the point where the infinity of the intellectual world both in its actuality and in its potentiality had been exhausted, and thus the famous miracle of the counted uncountable would have been performed.

But are there any truths which are so securely based that any doubt of them seems to us to be tantamount to insanity? That twice two makes four, that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, that Paris is in France, that a man who gets no food dies of hunger, and so forth? Are there then nevertheless eternal truths, final and ultimate truths.

Certainly there are. We can divide the whole realm of knowledge in the traditional way into three great departments. The first includes all sciences

that deal with inanimate nature and are to a greater or lesser degree susceptible of mathematical treatment: mathematics, astronomy, mechanics, physics, chemistry. If it gives anyone any pleasure to use mighty words for very simple things, it can be asserted that certain results obtained by these sciences are eternal truths, final and ultimate truths; for which reason these sciences are known as the exact sciences. But very far from all their results have this validity. With the introduction of variable magnitudes and the extension of their variability to the infinitely small and infinitely large, mathematics, usually so strictly ethical, fell from grace; it ate of the tree of knowledge, which opened up to it a career of most colossal achievements, but at the same time a path of error. The virgin state of absolute validity and irrefutable proof of everything mathematical was gone forever; the realm of controversy was inaugurated, and we have reached the point where most people differentiate and integrate not because they understand what they are doing but from pure faith, because up to now it has always come out right. Things are even worse with astronomy and mechanics, and in physics and chemistry we are swamped by hypotheses as if attacked by a swarm of bees. And it must of necessity be so. In physics we are dealing with the motion of molecules, in chemistry with the formation of molecules out of atoms, and if the interference of light waves is not a myth, we have absolutely no prospect of ever seeing these interesting objects with our own eyes. As time goes on, final and ultimate truths become remarkably rare in this field.

Relative truth is truth which has developed alignment with reality without yet having reached *complete* alignment between human knowledge and the reality which it reflects. To put it another way, relative truth represents knowledge which incompletely reflects material subjects without complete accuracy. In relative truth, there is only partial alignment — in some (but not all) aspects — between consciousness and the material world.

Annotation 235

False consciousness is consciousness which is incorrect and misaligned from reality. Discovering and rooting out false consciousness is one of the primary concerns of dialectical materialism, as false consciousness can be a serious impediment to human progress. The term “false consciousness” was first used by Friedrich Engels in a personal

letter to Franz Mehring in 1893 (a decade after the death of Karl Marx), and in this letter Engels uses the term interchangeably with the word “ideology”^{*} to describe conscious thought processes which do not align with reality:

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives. Because it is a process of thought he derives both its form and its content from pure thought, either his own or that of his predecessors. He works with mere thought material which he accepts without examination as the product of thought, he does not investigate further for a more remote process independent of thought; indeed its origin seems obvious to him, because as all action is produced through the medium of thought it also appears to him to be ultimately based upon thought. The ideologist who deals with history (history is here simply meant to comprise all the spheres – political, juridical, philosophical, theological – belonging to society and not only to nature), the ideologist dealing with history then, possesses in every sphere of science material which has formed itself independently out of the thought of previous generations and has gone through an independent series of developments in the brains of these successive generations. True, external facts belonging to its own or other spheres may have exercised a co-determining influence on this development, but the tacit pre-supposition is that these facts themselves are also only the fruits of a process of thought, and so we still remain within that realm of pure thought which has successfully digested the hardest facts.

Although the *term* “false consciousness” is not found in writing until after Marx’s death, the *concept* underlying the term “false consciousness” is found often in the works of Marx and Engels. For instance, in *The Holy Family*, Marx and Engels explain how communist, class conscious workers have been able to break free of false consciousness of capitalist society:

They (the communist workers) are most painfully aware of the difference between being and thinking, between consciousness and life. They know that property, capital, money, wage-labor and the like are no ideal figments of the brain but very practical, very objective products of their self-estrangement.

This allusion to “the difference between being and thinking” recurs again and again in the works of Marx and Engels.

Lenin also discussed the concept of false consciousness extensively, and argued that dialectical materialism was the key to negating the false consciousness of the working class, writing in *What the “Friends of the People” Are*:

It never has been the case, nor is it so now, that the members of society conceive the sum-total of the social relations in which they live as something definite, integral, pervaded by some principle; on the contrary, the mass of people adapt themselves to these relations unconsciously, and have so little conception of them as specific historical social relations that, for instance, an explanation of the exchange relations under which people have lived for centuries was found only in very recent times. Materialism removed this contradiction by carrying the analysis deeper, to the origin of man's social ideas themselves; and its conclusion that the course of ideas depends on the course of things is the only one compatible with scientific psychology. Further, and from yet another aspect, this hypothesis was the first to elevate sociology to the level of a science.

Note that this convention of using the word "ideology" to mean "false consciousness" has never been common, and Marx and Engels both used the word "ideology" more often in its more usual sense of "a system of ideas," but it is still occasionally encountered in socialist literature, as Joseph McCarney explains in *Marx Myths and Legends*:

Marx never calls ideology 'false consciousness'. Indeed, he never calls anything 'false consciousness', a phrase that does not occur in his work... The noun is almost always accompanied by an epithet such as 'German', 'republican', 'political' or 'Hegelian', or by a qualifying phrase, as in 'the ideology of the bourgeoisie' or 'the ideology of the political economist'. More typical in any case is the adjectival usage in which such varied items as 'forms', 'expressions', 'phrases', 'conceptions', 'deception', and 'distortion' are said to have an 'ideological' character. Even more distinctive is the frequency, amounting to approximately half of all references in the relevant range, of invocations of the 'ideologists', the creators and purveyors of the ideological forms.

"Relative truth" and "absolute truth" do not exist separately, but have dialectical unity with each other. On the one hand, "absolute truth" is the sum of all "relative truths." On the other hand, in all relative truths there are always elements of absolute truth.

Lenin wrote that "absolute truth results from the sum-total of relative truths in the course of their development; [...] relative truths represent relatively faithful reflections of an object existing independently of man; [...] these reflections become more and more faithful; [...] every scientific truth, notwithstanding its relative nature, contains an element of absolute truth."²

² *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1908.

Correct realization of the dialectical relationship between relative and absolute truth plays a very important role in criticizing and overcoming extremism and false consciousness in perception and in action. If we exaggerate the absoluteness of the truth of knowledge which we possess, or downplay its relativity, we will fall into the false consciousness of metaphysics, dogmatism, conservatism, and stagnation.

