

POLITICS / POLITICAL THEORY

NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ENGLISH, READ LUNA NGUYEN AND EMERICAN JOHNSON'S GROUNDBREAKING TRANSLATION AND ANNOTATION OF ONE OF THE CORE INTRODUCTORY TEXTBOOKS OF VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST THEORY: *THE CURRICULUM*.

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. The *Curriculum* is intended for students not specializing in the academic study of Marxism-Leninism, and is intended to give every Vietnamese student a firm grounding in the political philosophy of *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.

This book—which focuses on the 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 prominent organizations such as the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, the Women's Union, the Farmer's Union, and the Worker's Union. *Dialectical materialism* is the core framework of communist theory and practice as well as a common lens through which Vietnamese socialists relate, communicate, and work together.

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NGUYEN
&
JOHNSON

THE CURRICULUM OF THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF MARXISM-LENINISM



TRANSLATED, EDITED,
INTRODUCED, & ANNOTATED BY
LUNA NGUYEN &
EMERICAN JOHNSON

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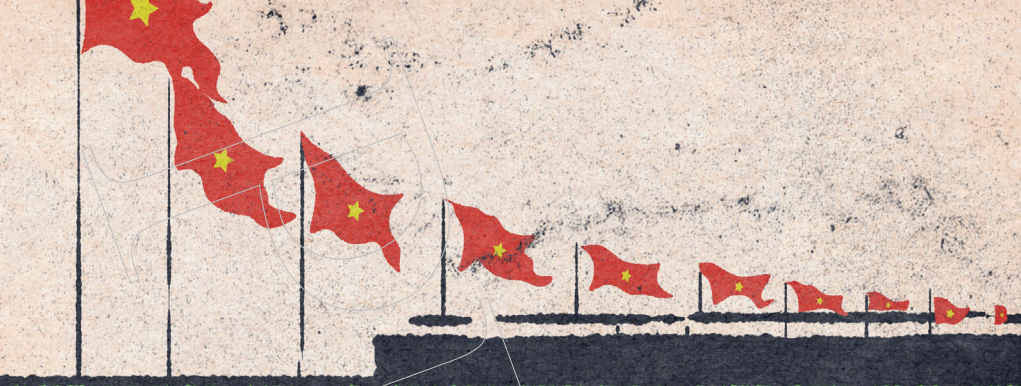
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CURRICULUM
OF THE BASIC
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MARXISM-LENINISM**



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THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF
MARXISM-LENINISM

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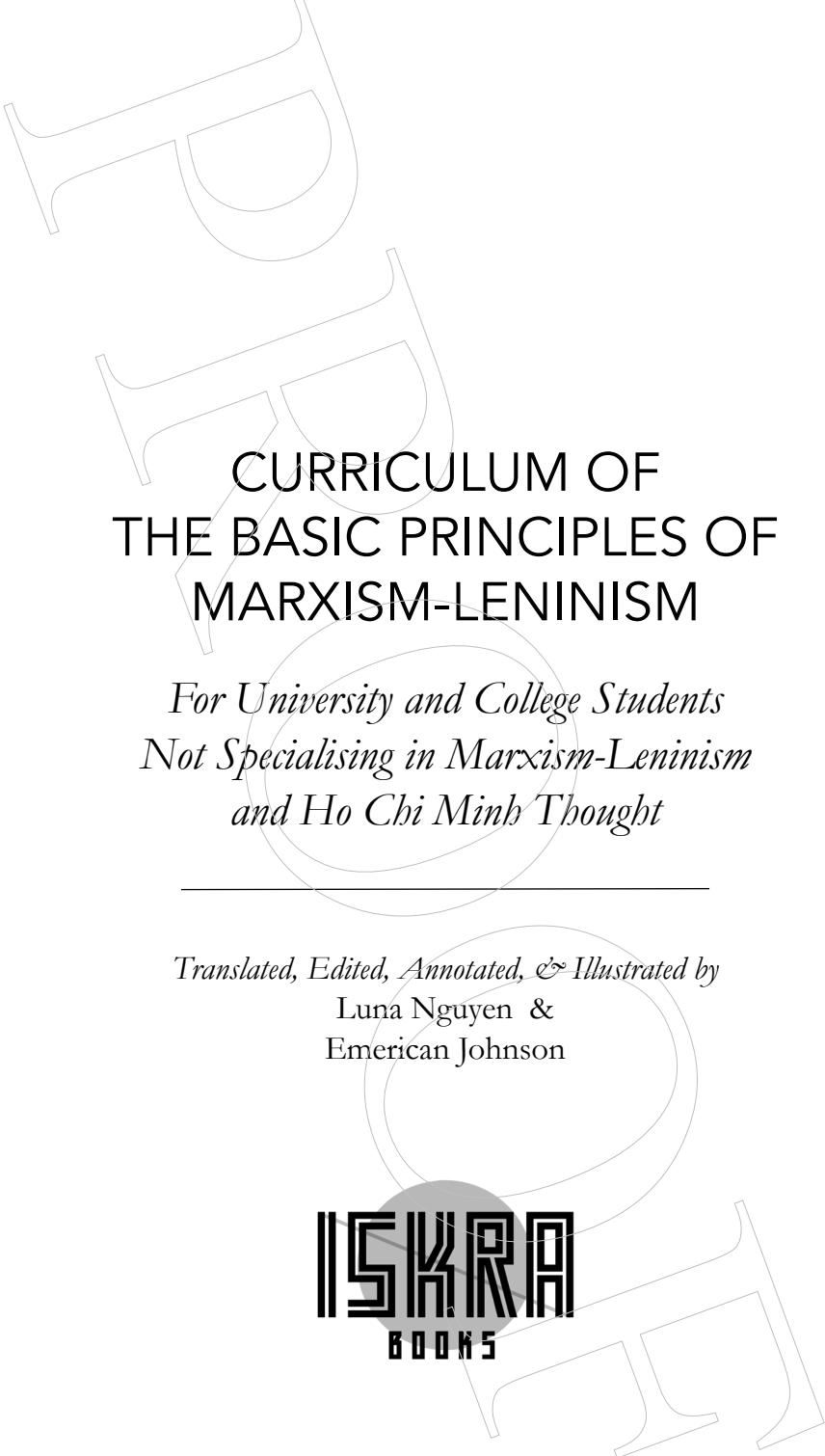
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CURRICULUM OF
THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF
MARXISM-LENINISM

*For University and College Students
Not Specialising in Marxism-Leninism
and Ho Chi Minh Thought*

Translated, Edited, Annotated, & Illustrated by
Luna Nguyen &
Emerican Johnson

ISKRA
BOOKS

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SUPPORT THIS WORK

Translating and annotating this book took well over a year, 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:

Zach L., Kathryn S., Timothy P., De'Vonte T., Douglas H., Ayodele E., Stephanie P., Bryan D., Jeff H., Matheus G. P., Luke F., Ayo E., David B. G., Joel V., Jake B., K. Masunungure, Daniel A., Ville I., Ariel G., Aaron L., Jason T., Crescenzo P., Antonio R., Roger W., Hunter S., Joseph Z. B., Cam S., Adam K., Olga C., Roberto P., Gerard D., Voltie M., Kaylee C., Edil F., Zeke T., Gideon S., Saumya I., Jason G. A., Jr., Richard H., Lachlainn H., Jake B., Matthew S., Joshua E., Corey K., Justin F., Jesse T., Christopher R., Helios A. C., Michael M., Ellenore M., Jason T., Michael E., Heath H., Boyles B., Ashley C., Daniel S., Aadil B., Joshua R., Maximilian H., John P., John M., Matthew L., Glenn A., Edward C., Caitlin B., Aaron W., Benjamin S., Michael C., Megan B., Manuel G. F., Sam W., James H., Kevin P., Calum S., Jesse R., Taylor H., Siddharth P., Melinda K., Shane F., Marc G., Katia S., Manuel V., Sarah K., Aidan M., Blake P., Patrick O., Daniel H., Ryan P., Matthew P., Duy V., Georgio M., Noah B., Ian H., Jackson M., Karen N., McKenzie P., Julianna D. P., Kyle R., Peter F., Josh P., Kayla D., Lindsay H., Adam M., Dennis C., Griffin M., Nicholas H., Brandon H., Ashley E., Simon C., Jonis F., John G., Eric R., Audrin T., Nam T., Orhan M., Ross P., Sam P., Jillian R., Derric A., Blaine H., Jimi C., Luiza S., Sarah F., Danion S., Liam H., Mendel A., Marcos F. T., Peter L. D., Abby L., Erin P., Astor C., Alex E., Simon L., Andrew H., Robert D., Chandler F., Audrey M., Larry V. K. III, Zero P., Daniel G., Dmitri S., Jeremy A. C., Anthony M., Amiad H., Mat C., Pastor J., Richard M., Robert D., Alexandria J., Darsius ACAB, Anna N., Anthony Z., Joshua B., Kyril W., Morgan H., Tarana I. M., Dirk K., Jacob N., Robyn M.

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: www.lunaoi.com.

We also encourage you to support our publishers with the Center for Communist Studies. CCS is a collective of scholars and researchers who publish important socialist theory, as well as the astounding periodical *Peace, Land, and Bread*. Support CCS and browse their full library of published material at: www.iskrabooks.org.



PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Iskra Books and the *Center for Communist Studies* are incredibly honored and excited to be involved in this project. The opportunity to make *actually existing socialist* education materials accessible, alongside insightful commentary from Luna Nyugen and Emerican Johnson, was something we jumped at. Luna and EJ are excellent educators and communicators and have built an impressive and impactful body of work, dedicated to broadening the understanding of Marxism-Leninism, the lessons of Vietnam's revolutionary history, and the contributions of Ho Chi Minh Thought. This book furthers that larger project, as will successive books from the same curriculum, and new translations of other radical Vietnamese texts. As explained in the Introduction below, the contents of this book form a semester's worth of study for students not specializing in Marxism-Leninism, and yet the depth and breadth of material covered is vast. It is also a shock for western audiences to see topics such as the history of class struggle and dialectics treated with academic respect and enthusiasm since they're often brushed over or completely ignored in Western academia. This level of commitment to a dialectical materialist understanding of our lives, our political actions, and the universe at large shines through in the text. It is fascinating to see how this philosophical perspective can bring an alternative way of looking at psychology, historical change, and theoretical development.

The possibilities for practical application from studying this text are enormous, and we hope activists and organizers worldwide implement the forms of analysis, the historical lessons, and the revolutionary optimism into their praxis. Who better to learn from than those who successively liberated themselves from French, Japanese, and American colonial invaders? Che Guevara, in his message to the Tricontinental, argued that those seeking the liberation of the peoples of the world should "create two, three, many Vietnams" and it is in that spirit that we should utilize this work.