Annotation 236

Intentional or unintentional exaggeration of the absoluteness of truth — i.e., considering our knowledge to be more complete and/or aligned with reality than it actually is — leads to incorrect viewpoints and mindsets, including:

Metaphysics is a philosophical system which seeks truth through the systematic categorization of knowledge [see Annotation 8, p. 8]. This is a flawed method of seeking knowledge because it considers truth to be essentially static and unchanging, and upholds the erroneous notion that truth can be systematically broken down into discrete, isolated categories. In addition to being fundamentally incorrect about the nature of truth and knowledge, it leads to the incorrect presumption that such static categorization of knowledge can lead to truth *at all*. Metaphysics fails to see truth and consciousness as a *process*, and instead sees truth as a static assembly of categorized facts and data.

Dogmatism occurs when one only accounts for commonalities and considers theory itself as the sole basis of truth. Dogmatism inherently overstates the absoluteness of knowledge, as dogmatic positions uphold certain theoretical principles as complete, inviolable, and completely developed. This explicitly denies the continuously developing process of advancing knowledge and consciousness.

Conservatism includes any position that seeks to prevent change, or to undo change to return to an earlier state of development. Such positions deny the continuous development of consciousness, knowledge, and practice, and incorrectly assert incorrect positions; or mistake relative truth for absolute truth.

Stagnation is an inability or unwillingness to change and adapt consciousness and practice in accordance with developing material conditions. Stagnation can stem from, or cause, overstatement of absolute truth in theory and forestall necessary development of both consciousness and practical ability.

On the contrary, if we exaggerate the relativity of the truth of knowledge which we possess, or downplay its absoluteness, we will fall into relativism, thereby leading to subjectivism, revisionism, sophistry, and skepticism.

Annotation 237

Relativism is the belief that human consciousness can *only* achieve relative understanding of the world, and that truth can therefore never be objectively discovered. Relativism is, thus, the overstatement of the relative nature of truth and the denial of the existence of absolute truth. Relativism leads to such incorrect viewpoints and mindsets as:

Subjectivism: which occurs when one centers one's own self and one's own conscious activities in perspective and worldview, failing to test their own perceptions against material and social reality [see Annotation 211, p. 205]. This position denies that truth can be discovered in the external material world, falsely believing that absolute truth stems only from conscious activity.

Revisionism: a failure to recognize and accept commonalities in conscious activity, focusing only on the private [see *Private and Common*, p. 128]. Revisionism leads to constant and unnecessary reassessment and reevaluation of both knowledge and practice. Revisionism, thus, is a position which overstates the relativity of truth and ignores truths which are more fully developed towards absoluteness.

Sophistry: the use of falsehoods and fallacious arguments to deceive [see Annotation 116, p. 118]. Sophistry is, thus, the intentional denial of truth and the intentional mischaracterization of truths as either overly relative or as not truths at all.

Skepticism: the belief that truth is essentially undiscoverable, because human consciousness is ultimately unreliable and incapable of accurately reflecting material reality [see Annotation 200, p. 192]. By denying that truth is discoverable at all, skepticism explicitly rejects absolute truth and declares that all truth is relative and unreliable.

In addition to objectivity, absoluteness, and relativity, truth also has *concreteness*. The concreteness of truth refers to the degree to which a truth is attached to specific objects, in specific conditions, at a specific point in time. This means that all accurate knowledge always refers to a specific situation which involves specific subjects which exist in a specific place and time. The content of truth cannot be pure abstraction, disconnected from reality, but it is always associated with certain, specific objects and phenomena which exist in a specific space, time, and arrangement, with specific internal and external relationships. Therefore, truth is associated with specific historical conditions. This specificity to time, place, relations, etc., is what we call *concreteness*.

Knowledge, if detached from specific historical conditions, will fall into pure abstraction. Therefore, it will not be accurate — it will not align with reality — and such knowledge cannot be considered truth. When emphasizing this property, Lenin wrote: “Truth is always concrete, never abstract.”³ Mastering the principle of the concreteness

³ *Once Again On The Trade Unions*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1921.

of truth has an important methodological significance in cognitive and practical activities. It is required that consideration and evaluation of all things and phenomena must be based on a historical viewpoint [see Annotation 114, p. 116]. In developing and applying theory, we must be conscious of specific historical conditions. According to Lenin, Marxism's nature, its essence, lies in the concrete analysis of specific situations; Marx's method is, above all, to consider the objective content of the historical process in a specific time.

Annotation 238

In other words, Marxism is rooted in seeking truth by examining reality from a historical and comprehensive viewpoint. For more information, see Annotation 114, p. 116.

- *The Role of Truth in Reality.*

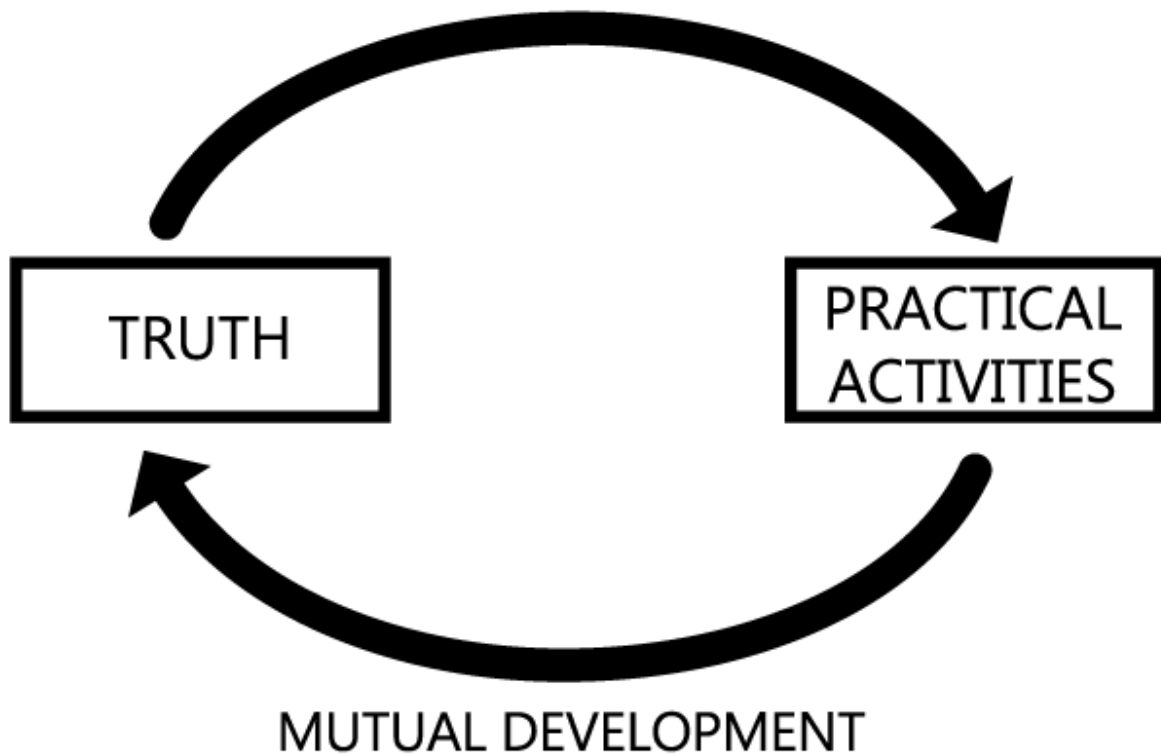
In order to survive and develop, humans must conduct practical activities. These activities involve transforming the environment, nature, and human society. At the same time, through these activities, humans perform — knowingly or unknowingly — the process of perfecting and developing our conscious and practical abilities. It is this process that helps human cognitive activities develop. Practical activities can only be successful and effective once humans apply accurate knowledge of objective reality to our practical activities. Therefore, truth is one of the prerequisites that ensure success and efficiency in practical activities.

The relationship between truth and practical activities is a dialectical relationship which serves as the basis for the movement and development of both truth and practical activity: truth develops through practice, and practice develops through the correct application of truth which people have gained through practical activities.

Annotation 239

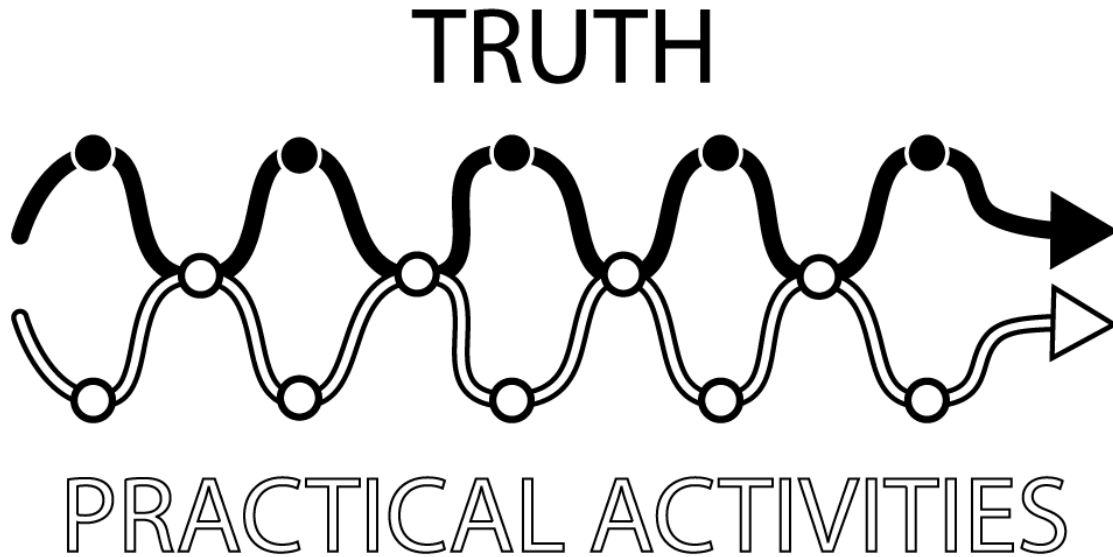
Practice only develops when truth about the universe is consciously applied to practical activities. For example, farm output increases as we learn more truth about the way crops grow and how land can be properly managed. Simultaneously, truth can only be developed through practical activity, as all ideas and knowledge must be tested through methodological observation, experimentation, and other forms of practical activity.

A *theory* is an idea or system of ideas intended to explain an aspect, characteristic, or tendency of objective reality. Theories are not inherently truthful; holding incorrect



Truth and Practical Activities have a dialectical relationship in which truth develops through practice, and practice develops through the correct application of truth.

theories constitutes *false consciousness*. *Practice* (or *praxis*) is purposeful conscious activity which improves our understanding of the world. Theory and practice have a dialectical relationship with one another which, if understood, helps us to discover truth.



Truth and practical activities mutually develop one another over time.

This dialectical relationship between theory and practical activities means that we must never favor theory over practice, nor practice over theory, but that we must rather balance development of theoretical understanding as we engage in practical activities to test our knowledge against reality and to develop our practice with ever-advancing understanding of the world. As practice and theory develop one another, our understanding of objective reality comes closer and closer to truth.

In *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx summarizes the relationship between theory and practice, writing:

The problem of the external world is here put as the problem of its transformation: the problem of the cognition of the external world as an integral part of the problem of transformation: the problem of theory as a practical problem.

Here, Marx explains that theory is concerned with solving the “problem” of transforming the external world through practice, and that “cognition of the external world” is required to solve the “problem of transformation. In other words, we must improve our theory in order to improve our practical ability to transform our world, and we learn about the world (thus improving our theory) through those practical activities.

Marx also writes in *Theses on Feuerbach* that:

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory, but it is a practical question. In practice man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power... of his thinking.

This point is key for understanding the dialectical relationship between practice and theory: in order to be useful, theory must be *proven through practice*. Thus, we must seek to develop our practice through theory, and our theory through practice.

Engels summarizes these ideas a bit more colorfully in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

Before there was argument there was action... In the beginning was the deed ... And human action had solved the difficulty long before human ingenuity invented it. The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Engels wrote in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* of the uselessness of what might be called “pure theory,” divorced from practice, and the sort of radical skepticism which refutes that any practical knowledge can ever really be obtained by human beings:

There is yet a set of different philosophers — those who question the possibility of any cognition, or at least of an exhaustive cognition of the world... The most telling refutation of this (scepticism and agnosticism) as of all other philosophical crotchets, is praxis, namely experiment and industry.

It is *practice*, according to Engels, which proves the merit and utility of theory.

Through experiment and industry — through practical activities in the material world — we can test our ideas and dialectically develop both theory and practice. Lenin built upon these ideas in his own work, writing in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*:

The materialist theory, the theory of the reflection of objects by our mind, is here presented with absolute clarity: things exist outside us. Our perceptions and ideas are their images. Verification of these images, differentiation between true and false images, is given by practice.

Here, Lenin explains how only a proper understanding and application of the dialectical relationship between theory and practice can lead to the negation of false consciousness [see Annotation 235, p. 231] and the dialectical development of both practice and theory. Simply arguing and debating about ideas without relating them directly to practice will never lead to truth, nor will such pure-theory argumentation develop theory or practice in any meaningful way.

This brings to mind another line from Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*:

The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.

The philosophy of dialectical materialism and the system of materialist dialectics are designed specifically to produce *action* and to avoid such “scholastic questions” and “pure-theory argumentation.”