David Peat
Proofing Editor
Member of the Editorial Board
Peace, Land, & Bread—Iskra Books





DEDICATION AND GRATITUDE

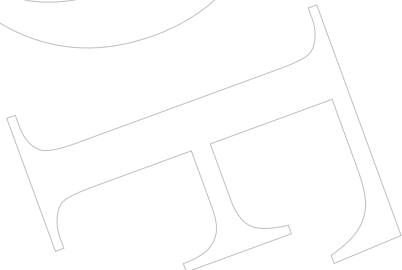
This book is dedicated to all the backers of the GoFundMe that raised the funds to allow me to translate this text. What I initially believed would be a straightforward three-month process of translating ended up taking over sixteen months of not just translation but also research, study, review, annotation, 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.

Thank you to my husband and comrade, Emerican Johnson, who helped me throughout the translation process, and who did such a fantastic job editing, annotating, and illustrating this text. He was my constant debate partner and study buddy as we grappled together with the spirit and meaning of the writings of Marx, Lenin, and Engels that are the bedrock of this text.

Thank you, also, to the Center for Communist Studies for the absolutely vital work they have done in helping us to finalize, typeset, design, and publish this book. We literally could not have done it without you. In particular, thank you to Ben Stahnke for organizing and cheerleading us through to the end, and to David Peat, for the painstaking, meticulous, and no-doubt frustrating work of proofreading our very, very, very imperfect writing!

Finally, I'd 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've 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.

Luna Nguyen



TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

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, which 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, and 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 translations used in this text and other translations, but it is my hope that the underlying meaning of each translation is properly conveyed.

Luna Nguyen



EDITOR/ANNOTATOR'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 into the wide world of Vietnamese scholarship and pedagogy as it relates to socialist theory and philosophy.

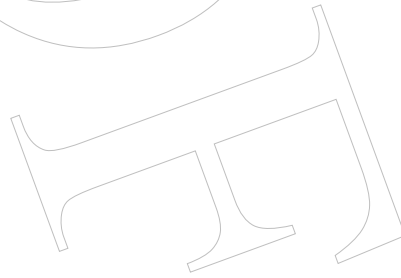
Luna and I have done our best to capture the original meaning and spirit of the text. Furthermore, as we have mentioned elsewhere, our annotations and illustrations are intended only to contextualize and expand on the core information of the original text similarly to the class/lecture setting for which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

American Johnson



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. 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. Additionally, this book is meant to be used as a textbook in the context of college classes which include in-person lectures.

As such, in translating and preparing this book for a foreign audience who are likely to be reading this book 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 as footnotes and within inset boxes like this, assisting the reader by historicizing and contextualizing the text's original premises.

We have also added illustrations to our annotations, as well as a detailed glossary and index, which are located in the back of the book, to aid you with self-study and quick reference. We hope that these elements will be of use not only with the reading of this text, but also as a reference in studying other texts which are rooted in dialectical materialism.

*Luna Nguyen &
American Johnson*

INTRODUCTION 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 have 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 be provided 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 point out 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:

1. As a comprehensive introductory textbook on dialectical materialism and for self-study, group study, classroom use, cadre training, etc.
2. 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.
3. As a companion book for further reading of theory and political texts rooted in dialectical materialist philosophy.

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 information. We also hope that this repetition may also help with self-study by reinforcing important concepts and quotations.

This book—part one 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.

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, but this book focuses primarily on Marx,

Engels, and Lenin because these figures laid the foundations and formulated the basic principles which are most universally applicable. In the text and in the annotations which we've added, reference will be made to other important figures, but in this book the focus is on developing an understanding of the most basic, most foundational, and most universal ideas as developed by Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

At the time of publication, we are already in the process of translating and annotating part two of this curriculum, which focuses on historical materialism, with the hopes of eventually releasing the full curriculum.

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 as they are used in this book, as well as an afterword, in which we offer advice for further study and application of dialectical materialism as well as recommendations for further reading.

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 five 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.

National Political Publishing House - Sự Thật
April, 2016



ORIGINAL 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 the National Political Publishing House, *Truth*, 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.

Feedback letters should be sent to the Ministry of Education and Training (Higher Education Department), 35 Dai Co Viet, Hanoi.

Ministry of Education and Training

INTRODUCTION

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF MARXISM-LENINISM

I. A 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 Engels,² and defended and developed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.³ 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

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

2 Friedrich Engels, 1820-1895 (German): a 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): a 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.

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*⁴ 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. 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.

4 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 broader and more 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.

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*⁵

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.⁶

5 The following sections will explain the conditions which lead 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 18th and 19th century advances in natural science had on the development of Marxism.

6 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. 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; namely: the bourgeoisie. As the owners of the means of production, the *bourgeoisie*, who are the current ruling class of society under capitalism. Within the framework of Dialectical Materialism, all classes are defined by internal and external relationships; chiefly, classes are defined by their relations to the means of production, and to one another. 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* which includes 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.” Marx also explained in the manifesto that the petty bourgeoisie occupy a sort of “intermediate” class between the proletariat and the capitalist class, writing: “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, craftsmen, 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.

The *lumpenproletariat* is another intermediate class which includes the segments of society with the least privilege, such as criminals, homeless 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 revolu-

tionary 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 century 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.

During this period, the French colonialists worked with Vietnamese landlords to exploit peasants in rural areas, who also received barely enough to survive and were prohibited from education. Because Vietnamese peasants and colonial slaves were so severely oppressed and lived in conditions of such abject poverty, it is difficult to functionally distinguish between the proletariat and the lumpenproletariat in Vietnam during this colonial era. As noted earlier, even the petty bourgeoisie was generally severely exploited and repressed by French colonial rulers.

As such, Ho Chi Minh and other Vietnamese communists of this era 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,” which demanded children to deeply respect, honor, and obey their parents.

Proletarian Piety 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 willing to fight for communist revolution 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 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

The deep contradictions between the socialized production force⁷ and the capitalist relations of production⁸ were first revealed by the

French, such as *Bi Vô*, 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.

The concept of proletarian piety was crucial for uniting the divided and conquered masses of Vietnam and successfully overthrowing the ruling classes. Every revolutionary struggle will take place in unique material conditions, and the composition and structure of the oppressed classes 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 and structure to develop strategies and plans which will most suitably and efficiently lead to successful revolution.

7 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.

8 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 survive within a given society. The capitalist relations of production require the work-

economic depression of 1825 and the series of struggles between workers and the capitalist class which followed.

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' 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.⁹

ing class to work for capitalists to receive wages which they need to survive. This is inherently contradictory because a small minority of society (the capitalist class) own the means of production and the vast majority of society (the working class) must therefore involuntarily submit to wage servitude in order to survive.

9 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 Reform Act of 1832, which tried (and failed) to give non-property owners the right to vote, as well as the Poor Law Amendment of 1834, which drove poor people into workhouses and removed other social programs for the working poor. These events led to a broadly popular mass movement of workers and the working poor who would go on to organize around the People's Charter of 1838, which was a list of six demands to extend the vote and allow the working class 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

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 quintessence¹⁰ of various previously established frameworks of human philosophical theory such as German classical philosophy, British classical political economics, and Utopianism in France and Britain.

German classical philosophy, especially the philosophies of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel¹¹ and Ludwig Feuerbach,¹² had deeply influenced the formation of the Marxist worldview and philosophical methodology.¹³ One of Hegel's important achievements was his critique of the metaphysical method.¹⁴

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.

10 In the original Vietnamese, the word *tinb 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.

11 G.W.F. Hegel (George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, 1770 - 1831) (German): philosophy professor, an objective idealistic philosopher - representative of German classical philosophy.

12 L. Feuerbach (Ludwig Feuerbach, 1804 - 1872) (German): philosophy professor, materialist philosopher.

13 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.

14 Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that attempts to explain the fundamental nature of reality. 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. Generally speaking, metaphysics

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.¹⁵ Starting with a critique of the mysterious idealism of Hegel's philosophy, Marx and Engels inherited the "logical kernel" of Hegelian dialectics and successfully built materialist dialectics.¹⁶

presents 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.

15 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 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] 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.

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.

16 In order to understand the ways in which the critique of Hegel's philosophy

Marx and Engels also criticised many limitations of Feuerbach's

by Marx and Engels lead 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 sense 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.”

In the era of Marx and Engels, the leading philosophical school of materialism was known as *empiricism*. The empiricists believed that we can *only* obtain knowledge through the experiences of our senses.

Marx and Engels also considered themselves to be materialists. However, they believed that this strict empiricist view made materialism vulnerable to attack from idealists, because it ignored rational knowledge that went beyond sense data. In particular, hardline empiricism ignores *social relations*, which cannot be analyzed through sense data and sense observation alone.

As Marx wrote 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 saw the physical, material world as the *first basis* for reality, but they also understood that felt 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. 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 data*. On the contrary, empirical data was key to the works of both 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

methodology and viewpoint¹⁷—especially Feurbach’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.

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.¹⁸

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 follow from material conditions, but that consciousness can also influence the material world. This is discussed in more detail in the section, “Materialism and Dialectical Materialism.”

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

18 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 unmenschliches 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 who believed that the external world could only be understood through the *active* subjective thought processes of human beings, and the empiricist materialists who believed that human beings were *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 in that all human thoughts fundamentally derive from observation and sense experience of the material world. This is discussed in more detail in the section, “Dialectical Materialist Opinions About Matter, Consciousness, and the Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness.”

Coming back to Feuerbach, Marx and Engels believed that Feuerbach was misguided in discussing “the essence of man” in isolated abstraction from the material world and from social relations, defining human nature by our traits alone. They also believed that Feuerbach's humanism was based on an abstract, ideal version of human beings, whereas the humanism of Marx and Engels is firmly rooted in reality.

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*.

The British classical political economics, represented by such economists as Adam Smith¹⁹ and David Ricardo,²⁰ also contributed to the formation of Marxism's historical materialist conception.

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 value²¹; the internal contradictions of commodity production²²; and the duality of com-

Marx and Engels believed that human nature could only be understood by examining our economic and social relations, including our relationships with each other and our relationship 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."

19 A. Smith (Adam Smith, 1723 - 1790) (British): Logic professor, moral philosophy professor, economist.

20 D. Ricardo (David Ricardo, 1772 - 1823) (British): Economist.

21 *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.

Marx did not believe that the economic principles of capitalism resulted from nature, but rather, from historical conflict between different classes. He believed that the principles of political economics 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.