Ho Chi Minh summarized these ideas perhaps most clearly and precisely of all in the very title of his article: *Practice Generates Knowledge, Understanding Advances Theory, Theory Leads to Practice*:

Knowledge comes from practice. And through practice, knowledge becomes theory. That theory, again, has to be put into practice. Knowledge advances not just from thought to theory, but, above all, from applying theory to revolutionary practice. Once the world’s law is fully grasped as theory, it is critical to put that theory into practice by changing the world, by increasing production, and by practicing class struggle and struggling for national self-determination. This is a continuous process of obtaining knowledge.



"If Uncle Ho says we will win, we will win!" — Propaganda poster from the 30th anniversary of the Battle of Dien Bien Phu (1984).

Afterword

If it seems that this book has come to an end somewhat abruptly, it's because this is really just the first of four major sections of the full volume from which this text is drawn. If you are reading this afterword after reading the entirety of the preceding contents, then congratulations, you have completed the equivalent to a full semester's coursework for a class on dialectical materialist philosophy which all Vietnamese college students are required to take!

The next sections in this curriculum, each covered in the original full volume, include:

Part 2: Historical Materialism

This section covers the definition and basic principles of historical materialism, which is the field of work dedicated to applying dialectical materialism and materialist dialectics to human history and human society. In the West, historical materialism and dialectical materialism are often conflated, but this is in error. Historical materialism is an *applied field* of dialectical materialist philosophy and materialist dialectical methodology which is used in the pursuit of understanding and interpreting human history.

Part 3: Political Economy

This section condenses the three cardinal volumes of *Capital* by Karl Marx and covers three primary doctrines:

1. The doctrine of value.
2. The doctrine of surplus value.
3. The doctrines of monopolist capitalism and state monopolist capitalism.

Political Economy, in this course, can be considered the application of dialectical materialism and materialist dialectics to the analysis and understanding of the capitalist mode of production from the perspective of the socialist revolutionary movement.

Part 4: Scientific Socialism

This section relies on an established understanding of dialectical materialism, historical materialism, and political economy as a foundation for developing socialist revolution. The three chapters of this section on Scientific Socialism are:

1. The Historical Mission of the Working Class and the Socialist Revolution
2. The Primary Social-Political Issues of the Process of Building a Socialist Revolution
3. Realistic Socialism and Potential Socialism

Moving Forward

We are already working on the translation of Part 2 of this curriculum, and we hope to complete it as quickly as possible. In the meantime, we believe this book provides the reader with enough of a foundation to continue studying and to begin applying the principles of dialectical materialism and materialist dialectics in political struggle.

We highly discourage readers from self-study in isolation, just as we discourage individual political action. The best way to study socialism is *alongside other socialists*.

Depending on where you live, you may be able to find political education resources provided by communist parties, socialist book clubs, or other organizations. If such resources aren't available, it should be fairly easy to find study groups, workshops, and affinity groups online where you can study with like-minded comrades. Of course, socialist revolution requires more than just study, as we hope this book has thoroughly explained. Theory *must* be coupled with practice. As Ho Chi Minh wrote: "If you read a thousand books, but you fail to apply theory into practice, you are nothing but a bookshelf."

To avoid atrophying into the proverbial bookshelf, we encourage you to go out into the world and apply these ideas creatively and collectively with other socialists. Dialectical materialism is a philosophy that was developed from the ground up for *application in the real world*. Dialectical materialism and materialist dialectics provide a functional model of reality, a way of looking at highly complicated systems, with all their dynamic internal and external relations. Dialectical materialist philosophy demands that we see human systems as processes in motion. In order to fully comprehend such dynamic processes, we must engage with them, which is why Ho Chi Minh taught that "we are not afraid to make mistakes; we would only be afraid of making mistakes if we were not determined to correct them."⁴

As we mentioned in the foreword, many socialists in the West suffer from a lack of practical *engagement*. Far too many socialists fall into utopianism, idealism, and social chauvinism and we believe this largely stems from failures to test ideas against reality through *praxis*. We hope that this book has impressed upon the reader that simply arguing about pure theory is a useless and futile pursuit. Indeed, sparring verbally over such "scholastic questions," as Marx described them, is counter-productive. Marx and Engels defined such failure to engage in theory as "critical criticism" — that is to say, criticism for the sake of criticism. As Marx and Engels wrote in *The Holy Family*, such critical criticism is futile, as we will never *think* our way to revolution:

According to Critical Criticism, the whole evil lies only in the workers' "thinking". It is true that the English and French workers have formed associations in which they exchange opinions not only on their immediate needs as workers, but on their needs as human beings. In their associations, moreover, they show a very thorough and comprehensive consciousness of the

⁴ *Revolutionary Ethics*, Ho Chi Minh, December 1958.

“enormous” and “immeasurable” power which arises from their co-operation. But these mass-minded, communist workers, employed, for instance, in the Manchester or Lyons workshops, do not believe that by “pure thinking” they will be able to argue away their industrial masters and their own practical debasement. They are most painfully aware of the difference between being and thinking, between consciousness and life. They know that property, capital, money, wage-labour and the like are no ideal figments of the brain but very practical, very objective products of their self-estrangement and that therefore they must be abolished in a practical, objective way for man to become man not only in thinking, in consciousness, but in mass being, in life. Critical Criticism, on the contrary, teaches them that they cease in reality to be wage-workers if in thinking they abolish the thought of wage-labour; if in thinking they cease to regard themselves as wage-workers and, in accordance with that extravagant notion, no longer let themselves be paid for their person. As absolute idealists, as ethereal beings, they will then naturally be able to live on the ether of pure thought.

Engels expressed his frustration with such endless, utopian, idealist debates in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

Hence, from this nothing could come but a kind of eclectic, average Socialism, which, as a matter of fact, has up to the present time dominated the minds of most of the socialist workers in France and England. Hence, a mish-mash allowing of the most manifold shades of opinion: a mish-mash of such critical statements, economic theories, pictures of future society by the founders of different sects, as excite a minimum of opposition; a mish-mash which is the more easily brewed the more definite sharp edges of the individual constituents are rubbed down in the stream of debate, like rounded pebbles in a brook.

Engels concludes by punctuating *why* he and Marx had developed dialectical materialism as a praxis-oriented philosophical foundation for scientific socialism: “To make a science of Socialism, it had first to be placed upon a real basis.” We hope that the readers of this text will seek out real bases for your development in theory and praxis, and we trust that you will quickly discover that developing practice develops theory, and vice-versa.

Remember that Marx and Engels, themselves, were not just theorists who scribbled down their thoughts in an “scholarly” vacuum. They were revolutionists themselves, highly engaged in political struggle and, in so struggling, they risked their lives and freedom over the course of many decades. This struggle is what led to the change and development of their ideas over time. The same can be said for every other successful socialist revolutionary in history.

Vo Nguyen Giap, the great general who led Vietnam's military forces through resistance wars against fascist Japan, colonialist France, and the imperialist USA, describes how he applied such principles on the battlefield in his book *People's War, People's Army*:

During the Resistance War, owing to constant fighting, the training of our troops could not be carried out continuously for a lengthy period but only between battles or campaigns. We actively implemented the guiding principles 'To train and to learn while we fight.' After the difficult years at the beginning of the Resistance War, we succeeded in giving good training to our army. The practical viewpoint in this training deserves to be highlighted. The content of training became most practical and rich. Training was in touch with practical fighting: the troops were trained in accordance with the next day's fighting, and victory or defeat in the fighting was the best gauge for the control and assessment of the result of the training. On the basis of gradual unification of the organisation and its equipment, the content of training in the various units of the regular army was also systematised step by step.

Here, Vo Nguyen Giap has provided a concrete example of the dialectical relationship between theory and practice, and their inseparability. This fundamental aspect of dialectical materialist philosophy demands that we think and act like *scientists* to change the world, rather than simply speculating and imagining ineffectually like arm-chair philosophers. As Marx wrote in *Theses on Feuerbach* "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." We encourage you to apply what you learn in this and other books to *change the world*.

Advice on Further Study

As you advance in your studies of socialist literature and theory, we offer the following advice:

First, you must recognize that the specific language used by revolutionary leaders and thinkers may vary widely across time and around the world. Fashions in language develop over time, and many contributions — like the text you've just read — come to us through translation from countless languages. This is why we believe it critical to develop an understanding of the *spirit* of the ideas of any particular text, and not to get bogged down in semantics and terminology. Liberal ideologists have done much to distract and divert intellectual energy with endless metaphysical altercation over the "proper" usage of this or that word. We caution strongly against this attitude, which makes us susceptible to sophistry, opportunism, and the sewing of undue conflict and division amidst the working class. We have pointed out various instances where Marx, Engels, and Lenin used different language to describe the same concepts. We also

offer the reminder that Marx, Engels, and Lenin were writing in different languages at different times, just as socialists around the world have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As socialism is an international movement, we must stress the importance of avoiding linguistic barriers by engaging with one another in good faith and testing conflicting ideas and interpretations of theory against one another through practice instead of getting bogged down with “critical criticism.”

Next, we encourage students of socialist philosophy to always keep in mind that the doctrines and philosophies of revolutionary figures are products of the times and places in which they were conceived. It would be a mistake to view the works of any revolutionary figure as a road map or a set of instructions to follow by rote. Even Marx and Engels changed and developed their own ideas over the decades they were active, as they addressed in the 1872 preface to *The Communist Manifesto*:

The practical application of the principles will depend, as the Manifesto itself states, everywhere and at all times, on the historical conditions for the time being existing, and, for that reason, no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of Section II. That passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded today. In view of the gigantic strides of Modern Industry since 1848, and of the accompanying improved and extended organization of the working class, in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February Revolution, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune, where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this programme has in some details been antiquated. One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.” (See *The Civil War in France: Address of the General Council of the International Working Men’s Association*, 1871, where this point is further developed.) Further, it is self-evident that the criticism of socialist literature is deficient in relation to the present time, because it comes down only to 1847; also that the remarks on the relation of the Communists to the various opposition parties (Section IV), although, in principle still correct, yet in practice are antiquated, because the political situation has been entirely changed, and the progress of history has swept from off the earth the greater portion of the political parties there enumerated.”

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Ho Chi Minh also frequently took pains to point out that their revolutionary theories were devised specifically to suit the particular objective conditions of their own respective times and places. For example, in *What is to be Done*, Lenin discusses the question of secrecy in revolutionary activity. Lenin recognizes that secrecy is not always necessary, such as in the more liberal social democracies which existed in Europe in his era. In Russia, however — with its autocratic monarchy — material conditions called for more covert activity:

In countries where political liberty exists the distinction between a trade union and a political organisation is clear enough, as is the distinction between trade unions and Social-Democracy. The relations between the latter and the former will naturally vary in each country according to historical, legal, and other conditions; they may be more or less close, complex, etc. (in our opinion they should be as close and as little complicated as possible); but there can be no question in free countries of the organisation of trade unions coinciding with the organisation of the Social-Democratic Party. In Russia, however, the yoke of the autocracy appears at first glance to obliterate all distinctions between the Social-Democratic organisation and the workers' associations, since all workers' associations and all study circles are prohibited, and since the principal manifestation and weapon of the workers' economic struggle — the strike — is regarded as a criminal (and sometimes even as a political!) offence.”

Ho Chi Minh was even more explicit about the requirement to tailor theory to current and local material conditions in a speech to the Communist Party of Vietnam in 1950:

Studying Marxism-Leninism is not just a matter of repeating the slogan ‘workers of the world, unite’ like a parrot. We must unify Marxism-Leninism with the reality of Vietnam’s revolution. Talking about Marxism-Leninism in Vietnam is talking about the specific guidelines and policies of the Communist Party of Vietnam. For example, our priority now is: great solidarity!

In a 2001 document, the Communist Party of Vietnam explained how Ho Chi Minh tailored lessons learned from prior revolutionaries to the specific material conditions of revolutionary Vietnam:

Ho Chi Minh’s thought is... the creative application and development of Marxism-Leninism to the specific conditions of our country. Ho Chi Minh learned profound lessons from Lenin and the Russian October Revolution, but he did not simply use those lessons as a template, nor did he just copy that foundation. Instead, he absorbed the spirit of Marxism-Leninism. Lenin’s thesis allowed Ho Chi Minh to see what was necessary for the Vietnamese people — the path of national liberation. Ho Chi Minh had creative arguments that contributed to enriching Marxism-Leninism in the issue of national liberation revolution, building a new democratic regime and the transitional path to socialism in an Eastern, semi-feudal colony which was still very backward: Vietnam.

As you find your own revolutionary path, you must carefully examine the objective conditions of your own time and place, and work collectively and collaboratively

with your fellow revolutionists to decide how theory and lessons gleaned from history apply to your own circumstances. And, of course, you must test the validity of your conclusions against reality through *practice*.

Creative Application of Dialectical Materialism and Materialist Dialectics

Finally, we implore you to apply dialectical materialism *creatively*. Don't look at this (or any other) book as a set of static instructions. Dialectical materialism and materialist dialectics are living, breathing systems of thought which benefit from the ideas and imagination of comrades working and struggling together. Seek the *spirit* of these ideas, study revolutionary theory and history, then *apply* what you learn in your daily life. Combat dogmatism and avoid arguments over pure theory. Determine what works and what doesn't through activity in the real world, and apply what you learn from practical experience to your theoretical development. Over time, you will begin to see how practice and theory impact and develop one another. When you are struggling with a particular problem in revolutionary practice, you will find yourself reading theory in a new light, discovering information and ideas which might be applicable to your immediate circumstances. And as you study theory, you will find that it also impacts your practice, giving you tools and perspective and methodologies for action which you might never have imagined on your own.