22 *Internal Contradictions of Commodity Production.* In Marxist terms, a commodity is specifically something that has both a use value and a value-form, but in simpler

modity production labor.²³ They also could not distinguish between simple commodity production and capitalist commodity production,²⁴

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.

23 *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.

24 *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 is 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 called the “C→M→C” mode of circulation. 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 with their own labor, and they directly consume the commodities which they purchase.

and could not accurately analyse the form of value²⁵ in capitalist com-

Capitalist commodity production and capitalist exchange are based on the “ $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M'$ ” mode of circulation. $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M'$ stands for: *Money* \rightarrow *Commodity* \rightarrow *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*.

Note: $C \rightarrow M \rightarrow C$ and $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M'$ are also related to *quality* and *quantity*. Capitalist commodity production, on the other hand, 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.

25 *Value-Form.* This is one of the most important, and potentially most confusing, concepts in all of Marx’s analysis. Marx explains these principles at length in *Appendix of the 1st German Edition of Capital, Volume 1*, but here are some of the fundamental takeaways: 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, commodities themselves also exist in duality according to Marx; commodities have both “use-value” and “value.”

a. *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.

b. *Value*, or the Value-Form, is the *social form* of a commodity, which is to say, it represents the relationships intrinsic to the commodity. 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 used to produce these commodities. And so, the value-form of a commodity is the social form because it embodies relational equivalencies:

i. The value-form represents the relationship between the commodity and the labor which was used to produce the commodity.

ii. The value-form represents the relationship between a commodity and one or more other commodities.

As Marx explains in *Appendix to the First 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

modity production. British classical political economists like Ricardo and Smith outlined the scientific factors of the theories of labor value²⁶ and contributed many progressive thoughts which Marx adapted and further developed. 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,²⁷ 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.

*Utopianism*²⁸ had been developing for a long time and reached its peak in the late 18th century with famous thinkers such as Henri de

such as “exchange value,” “value,” “price,” “money,” etc., which meant that they could not possibly fully understand or analyze capitalist economies.

26 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.

27 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.

28 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 a lot of other rich capitalists in the early 19th century had 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. According to Mar and Engels, 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.

Saint-Simon,²⁹ François Marie Charles Fourier,³⁰ and Robert Owen.³¹ 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 development rule of capitalism and 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.

The humanitarian spirit and compassionate analysis which the utopians made about history and their work to lay out concrete features of a future, better society became one of the important theory premises for the birth of the scientific theory of socialism in Marxism.

The Natural Science³² 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. Three major scientific breakthroughs which were important to the development of Marxism include: firstly, the law of the conservation and transformation of energy, and secondly, the theory of evolution, and, lastly, cell theory.

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

29 H.S. Simon (Claude Henri de Rouvroy Saint Simon, 1760 - 1825) (French): philosopher, economist, utopianist activist.

30 C. Fourier (Charles Fourier, 1772 - 1837) (French): philosopher, economist, utopianist activist.

31 R. Owen (Robert Owen, 1771 - 1858) (British): utopianist activist, owner of a cotton factory.

32 *Natural science* is science dealing primarily with the natural world, including chemistry, biology, physics, geology, etc.

through those relationships.

These scientific discoveries—the law of conservation and transformation of energy, the theory of evolution, and the cell theory—lead to the rejection of metaphysical thinking and the theological viewpoint which centered the role of the “creator” in natural philosophy.³³ These

33 Marx and Engels closely observed and studied the groundbreaking scientific progress of their era. They believed strongly in empirical science and the data which it produced, and based their analysis and philosophical doctrines on such observations. Specifically, Marx and Engels developed the system of Dialectical Materialism to analyze and understand the world based on scientific and historical analysis.

Scientific discoveries—such as the law of conservation and transformation of energy, the theory of evolution, and the cell theory—thus offered an important scientific foundation for the works of Marx and Engels.

Marx and Engels recognised the importance and validity of these scientific achievements, and they used these specific achievements to build 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 was “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 went on to explain that it is understandable to break scientific study down to focus on precise, specific, narrow subject matters, in order to build up empirical data, but that all of these isolated, individual data points must somehow be analyzed coherently and cohesively in order to obtain a deeper and more useful understanding of reality:

But this conception, correctly as it expresses the general character of the picture of appearances as a whole, does not suffice to explain the details of which this picture is made up, and so long as we do not understand these, we have not a clear idea of the whole picture. In order to understand these details, we must detach them from their natural, special causes, effects, etc. This is, primarily, the task of natural science and historical research: branches of science which the Greek of classical times, on very good grounds, relegated to a subordinate position, because they had first of all to collect materials for these sciences to work upon [...] 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.

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

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.³⁴ They also confirmed the scientific nature of the dialectical-materialist viewpoint in both material processes and thought processes.³⁵

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 or 1843 through around 1847 or 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 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), *Theses on Feuerbach* (Marx, 1845), *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1845-1846), and so on, clearly showed that Marx and Engels inherited the

Materialism, on the other hand, allows humans to analyze the world on a larger scale. It enables us to study the whole universe, the whole of human society, including philosophical issues.

34 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.

35 This is discussed in further detail in Chapter 3, Section I, Part 2: "Materialist Dialectics."

quintessence 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.³⁶ 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.³⁷

In the book *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx proposed the basic principles of Dialectical Materialism, 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. *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* outlined the laws of movement in history, as well as the basic theory of socio-economic forms.

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.³⁸

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.

36 There is a subtle, but important, distinction between *Dialectical Materialism* and *Materialist Dialectics*. This will be explained in more detail in chapters I and II.

37 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.

38 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.

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 value³⁹ 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.

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.⁴⁰

The theory of surplus value was deeply and comprehensively researched and presented in *Capital*⁴¹ 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

39 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.

40 Under capitalism, a worker's labor becomes 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 capitalist employers - they only know how much money they are receiving as wages. These mechanisms are not transparent to workers, and so workers can never know exactly how much of their labor value is being taken from them as surplus labor value and transformed into profits for the capitalist alone.

41 *Das Kapital*: The most important work of Karl Marx about political economics. It is composed of four volumes. It is the work of Marx's whole career and an important part of F.Engels's career. K.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, F.Engels edited and published the second volume in 1885 and the third volume in 1894. The fourth volume was not published when Engels was still alive. The Institute of Marxism - Leninism of the USSR edited and published *Das Kapital IV*, also known as *Theories of Surplus-Value*, in the 1950s.

develops the historical-materialist viewpoint through the theory of socio-economic forms.

This theory presents a system of laws of motion and development⁴² of human society. 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*⁴³; between *infrastructure basis* [commonly referred to as “base” in English] and *superstructure*.⁴⁴

42 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 referred 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.

43 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).

44 Marx viewed society as composed of an economic *base* as well as a social *superstructure*.

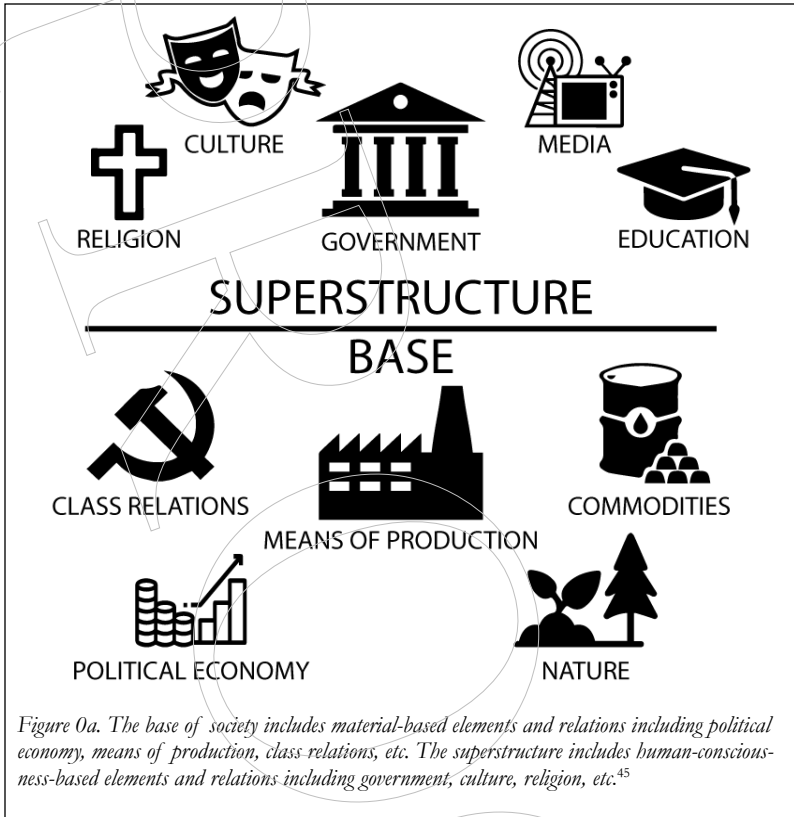


Figure 0a. The base of society includes material-based elements and relations including political economy, means of production, class relations, etc. The superstructure includes human-consciousness-based elements and relations including government, culture, religion, etc.⁴⁵

45 The base of society includes the material processes which humans undertake to survive and transform our environment. In other words, the base refers to the relationship which humans have with the means of production, including the ownership of the means of production and the organization of labor. The superstructure of society includes the ideal components of human society, including 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.

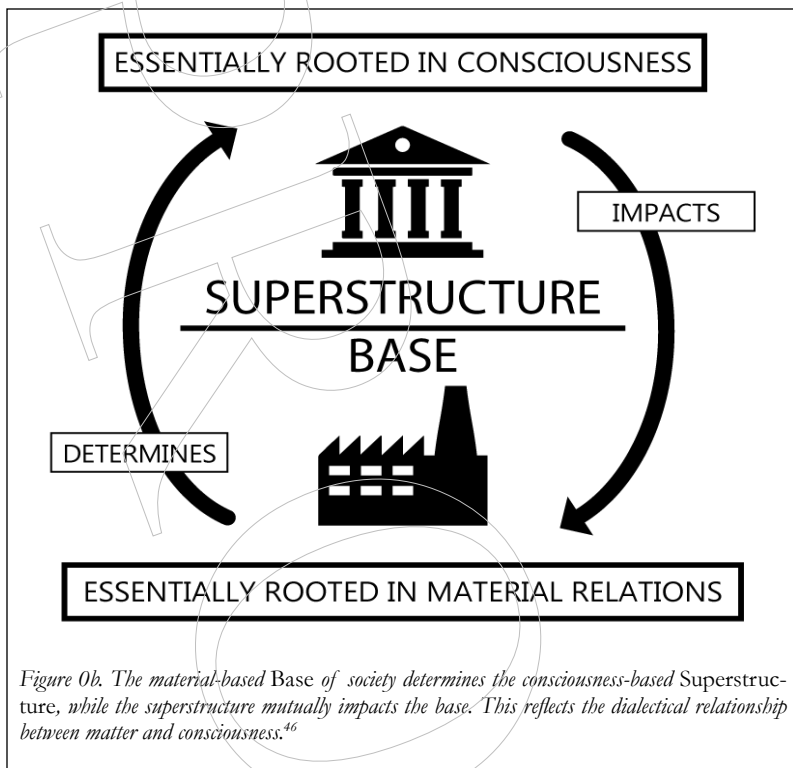


Figure 0b. The material-based Base of society determines the consciousness-based Superstructure, while the superstructure mutually impacts the base. This reflects the dialectical relationship between matter and consciousness.⁴⁶

The theory of socio-economic forms proves [according to Lenin] that the materialist viewpoint of history is not just a hypothesis, but a scientifically-proven principle.⁴⁷ *Capital* is Marx's main work which

46 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. 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 force of conscious activity are material needs and considerations. This is discussed more in Chapter 1, Part 2, Section 1: "Matter" and Section 2: "Consciousness."