We have tried to make this book a useful companion for further study. We have also made the digital version available for free online. If you have found it useful, we hope you will share it freely and widely.

In Closing

One last time we would like to thank Dr. Vijay Prashad and Dr. Taimur Rahman for their wonderful insights on our translation, and to acknowledge the monumental work of the Vietnamese scholars who wrote and revised the original text from which this volume is drawn. We also want to recognize once more the donors and supporters who have given us the precious resource of time to translate and annotate this work. Finally, we want to thank the teams at the Iskra Books and The International Magazine, who have provided invaluable editing and peer review services, promotion, and guidance. You can find all their publications, respectively, at:

IskraBooks.org

InternationalMagz.com

If you would like to download the free digital version of this book, support future translation work, or if you would like to get in touch, you can visit our website:

BanyanHouse.org

We will leave you, now, with the immortal words of the Manifesto:

Workers of the world, unite!
You have nothing to lose but your chains.

In Solidarity,

- Luna Nguyen, Translator & Annotations
- Emerican Johnson, Editor, Illustrator, & Annotations



“Marxism-Leninism — Long Live the Victories” — a demonstration to welcome the liberation army in the South of Vietnam on April 30, 1975.

[Appendices]

Appendix A: Basic Pairs of Categories Used in Materialist Dialectics

This is a summary of the basic pairs of universal categories and their characteristics which are discussed in depth starting on p. 126.

<p>Private A specific item, event, or process.</p>	<p>Common The properties that are shared between Private things, phenomena, and ideas.</p>
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Private is commonly referred to in literature as *Special/Specific* while *Common* is commonly called *General*. *Note:* When an aspect or characteristic is not held in common with anything else in existence, it is considered *Unique*. The Unique can become Common, just as the Common can become Unique. Example: a Unique design for an object may be replicated, making it Common. A type of item that is Common may gradually disappear until there is only one example left, making it Unique. *See p. 128.*

<p>Reason Mutual impact between things, phenomena, or ideas which causes each to change.</p>	<p>Result The change caused by a Reason.</p>
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Reason and *Result* may be referred to as *Cause* and *Effect*, respectively, though this should lead to confusion with metaphysical conceptions of cause and effect. *Note:* Reasons can be Direct or Indirect. *See p. 138*

<p>Obviousness Refers to events that always and predictably happen due to factors of internal material structure.</p>	<p>Randomness Events caused by external impacts and interactions which are thus not completely predictable.</p>
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Obvious may be referred to as *Necessary*, while *Randomness* may be referred to as *Accidental*. *See p. 145.*

Content What something is made of.	Form The shape that contains content.
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Ways in which Content and Form are discussed and perceived can vary wildly depending on the subject being discussed and the viewpoint from which the subject is being considered. *See p. 145.*

Essence Features that make something develop a certain way.	Phenomena The expression of the essence in certain conditions.
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See p. 156.

Possibility What may happen, or might exist, in the future, if certain developments take place.	Reality What is happening, or what exists, at the present moment.
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See p. 160.

Appendix B: the Two Basic Principles of Dialectical Materialism

The Principle of General Relationships This principle states that:

“Materialist dialectics upholds the position that all things, phenomena, and ideas exist in mutual relationships with each other, regulate each other, transform into each other, and that nothing exists in complete isolation.”

From this Principle, we find the characteristics of *Diversity in Unity* and *Unity in Diversity*; the basis of Diversity in Unity is the fact that every thing, phenomenon, and idea contains many different relationships; the basis of Unity in Diversity is that many different relationships exist — unified — within each and every thing, phenomenon, and idea.

The Characteristic of Diversity in Unity is derived from the fact that there exist an infinite number of diverse relationships between things, phenomena, and ideas, but all of these relationships share the same foundation in the material world.

The Characteristic of Unity in Diversity is derived from the fact that when we examine the universal relationships that exist within and between all different things, phenomena, and ideas, we will find that each individual manifestation of any universal relationship will have its own different manifestations, aspects, features, etc. Thus even the universal relationships which unite all things, phenomena, and ideas exist in infinite diversity.

The Principle of Development This principle states that:

“Development is a process that comes from within the thing-in-itself; the process of solving the contradictions within things and phenomena. Therefore, development is inevitable, objective, and occurs without dependence on human will.”

The Characteristic of Objectiveness of Development stems from the origin of motion. Since motion originates from mutual impacts which occur between external things, objects, and relationships, the motions themselves also occur externally (relative to all other things, phenomena, and objects). This gives motion itself objective characteristics.

The Characteristic of Generality of Development stems from the fact that development occurs in every process that exists in every field of nature, society, and

human thought; in every thing, every phenomenon, and every process and stage of these things and phenomena.

The Characteristic of Diversity of Development stems from the fact that every thing, phenomenon, and idea has its own process of development that is not totally identical to the process of development of any other thing, phenomenon, or idea.

Appendix C: the Three Universal Laws of Materialist Dialectics

The Law of Transformation Between Quantity and Quality

The law of transformation between quantity and quality is a universal law which concerns the universal mode of motion and development processes of nature, society, and human thought. The law was formulated by Friedrich Engels in *Dialectics of Nature*, and states that:

“In nature, in a manner exactly fixed for each individual case, qualitative changes can only occur by the quantitative addition or subtraction of matter or motion.” *See more on p. 163.*

The Law of Unification and Contradiction Between Opposites

The law of unification and contradiction between opposites is the essence of dialectics. It states, as formulated by V. I. Lenin in *Summary of Dialectics*:

“The fundamental, originating, and universal driving force of all motion and development processes is the inherent and objective contradiction which exists in all things, phenomena, and ideas.” *See more on p. 175.*

The Law of Negation of Negation

The law of negation of negation describes the fundamental and universal tendency of movement and development to occur through a cyclical form of development through what is termed “negation of negation.” Formulated by Friedrich Engels in *Anti-Dühring*, it states:

“The true, natural, historical, and dialectical negation is (formally) the moving source of all development—the division into opposites, their struggle and resolution, and what is more, on the basis of experience gained, the original point is achieved again (partly in history, fully in thought), but at a higher stage.” *See more on p. 185.*

Appendix D: Forms of Consciousness and Knowledge

Consciousness refers to the self-aware, productive, and creative motion and activity of the human brain. Practical activity is the most direct basis, motive, and purpose of consciousness, and is the criterion for testing truth. See: *The Relationship Between Praxis and Consciousness*, p. 216.