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

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,⁴⁸ 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.

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

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 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.

48 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.

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 perception and activities of many revolutionary movements.⁴⁹ At this time, Marxism was widely disseminating throughout

49 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 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 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 was therefore a continuation of Berkeley’s *subjective idealism*, which can be specifically referred to as *empirical idealism*.

Empirio-Criticism, also known as Machism, along with Berkeley’s Immaterialism, are considered to be *subjective idealism* because these philosophies do not hold that knowledge, consciousness, and the ideal exist objectively and externally from the material world. Rather, these philosophies 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.

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.

In *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, 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. 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 really 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.

Lenin 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.

As Lenin explains: “(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.”

Lenin 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: “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 Machism, 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

Russia, which challenged the social positions and benefits of capitalists. In reaction to Marxism, many ideological movements such as empiricism, utilitarianism, revisionism, etc., 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

slavishly follow the lead of the reactionary professorial philosophy.

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

The Empirio-Criticists 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 summarizes why he believes communists should reject Empirio-Criticism and Machism with several “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 and, leaving him, proceeded not towards materialism, but in the opposite direction, towards Hume and Berkeley. . . 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.

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 populists⁵⁰. 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 with regard 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.⁵¹ In the same book, Lenin also shared many thoughts about the important roles of theory, reality, and the relationship between the two.

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,

50 *Populist faction*: an idealist capitalist ideology with many representatives such as Mikhailovsky, Bakunin, Plekhanov. Populists failed to recognise the important roles of the people, of the farmers & workers alliance and the proletariat. They absolutely 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 and populists advocated to fight in the form of individual terrorism.

51 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.

he emphasized the ideological formation process of the proletariat.⁵²

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 tsarist feudalism. In this context of this ongoing bourgeois revolution, Lenin deeply developed Marxist

52 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."

As Lenin explains 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.

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, and so on.⁵³

From 1907 to 1917, there was a viewpoint crisis among many

53 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 tsarist 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 tsar's government, and the tsar 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 this book, Lenin argues forcefully against the political faction within the Russian socialist movement that came to be known as the "Mensheviks." The Mensheviks, as well as Lenin's faction, the Bolsheviks, emerged from a dispute within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party which took place in 1903.

In *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, 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.

Specifically, the Mensheviks believed that the working class should ally with the bourgeoisie to overthrow the tsar'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 tsar, 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 tsar.

physicists. This strongly affected the birth of many idealist ideologies following Mach's Positivism that attempted to negate Marxism. 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 eclecticism⁵⁴ and sophistry.

54 *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.

Sophistry is the use of falsehoods and misleading arguments, usually with the intention of deception, and with a tendency of presenting non-critical aspects

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.⁵⁵

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.

55 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. Lenin believed that the October, 1917 revolution represented the complete defeat of the tsar, however he believed the proletarian victory over the bourgeoisie would take more time.

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 tsar 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.

With these great works dedicated to the three component parts of Marxism, 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 (i.e., the Paris Commune⁵⁶) was established.

We are learning how to continue erecting the socialist edifice in a small-peasant country.” He continues later:

The proletariat 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.

56 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 Le-

In August 1903, the very first Marxist proletariat party was established—the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, a true Marxist party which 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 International⁵⁷ 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], Poland [1956], Romania [1947], Hungary [1949], Vietnam [1945], Czechoslovakia [1948], Yugoslavia [1945], Albania [1946], the Democratic People's Republic of Korea [1945], East Germany [1949], China [1949], and Cuba [1959].

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 80s of the 20th Century, the socialist alliance faced a crisis and fell into a recession period. Even though the socialist system fell into crisis

nin, and was referenced frequently in their works.

57 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 *Comintern* 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 during World War II.

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; 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,⁵⁸ human beings will almost certainly go forward to socialism.⁵⁹*

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

58 Historical materialism holds that human society develops based on internal and external relationships within and between aspects of society. The principles of historical materialism, as developed by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, indicate that human society is moving towards socialism and will almost certainly (eventually) 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, and *Karl Marx*, by Lenin.

59 Drawn from the delegate document of the 11th national congress.

actions is an important developmental step in cognition and logical thinking.⁶⁰ Achievements that the Vietnamese people have gained in the war to gain our independence, in peace, and in renovation time⁶¹ are all rooted in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought. Therefore, we have to “creatively apply and develop Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh Thought in Party’s activities. We have to regularly summarise reality, complement and develop theory, soundly solve problems of our society.”⁶²

And, finally:

We have to be consistent with Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought. We

60 Delegate document of the 9th national congress.

61 The revolution and independence of Vietnam were guided by Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought.

Specifically, *Marxism-Leninism* refers to philosophical worldview and methodology of scientific socialism, which exists to guide the development of socialism in human society. *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.

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 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—that is, socialism.

62 Delegate document of the 10th national congress.

have to creatively apply and develop the ideology correspondingly with the reality in Vietnam. We have to firmly aim for national independence and socialism.⁶³

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.⁶⁴ In the scope of *Marxist-Leninist Philosophy* [the first component part of Marxism-Leninism], these objects of study [and thus the viewpoints] are:

1. Dialectical Materialism—the fundamental and most universal worldview and methodologies which form the theoretical core of a scientific worldview.⁶⁵
2. Materialist Dialectics—the science of development and common relationships, of the most common rules of motion and de-

63 Delegate document of the 12th national congress.

64 Remember that a viewpoint, or point of view, is the starting point of analysis which determines the direction of thinking and the perspective from which phenomena and 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.

So, the objects of study of this book are the viewpoints—the starting points of analysis of Marxism-Leninism and the three component parts of which it's composed.

65 Remember that *Scientific* in Marxism-Leninism refers broadly to a systematic pursuit of knowledge, research, theory, and understanding.

Remember, 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 that world. And, 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.

velopment of nature, society and human thought.

3. Historical Materialism—the application and development of Materialism and Dialectics in studying social aspects.

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

1. The theory of value and the theory of surplus value.
2. Economic theory about monopolist capitalism and state monopolist capitalism.
3. 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.

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

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

The purposes of studying The basic principles of Marxism-Leninism: to master Marxist-Leninist viewpoints of science, revolution, and humanism⁶⁶; 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.

66 The humanism of Marxism-Leninism differs greatly from the humanism of Feuerbach. Marxist-Leninist humanism concerns itself with the liberation of all human beings from oppression and exploitation.

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 Method of Study

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

First, Marxist-Leninist theses⁶⁷ were conceptualized under many

67 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 tsar. 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, modern-day Singapore). Just as Lenin's remarks about the tsar 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." So you can see, 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.

In addition, 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. Ho Chi Minh 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. Ho Chi Minh 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.

Ho Chi Minh immediately took advantage of this situation and held a suc-

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.

Second, the birth and development of the 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 in different component parts in order to see the unity in diversity, 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

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 reclaiming 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 we can see, 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.

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 quintessentially 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 1

THE WORLDVIEW AND PHILOSOPHICAL METHODOLOGY OF MARXISM-LENINISM

Worldview is 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

1 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.

Worldview and *philosophical methodology* are the fundamental knowledge-systems² of Marxism-Leninism. Marxist-Leninist worldview and philosophical methodology emerge from the quintessence 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:

1. *Dialectical Materialism* is the ideological core of a scientific worldview.
2. *Historical Materialism* is a system of dialectical materialist opinions about the origin, motivation 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.”³ Lenin also defined Materialist Dialectics as “what is now called theory of knowledge or epistemology.”⁴

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.

2 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.

3 See *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*, V. I. Lenin, 1913.

4 See *Karl Marx*, V.I. Lenin, 1914.

Editor’s note: Epistemology is the theoretical study of knowledge; for more information on this, see the section “Cognitive Theory of Dialectical Materialism.”