Knowledge is the content of consciousness. Knowledge includes data about the world, such as ideas, memories, and other thoughts which are derived by direct observation and practical activities in the material world, through scientific experiments, or through abstract reflection of practical and scientific activities which occur within consciousness.

Consciousness and Knowledge have a dialectical relationship with one another: knowledge is developed within consciousness, and consciousness develops to higher levels as knowledge is accumulated and tested against reality (which also develops knowledge itself). In this manner, consciousness and knowledge develop into higher forms over time in individual consciousness and human society. Thus, consciousness and knowledge can be considered as existing in various forms which represent stages of development in dialectical processes of development.

Note that the development processes of knowledge and consciousness are dialectical in nature, not linear. For example, after empirical consciousness develops into theoretical consciousness, theoretical consciousness will then impact empirical consciousness, developing empirical consciousness into a higher stage of development. This is true for all development processes related to empirical and theoretical consciousness. These development processes and forms of consciousness and knowledge are explained in more detail in Chapter 3: Cognitive Theory of Dialectical Materialism, starting on page 204.

Forms of Consciousness


Consciousness is a process of the development of knowledge through a combination of human brain activity and human practical activity in the physical world (i.e., labor). The development of consciousness can be considered on the criteria of *concrete/abstract* and of *passive/active*. For more information, see Annotation 216, p. 210.

Empirical Consciousness	 develops into	Theoretical Consciousness
Concrete process of collecting data about the world, aka Knowledge.		Abstract reflection on accumulated knowledge; leads to general understandings of natural/social law.

Ordinary Consciousness	 develops into	Scientific Consciousness
Passive process of observing the world, directly, in daily life activities.		Active pursuit of understanding through systematic observation and indirect experiences.

The Cognitive Process

The Cognitive Process is a model developed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin which represents the dialectical path of consciousness to truth. For more information, see *Dialectical Path of Consciousness to Truth* on page 219.

Emotional Consciousness	Develops Into 	Rational Consciousness
Lower stage of the cognitive process in which humans use our senses to reflect phenomena of objective things in consciousness through practical activity.		Higher stage of the cognitive process which includes indirect, abstract, and generalized reflection of essential properties of things and phenomena.
Phase 1: Sensation Most primitive phase of emotional consciousness, in which senses detect objective things and consciousness imagines reflections of those things.		Phase 1: Definition First phase of rational consciousness, in which the mind begins to rationally interpret, organize, and process the basic properties of things and phenomena.
Phase 2: Conception Relatively complete reflection within consciousness of sensed objects which do not yet reflect the essence, nature, and regulating principles of the perceived.		Phase 2: Judgment The next phase of rational consciousness, in which concepts and properties of subjects are linked together. Judgment can be: Unique, General, or Universal.
Phase 3: Symbolization The most advanced phase of Emotional Consciousness, in which symbolic ideas of reflected objects form, which is the first step of abstraction and thus the first step towards rational consciousness.		Phase 3: Reasoning The final phase of rational consciousness, formed on the basis of synthesizing judgments so as to extrapolate new knowledge about the perceived subject through deductive or inductive inference.

Forms of Knowledge

For more information see Annotation 218, p. 214.

	<p>Ordinary Knowledge Knowledge accumulated through passive activity in daily life.</p>	<p>Scientific Knowledge Knowledge from methodological measurement/systematic observation.</p>
<p>Empirical Knowledge Individual and isolated knowledge from sense observations.</p>	<p>Ordinary Empirical Knowledge Individual/isolated knowledge from sense observations in passive daily life activity.</p>	<p>Scientific Empirical Knowledge Individual and isolated knowledge accumulated through methodological measurement/systematic observation.</p>
<p>Theoretical Knowledge Abstract and generalized knowledge.</p>	<p>Ordinary Theoretical Knowledge Knowledge accumulated through passive activity in daily life.</p>	<p>Scientific Theoretical Knowledge Abstract and generalized knowledge accumulated through methodological measurement/systematic observation.</p>

Appendix E: Properties of Truth

Truth is the alignment of consciousness with objective reality. All truths are objective, relative, absolute, and concrete. Truths also have characteristics of concreteness and abstractness.

Objectivity: The content of truth is external to the subjective will of human beings. The content of knowledge must be aligned with objective reality, not vice versa. This means that the content of accurate knowledge is not a product of pure subjective reasoning but is objective in nature.

Absoluteness: Absolute truth¹ is derived from the complete alignment between objective reality and human consciousness. The possibility of acquiring absolute truth in the process of the development of conscious understanding is theoretically limitless. However, in reality, our conscious ability to reflect reality is limited by the specific material conditions of each generation of humanity, of practical limitations, and by the spatial and temporal conditions of reflected subjects. Therefore, truth is also *relative*.

Relativity: Relative truth is truth which has developed alignment with reality without yet having reached *complete* alignment. To put it another way, relative truth represents knowledge which incompletely reflects material subjects without complete accuracy. In relative truth, there is only partial alignment — in some (but not all) aspects — between consciousness and the material world.

Dialectical Relationship Between Absolute and Relative Truth: Relative truth and absolute truth do not exist separately, but have dialectical unity with each other. On the one hand, “absolute truth” is the sum of all “relative truths.” On the other hand, in all relative truths there are always elements of absolute truth.

Concreteness: The concreteness of truth refers to the degree to which a truth is attached to specific objects, in specific conditions, at a specific point in time. This means that all accurate knowledge always refers to a specific situation which involves specific subjects which exist in a specific place

¹ Note: Absolute Truth in dialectical materialist philosophy should not be confused with Hegel’s conception of Absolute Truth as a final point at which human consciousness will have achieved absolute, complete, and final understanding of our universe.

and time. The content of truth cannot be pure abstraction, disconnected from reality, but it is always associated with certain, specific objects and phenomena which exist in a specific space, time, and arrangement, with specific internal and external relationships. Therefore, truth is associated with specific historical conditions. This specificity to time, place, relations, etc., is *concreteness*.

Abstractness: Abstract knowledge is knowledge which is not attached (or less attached) to specific times, places, relations, etc. Some degree of abstraction is necessary to develop theoretical understanding of general laws and the nature of objective reality, but care should be taken knowledge does not become completely detached from specific historical conditions, as this will result in *pure abstraction*. Knowledge which is purely abstract will not align with reality, and such knowledge cannot be considered truth.

Appendix F: Common Deviations From Dialectical Materialism

Throughout the history of the development of dialectical materialism and materialist dialectics, there have been many philosophical and methodological deviations which have derived from incorrect analysis, interpretation, and a failure to properly link theory and practice. Below are descriptions of some of the more common deviations which the reader should be aware of.