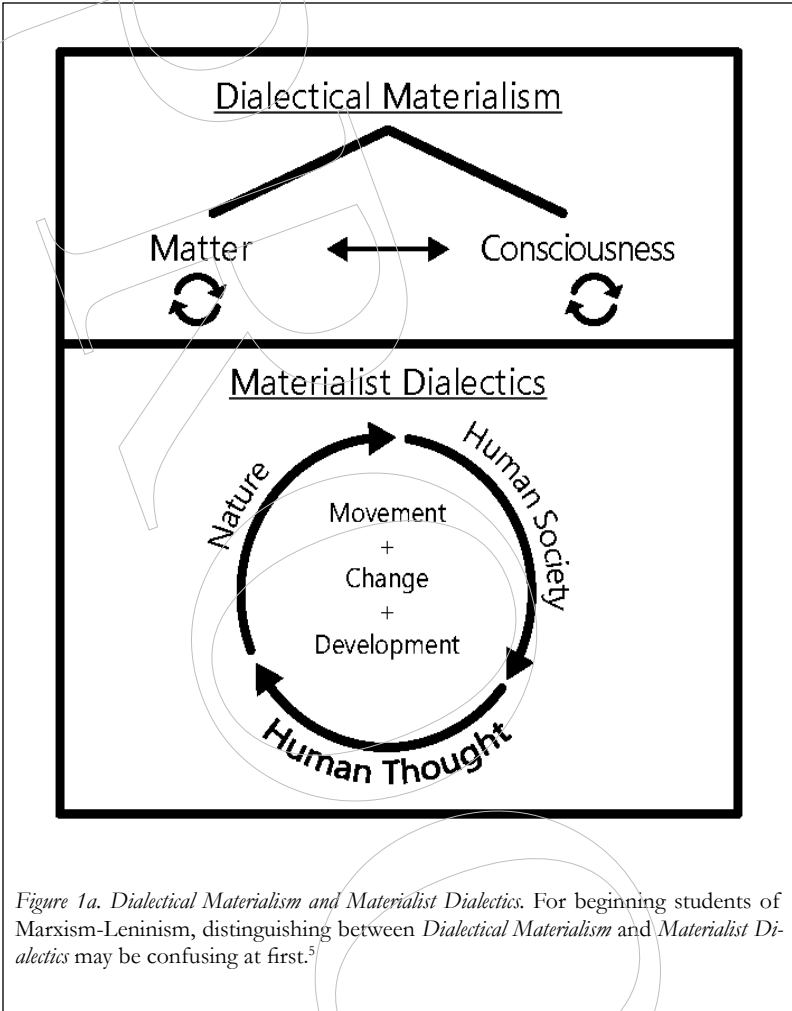
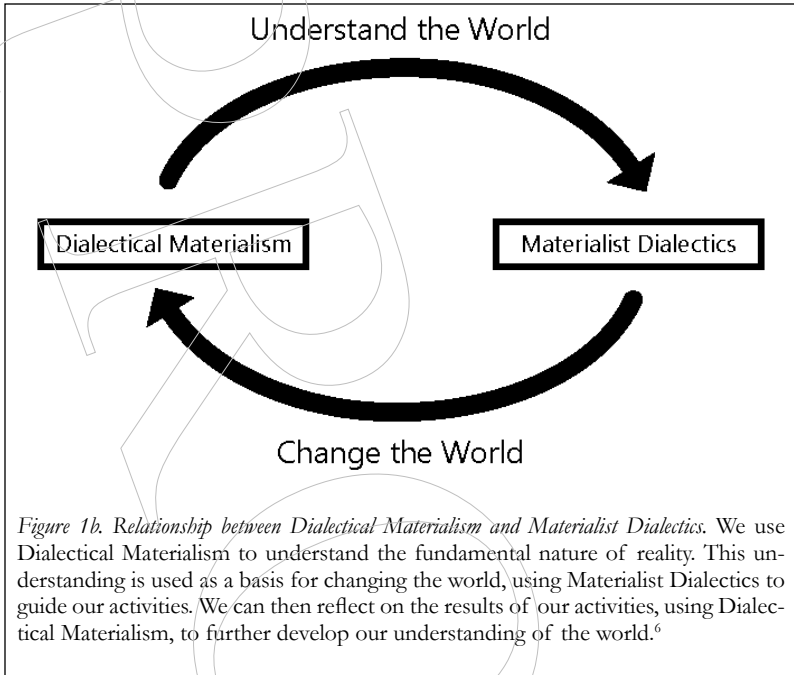


Figure 1a. *Dialectical Materialism and Materialist Dialectics*. For beginning students of Marxism-Leninism, distinguishing between *Dialectical Materialism* and *Materialist Dialectics* may be confusing at first.⁵

5 *Dialectical Materialism* is a scientific understanding of matter, consciousness and the relationship between them. 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.



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.

6 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 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.

PART 1

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 knowledges about our world, about ourselves, and our position in our world. Philosophy has existed for more than two thousand years. Philosophy has different objects of study depending on different periods of time. However, in order to summarise 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 being.”¹

So, philosophy studies the relations between consciousness and matter, 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.² These origins are *unilateral consideration*, and *absolutization* of only one aspect or one characteristic of the whole cognitive process.³ Historically, idealism

1 See “Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy,” F. Engels.

2 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.

3 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.

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.⁴ In history, there are two main forms of idealism: *subjective idealism* and *objective idealism*.

Idealism 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 the consciousness.”

4 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.

Subjective idealism asserts that *consciousness* is the primary existence.⁵ 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.

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.⁶

5 *Primary existence* refers to 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 activity. The primary existence of matter within Dialectical Materialism is discussed further in Chapter II, Section 3: “The relationship between matter and consciousness.” Willpower is discussed in Chapter II, Section 2, Subsection b: “Nature and structure of consciousness.”

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, and since humans can only observe the world through conscious experience, then the material world can never be truly known or observed by our consciousness.

6 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 action.

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. As Marx and 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.

a. 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.⁷

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 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.⁸

7 These Primitive Materialist elemental philosophies are discussed more in Chapter II, Section 1: Matter.

8 Metaphysical materialism was strongly influenced by the metaphysical, mechanical thinking of classical mechanics, which was a scientific and philosophical movement which explored mechanical machines and compared natural phenomena to mechanical devices. Classical mechanics developed a belief that all things—including living organisms—were built and could be built as mechanical devices. Metaphysical materialism developed with heavy influence from classical mechanics, and 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

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,⁹ 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 them.

II. DIALECTICAL MATERIALIST OPINIONS ABOUT MATTER, CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MATTER AND CONSCIOUSNESS

1. Matter

a. *The 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

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.

⁹ Dialectical Materialism explains the world in terms of relations within and between things, phenomena, and human thoughts, and their development. This will be discussed further in Chapter II, Section II: Basic Principles of Materialist Dialectics.

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 *Prakriti*¹⁰ or *Pradhana*; in Greece, the Milesian school believed they were *water* (Thales's¹¹ conception) or *air* (Anaximene's¹² conception); Heraclitus¹³ believed the ultimate element was *fire*; Democritus¹⁴ 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 Bacon,¹⁵ Rene Descartes,¹⁶ Thomas Hobbes,¹⁷ Denis Diderot,¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ These shortcomings

10 *Prakriti*: According to the *Samkhya* faction, *Prakriti* is matter with a very delicate and potential form, containing the capacity for motion and expansion.

11 Thales (Around 642 - 547 B.C.) (Greek): Philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, politician.

12 Anaximene (Around 585 - 525 B.C.) (Greek): Philosopher.

13 Heraclitus (Around 540 - 480 B.C.) (Greek): Philosopher, founder of ancient dialectics.

14 Democritus (Around 460 - 370 B.C.) (Greek): Philosopher, naturalist, one of the founders of atom theory.

15 F. Bacon (Francis Bacon, 1561 - 1626) (British): Philosopher, novelist, mathematician, political activist.

16 R. Descartes (Rene Descartes, 1596 - 1650) (Fench): Philosopher, mathematician, physicist.

17 T. Hobbes (Thomas Hobbes, 1588 - 1679) (British): Political philosopher, political activist.

18 D. Diderot (Denis Diderot, 1713 - 1784) (French): Philosopher, novelist.

19 Here are further explanations of these shortcomings of early materialists:

resulted in a non-thorough materialist viewpoint: when dealing with

1. *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.

2. *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*:

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.”

questions about nature, the early materialists had a strong materialist viewpoint but when dealing with social issues, they “slipped” into an idealist viewpoint.²⁰

3. *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*:

[S]ocial 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.

20 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.

Fideism is a form of idealism which holds that truth and knowledge are received through faith or revelation. In the same work, Lenin asks whether 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 relies on the concept of 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.

The development of natural sciences in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries, especially the inventions of Roentgen,²¹ Becquerel,²² Thomson,²³ etc., disproved the theories of “classical elements” such as fire, water, air, etc. 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

A failure to recognize the existence of such 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.

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.”

Lenin describes 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.

21 W. Roentgen (Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen, 1845 - 1923) (German): Physicist.

22 H. Becquerel (Henri Becquerel, 1852 - 1908) (French): Physicist.

23 Sir J.J. Thomson (Joseph John Thomson, 1856 - 1940) (British): Physicist, professor at London Royal Institution.

the roles of supernatural forces to the birth of the world.²⁴

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, inde-

24 Lenin discussed this viewpoint crisis extensively in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. As an example, here Lenin discusses a viewpoint crisis instigated by relativist reactions to new breakthroughs in natural science, which lead even materialist scientists 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 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.

pendently of human consciousness, no matter whether humans can perceive it 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 laid 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 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.²⁵

25 *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; *mode* of production refers to *how* commodities are produced in society. So, the mode of existence of matter refers to *how* matter exists in our universe.

Form comes from the category pair of *Content* and *Form*. Form refers to how we perceive objects, phenomena, and ideas. So, the form of existence of matter refers to the ways in which we perceive the existence of matter 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.²⁶ Matter exists objectively, therefore motion also exists objectively. The motion of matter is self-motion.²⁷

26 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 to imagine matter existing in complete isolation from matter; thus matter exists in the *mode* of motion.

27 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 Marxist-Leninist theory, “motion” is also known as “change” and it refers to the changes which occur as a result of the mutual impacts which occur in one subject in relation to another subject.

In *Dialectics of Nature*, Friedrich Engels discussed the properties of motion and explained that motion cannot 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.

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:

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); and *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 are arranged as follows, in the table on the next page:

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, 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.

Engels' Basic Forms of Motion in Relation to Matter			
	Basic Form of Motion	Material Effects	
↑ Less Advanced Advancement of Motion More Advanced ↓	Mechanical Motion	Changes in positions of objects in space	↑
	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.	Complexity of Matter
	Biological Motion	Changes of living objects, or genetic structure, etc.	More Complex
	Social Motion	Changes in economy, politics, culture, and social life, etc.	↓

The basic forms of motion 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 foun-

dation 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.²⁸

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.²⁹

28 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.

29 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 [17]) 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.

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*.

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.³⁰

Space, and time, as forms of existence of matter, exist objectively [i.e., in the external material world], 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.³¹

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, it exists objectively, and independently, of

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?

30 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.

31 In other words: the entire universe, in all of its diversity, is made of matter, and the properties of matter are the same throughout the known universe.

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.³²

2. Consciousness

a. *The Source of Consciousness*

According to the materialist viewpoint, consciousness has natural and social sources.³³

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,

32 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.

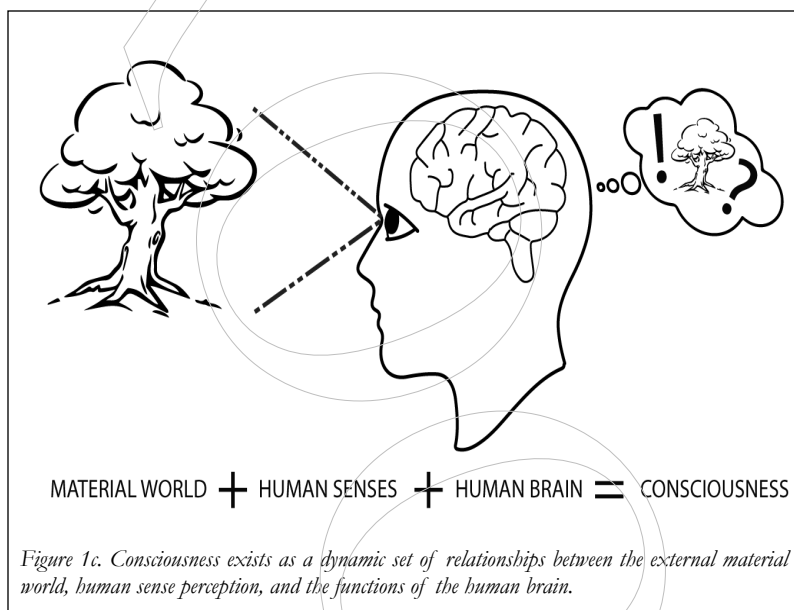
33 Consciousness arises from *nature*, and from *social* activities and relations.