Bureaucracy: An expression of *dogmatism* which arises when theory becomes overly formalized, to the extent that practical considerations are ignored in favor of codified theory.

Conservatism: A mindset which seeks to prevent and stifle development and to hold humanity in a static position. Not only is this detrimental to humanity, it is also ultimately a wasted effort, because development is inevitable in human society, as in all things, phenomena, and ideas.

Dogmatism: A breakdown of the dialectical relationship between theoretical consciousness and empirical consciousness, which arrests the development process of knowledge and consciousness. Usually the result of: failure to seek commonalities; considering theory itself as the sole basis of truth rather than practice; ignoring practical experience and considering pre-established theory, alone, as unalterable truth.

Eclecticism: An approach to philosophical inquiry which attempts to draw from various different theories, frameworks, and ideas to attempt to understand a subject; the philosophical error of inconsistently applying different theories and principles in different situations. **Empiricism:** A broad philosophical position which holds that only experience (including internal experience) can be held as a source of knowledge or truth. Though nominally opposed to idealism, it is considered a faulty (or naive) form of materialism, since it sees the world as only unconnected, static appearances and ignores the reality of dialectical (changing) relationships between objects.

Idealism: A philosophical position which holds that the only reliable experience of reality occurs within human consciousness. Idealists believe that relying on human reason exclusively or as a first basis is the best way to

seek truth. Various forms of idealism exist, broadly broken down into subjective idealism, which denies the existence of an external objective world, and objective idealism, which accepts that an external objective world exists, but denies that knowledge can be reliably gained about it through sense perception.

Opportunism: A system of political opinions with no direction, no clear path, no coherent viewpoint, leaning on whatever is beneficial for the opportunist in the short term.

Revisionism: A failure to recognize and accept commonalities in conscious activity, focusing only on the private. Revisionism leads to constant and unnecessary reassessment and reevaluation of both knowledge and practice. Revisionism, thus, is a position which overstates the relativity of truth and ignores truths which are more fully developed towards absoluteness.

Rigidity: An unwillingness to alter one's thoughts, holding too stiffly to established consciousness and knowledge, and ignoring practical experience and observation, which leads to stagnation of both knowledge and consciousness.

Skepticism: The belief truth is essentially undiscoverable, because human consciousness is ultimately unreliable and incapable of accurately reflecting material reality. By denying that truth is discoverable at all, skepticism explicitly rejects absolute truth and declares that all truth is relative and unreliable. Solipsism: A form of idealism in which one believes that the self is the only basis for truth. As Marxist ethicist Howard Selsam wrote in *Ethics and Progress: New Values in a Revolutionary World*: "If I believe that I alone exist and that you and all your arguments exist only in my mind and are my own creations then all possible arguments will not shake me one iota. No logic can possibly convince [the] solipsist."

Sophistry: The use of falsehoods and misleading arguments, usually with the intention of deception, and with a tendency of presenting non-critical aspects of a subject matter as critical, to serve a particular agenda. The word comes from the Sophists, a group of professional teachers in Ancient Greece, who were criticized by Socrates (in Plato's dialogues) for being shrewd and deceptive rhetoricians. This kind of bad faith argument has no place in materialist dialectics. Materialist dialectics must, instead, be rooted in a true and accurate understanding of the subject, material conditions, and reality in general.

Subjectivism: The centering of one's own self and conscious activities in perspective and worldview, failing to test one's own perceptions against material and social reality. Subjectivists tend to believe that they can inde-

pendently reason their way to truth in their own minds without practical experience and activity in the material world.

Utilitarianism: An ethical philosophical theory founded by Jeremy Bentham which seeks to maximize “utility,” which is considered to be a metaphysical property embodying “benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness.” Karl Marx dismissed utilitarianism as overly abstract, in that it reduces all social relationships to the single characteristic of “utility.” He also viewed utilitarianism as metaphysically static and tied to the status quo of current society, since utilitarianism does not address class dynamics and views all relations in the current status quo of society, making utilitarianism an essentially conservative theory. Marx also pointed out that Utilitarianism essentially views individuals as private individuals, not as social individuals, and seeks to work out solutions to the practical problems of human society through reasoning alone without examining material conditions and processes, and without taking into consideration practice and development, writing:

“The whole criticism of the existing world by the utility theory was... restricted within a narrow range. Remaining within the confines of bourgeois conditions, it could criticise only those relations which had been handed down from a past epoch and were an obstacle to the development of the bourgeoisie... the economic content gradually turned the utility theory into a mere apologia for the existing state of affairs, an attempt to prove that under existing conditions the mutual relations of people today are the most advantageous and generally useful.”

[Back Matter]

Glossary & Index

<p>Absolute Truth</p>	<p>Absolute Truth can refer to:</p>
<p>1. The recognition that objective and accurate truth can be drawn from sense perception of the material world along with labor and practice activities in the material world. The opposite of this position is Relativism. See p. 56, 94, 194, 228–229, 232–234.</p>	
<p>2. Hegel's notion of Absolute Truth: that there will eventually be some end point of to the process of rational consciousness at which point humanity will arrive at a final stage of knowledge and consciousness. See p. 228.</p>	
<p>See also: Relative Truth, Relativism, Stagnation, Truth. Absolutization</p>	
<p>Abstract Labor</p>	<p>To hold a belief or supposition as always true in all situations and without exception. See p. 49.</p>
	<p>The abstract conception of expenditure of human energy in the form of labor, without taking into account the value of labor output. When the value of labor output <i>is</i> taken into consideration, it is referred to as <i>concrete labor</i>. See p. 15, 17.</p>
<p>Adam Smith</p>	<p>(1723–1790) British logic professor, moral philosophy professor, and economist. Along with David Ricardo, Adam Smith was one of the founders of <i>political economy</i>, which Marx both drew from and critiqued in his analysis and critique of capitalism. See p. 14, 155.</p>
<p>Ahistoric Perspective</p>	<p>A perspective which considers aspects of human society without due consideration of historical processes of development. For example, Adam Smith and David Ricardo viewed political economy ahistorically, viewing capitalism as a static, universal, and eternal product of natural law rather than seeing capitalism as a product of historical processes of development which would change and develop</p>

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Translated and edited by micro-infamous youtubers Luna & Aaron who run the YouTube channel Non-Compete. They produced a video series called How Anarchism Works which received a fair bit of positive and negative attention, but the videos were later deleted, I think due to the author feeling they could have explained some aspects better so as to avoid misunderstandings.

Ted K recommended lots of Maoist & Stalinist writing in his final published book, plus some of his luddite fans have a medieval peasant romanticism that leads them to think positively of the Cambodian genocide. So, a few primary source readings on ‘Marxist-Leninist’ philosophy and ‘revolutionary’ internet culture today is within the remit of this archive.

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