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.

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.

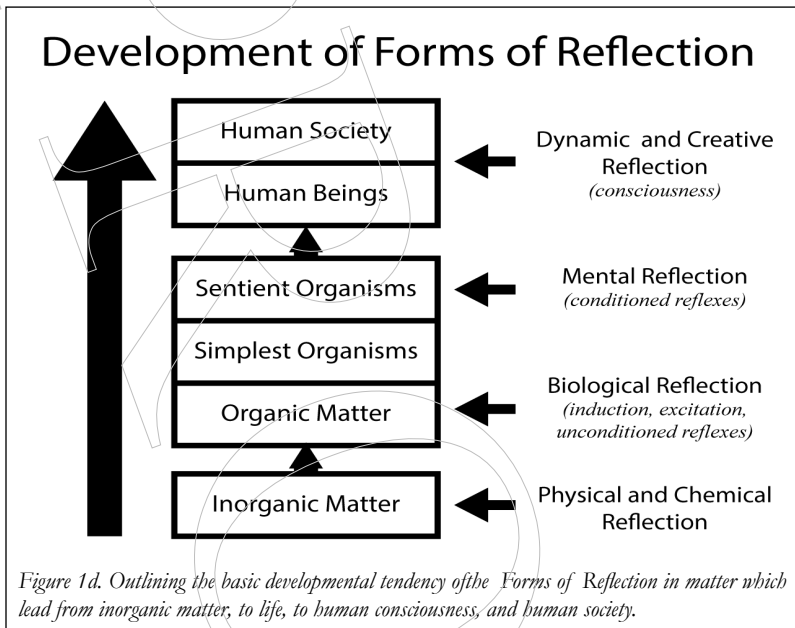
About the relationship between humans and the objective world which made possible creative and dynamic reflection: The relationship between humans and the objective world has been essential for as long as humans have existed. In this relationship, the objective world is reflected through human senses 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.³⁴



34 Reflection simply refers to gradual development which results from mutual impacts between two things, phenomena, or ideas. Any time two things interact, reflection occurs, and *traces* of some form or another are left on both objects as a result of this interaction. This is a fundamental concept of dialectical materialism: that all things are constantly affecting and impacting each other—mutually—and we call this process of mutually-impactful interaction *reflection*.

The following information about the different forms of reflection and the evolution of reflection come from decades of advancement from the basic theory of reflection proposed by Marx, Engels and Lenin 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 by scientists such as Vyacheslav A. Ivannikov and in mainstream science in Cuba, Vietnam, China, and Laos. The information 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 such as the ones named above 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.

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.³⁵

Physical Reflection: Change in Position

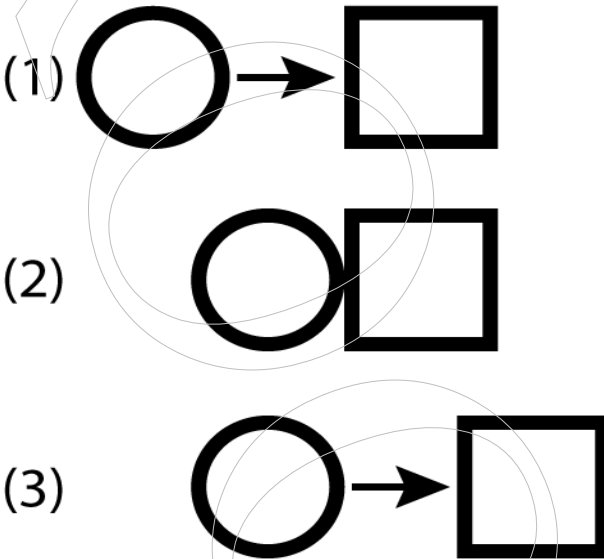
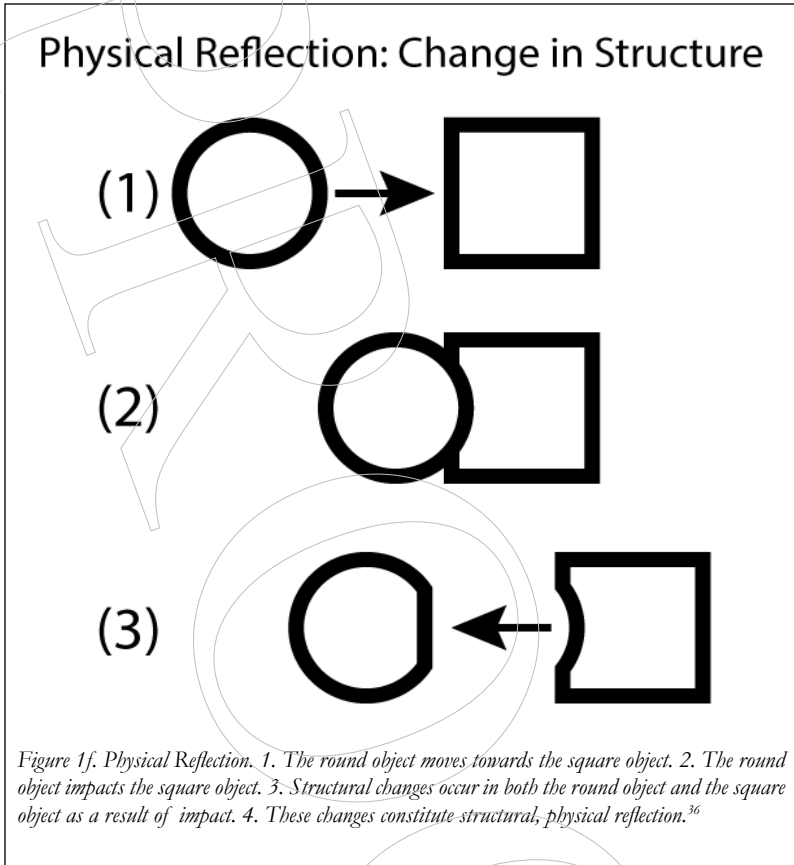
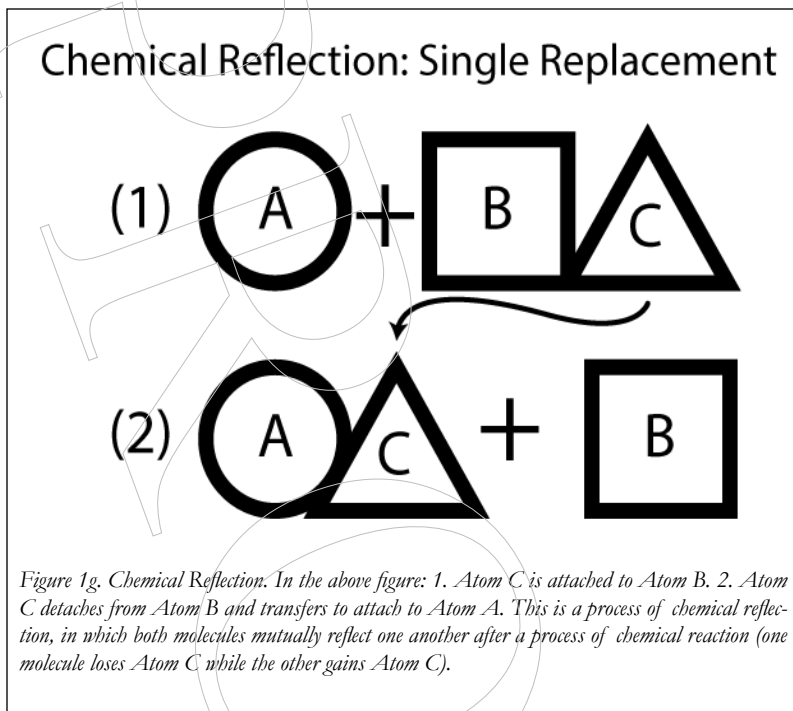


Figure 1e. Physical Reflection. 1. The round object moves towards the square object. 2. The round object impacts the square object. 3. The square object changes position in the same direction as the round object. 4. Thus, the square object's change in position reflects the motion of the round object.



36 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.

We must also avoid mistakes and misconceptions in this regard. For instance, 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 reflection of reality.



Biological reflection is a higher, more complex form of reflection. It deals with the reflection of the organic 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, etc.], our conscious reflections of the natural world have also become more complex.

Biological reflection is a more advanced form of reflection [than physical reflection]. It is a feature of organic material. 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. [An example of excitation would be 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.³⁷

Mental reflections are reactions which occur in animals with central nervous systems. Mental reflections occur through conditioned reflex mechanisms.³⁸

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.³⁹

37 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.

38 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.

39 Remembering 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.

We can see that 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. 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.

In other words, 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, which is a dialectical relationship: the processes of life reflect consciousness, just as consciousness reflects human life-processes through conscious activity (for example, conscious activities such as being able to hunt, gather, and cook food, build shelter, etc., improve the life-processes of human beings, extend human life, etc.).

Importantly, life-processes determine *how* consciousness reflects reality. Any unique or particular aspects of consciousness which arise are the direct results of life-processes of living humans.

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 perfectly, nor exactly.

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 hu-

man, 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 interpretations of reality and to try and force purely idealist conceptions of the human mind onto reality. 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 there determine how to build our revolutionary movement within the material world:

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 philosophical 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. It has not occurred to any one of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings.

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,’ [all 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 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, and 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.

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. 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:

Matter is a philosophical category designating 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.

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.

Here, Lenin is saying that the material world must exist outside of and in-

dependent 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.

Here, 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:

And 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.

Lenin broke with this idea, arguing 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, the more fully and accurately we can understand “things-in-themselves.”

This is further discussed in *Empirio-Criticism and Materialism*, Chapter 2, Part 1: “The ‘Thing-In-Itself,’ or V. Chernov Refutes Frederick Engels.”

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 [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 believed that in order to further develop our understanding and knowledge of the material world, it was necessary to *practice*, a concept which he borrowed from Engels. 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.

Later, Lenin elaborated on this necessity to constantly adapt and improve dialectical materialism with new information and knowledge, using Engels as an example:

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, as he explains 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 plant-based dye], which we no longer trouble to grow in in the field, but produce much more cheaply and simply from coal tar.

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].⁴⁰ Labor also allows us to discover the attributes, structures, motion laws, etc., of the natural world, via observable phenomena.⁴¹

All of these phenomena, through human senses, impact human brains. And through brain activity, knowledge and consciousness of the objective world are formed and developed.⁴²

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.

40 In *Dialectics of Nature*, Friedrich Engels discusses the dialectical relationship the human body has with the material world, explaining how, just as the hand shapes the tool, the use of tools also shapes the hand:

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.

41 We discover truth about the natural world through labor—through physical *practice* in the material world.

42 As Engels explains in *Dialectics of Nature*:

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

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.⁴³

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; and this in two ways.

43 Again, 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

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.⁴⁴

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 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 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 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.

44 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.

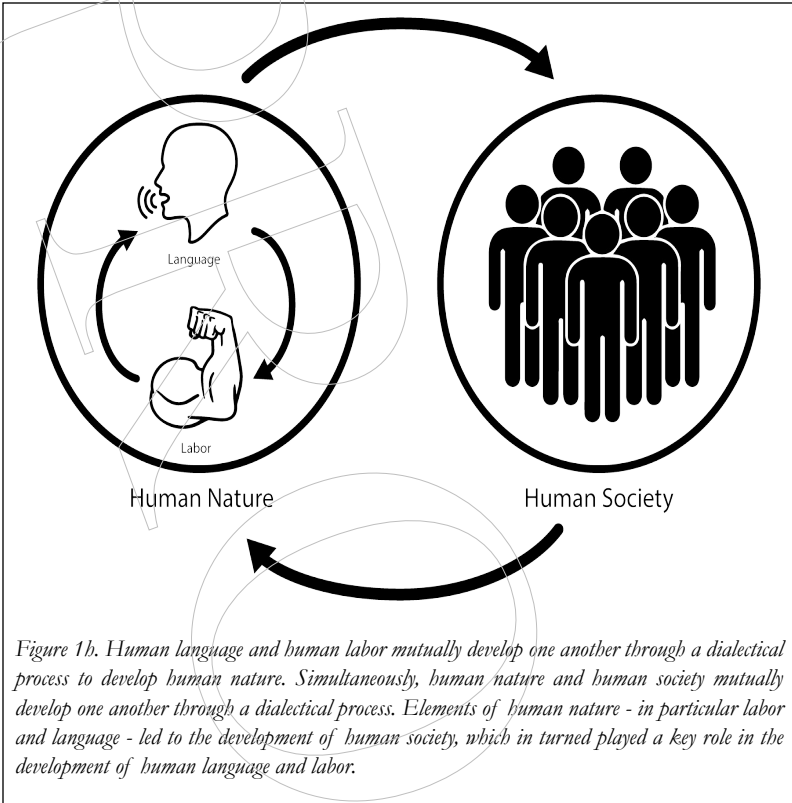


Figure 1b. Human language and human labor mutually develop one another through a dialectical process to develop human nature. Simultaneously, human nature and human society mutually develop one another through a dialectical process. Elements of human nature - in particular labor and language - led to the development of human society, which in turned played a key role in the development of human language and labor.

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.

The dynamic and creative nature of reflection is expressed in human psycho-physiological 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:

1. The creation of ideas, hypotheses, stories, etc.
2. The ability to summarize nature and to comprehend the objective laws of nature.
3. The ability to construct models of thoughts 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. However, consciousness does not perfectly reflect the objective world. It modifies information through subjective lenses (thoughts, feelings, aspirations, experiences, knowledge, needs, etc.) of humans.⁴⁵ According to Marx and Engels, ideas are simply “sublimates [transformations] of [the human brain’s] material life-process, which is empirically verifiable

45 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.

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

* Fr. Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach, etc., 4th Germ. ed., S. 15. Russian translation, Geneva ed., 1905, pp. 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].

So, Lenin recognizes firmly that the idea that consciousness is a perfect, exact duplicate of reality, or a “mirror image,” is incorrect, though this does not contradict the point that we can obtain real knowledge of the real world in our consciousness, and that this knowledge improves over time through practice and observation.

and bound to material premises.”⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷ Consciousness is determined by the social communication needs of human beings as well as the material conditions of reality.⁴⁸ Consciousness is dynamic in nature, constantly learning and changing flexibly. Consciousness guides humans to transform the material world to suit our needs.⁴⁹

46 *The German Ideology*, K. Marx and F. Engels, 1846.

47 *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. 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.

48 The term *material conditions* refers to the material external environment in which humans live. Material conditions include the natural environment, the means of production and the economic base of human society, and other physical externalities and systems which affect human life and human society.

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.

49 Consciousness and material conditions have a dialectical relationship with each other, just as the base of society and the superstructure have a dialectical relationship with each other. Consciousness arises from material conditions, yet conscious activity can affect material conditions.

As Marx explains in *Capital Volume I*:

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

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 will-power.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹ Knowledge can be separated into two broad

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 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.

50 As with the concept of reflection, 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. It is interesting to note that 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, yet the principles are rooted firmly in dialectical materialist analysis.

51 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

categories: knowledge of nature, and knowledge of human society. Each of these categories of knowledge reflects its 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.

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:

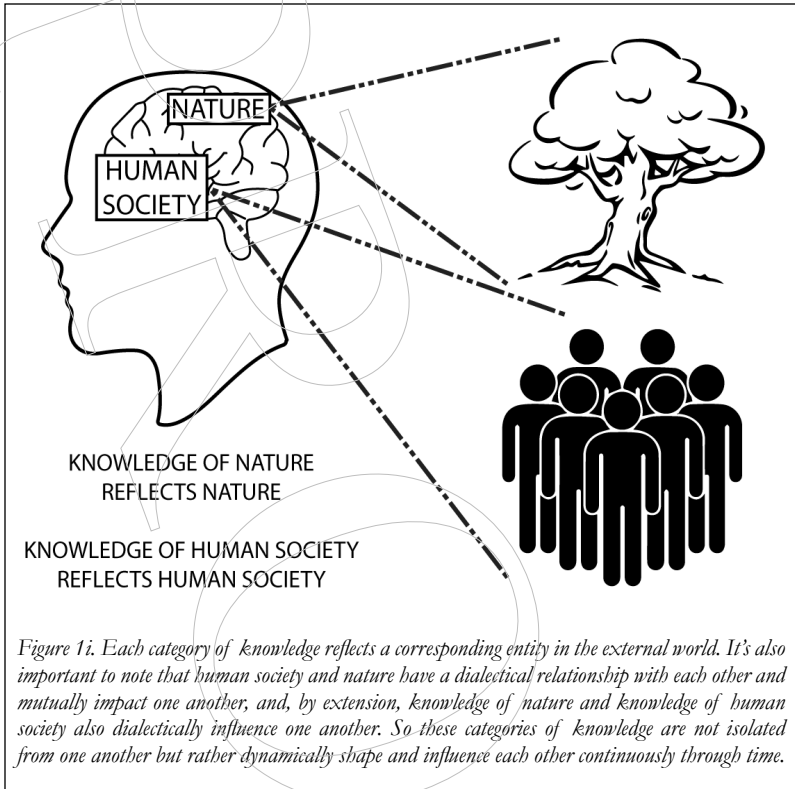
Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all. Consciousness is at first, of course, merely consciousness concerning the immediate sensuous environment and consciousness of the limited connection with other persons and things outside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

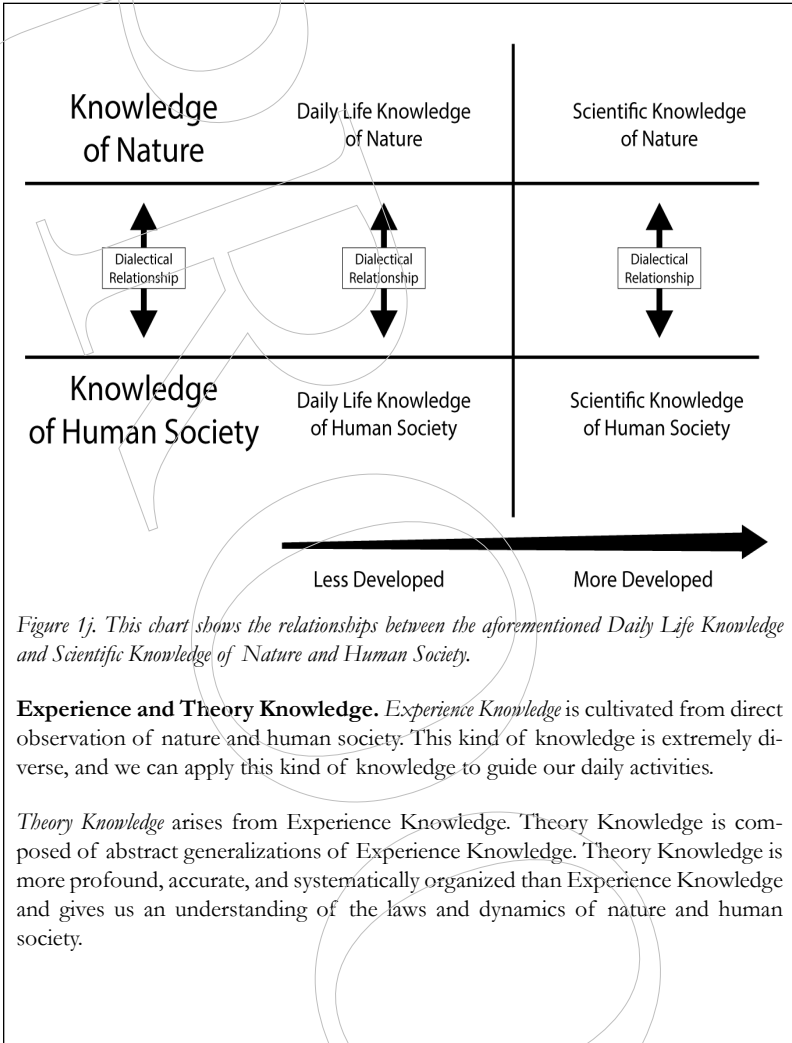
This sheep-like or tribal consciousness receives its further development and extension through increased productivity, the increase of needs, and, what is fundamental to both of these, the increase of population. With these there develops the division of labour.

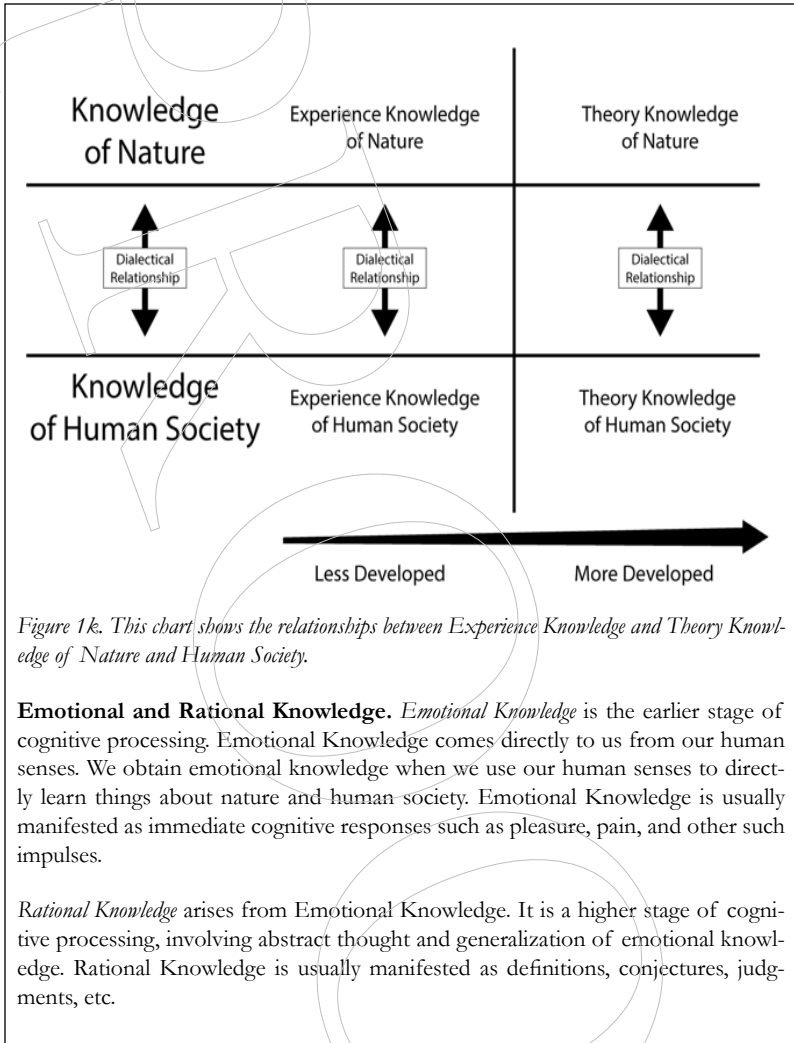


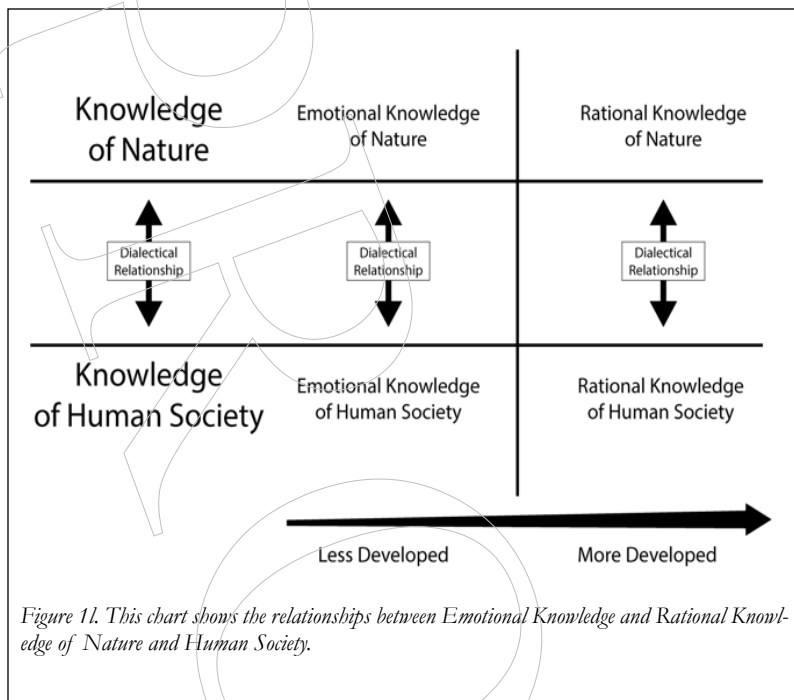
Editor's Note: in the following series of inset-boxes, we have added further textual and visual elaborations on the categories of consciousness, according to the *Marxism-Leninism Textbook of Students Who Specialize in Marxism-Leninism*, released by Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training.

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.







Sentiment is the resonant manifestation of human emotions and feelings in our relationships. Sentiment is a special form of reality reflection. 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.⁵²

52

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 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.⁵³

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.

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.⁵⁴

53 *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. (Drawn from: *Nguyen Thi Khuyen of the National Institute of Administration of Vietnam*).

Aesthetic Emotion is the resonance 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. (Drawn from: *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. (Drawn from: *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.

54 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 char-

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.⁵⁵

All of these factors which, together, create consciousness [knowl-

acter 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 pre-conceived 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.

55 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 multifarious, 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.

edge, sentiment, and willpower], 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.⁵⁶

56 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*, 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, as Marx explains in *Capital Volume I*:

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 further explains how social change arises through the combined willpower of many human beings:

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

a. The Role of Matter in Consciousness

Dialectical Materialism affirms that:

1. Matter is the first existence, and that consciousness comes after.
2. 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.

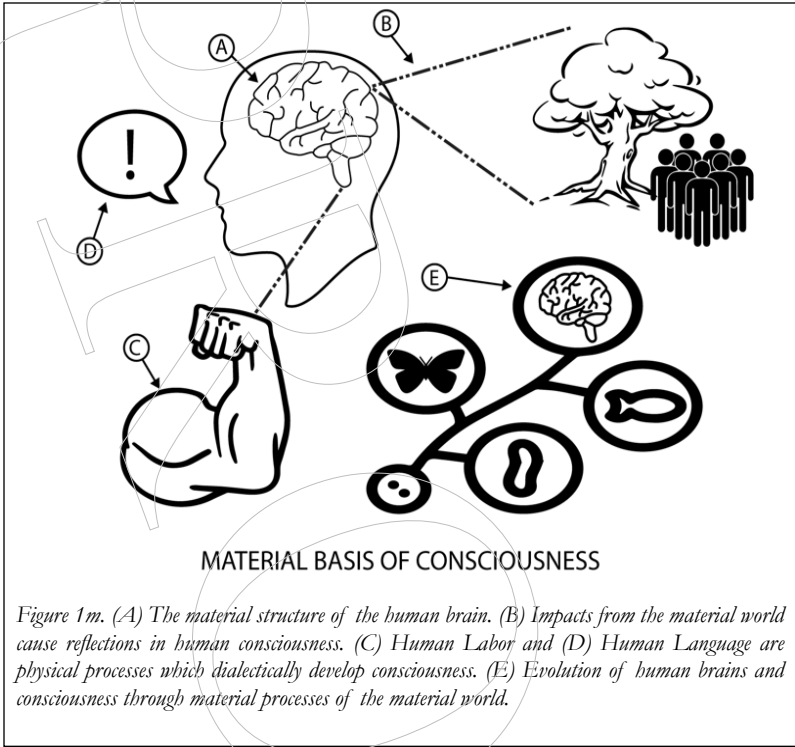
All of this scientific evidence stands as the basis for the viewpoint: matter comes first, consciousness comes after.

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

All of these factors also assert that matter is the origin of consciousness.

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.



Consciousness is composed of reflections and subjective images of the material world, therefore *the content of consciousness is decided by matter*. The development of consciousness is determined by natural laws and by social laws 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 conscious-

ness, 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.⁵⁷

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.

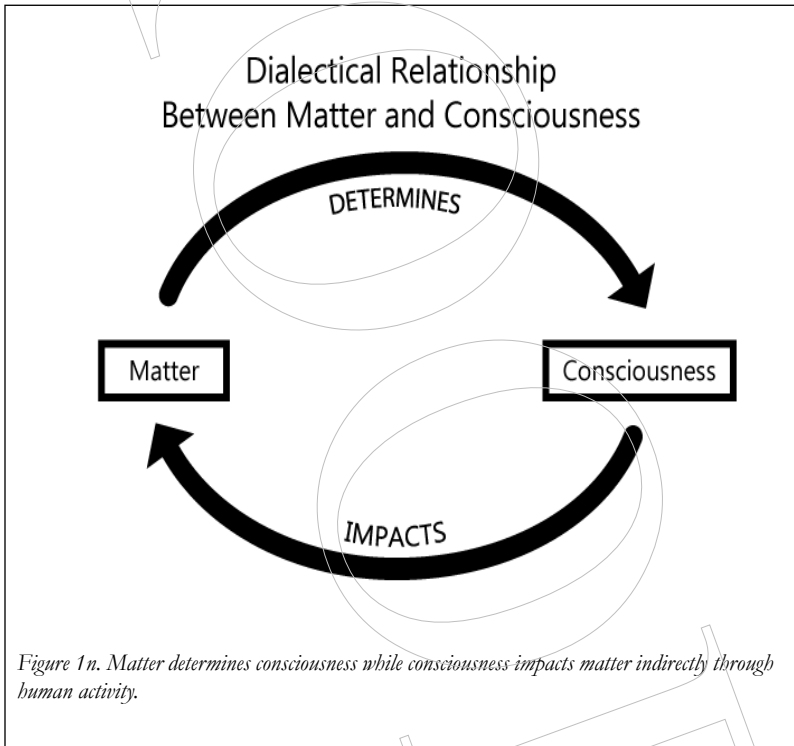
On the contrary, if human consciousness wrongly reflects objective reality, nature, and laws, then, right from the beginning, our actions will have negative results which will do harm to ourselves and our society.

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.

57 “Positive” and “negative,” in this context, are relative terms which simply denote “moving towards a goal” and “moving away from a goal.” From the perspective of revolutionary communism, “positive” can be taken as moving towards the end goal of the liberation of the working class and the construction of a stateless, classless society. Likewise, “negative” can be taken as moving away from that goal.

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 consciousness.
- Matter determines the content and creative capacity of consciousness.
- Matter is the prerequisite to form consciousness.
- 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 reality.



The strength with which consciousness can impact the material world depends on:

- The accuracy of reflection of the material world in consciousness.
- Strength of willpower which transmits consciousness to human activity.
- The degree of organization of social activity.⁵⁸
- Material conditions in which human activity occurs.

4. Meaning of the Methodology

Dialectical Materialism builds the most basic and common methodological 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 consciousness.
- The dialectical relationship between matter and consciousness.

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*.⁵⁹

58 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 communist revolutionary in history.

Marx explains the connections between social organization and conscious human activity in *Capital Volume I*:

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.

59 The previous paragraph summarizes an important methodological principle

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:

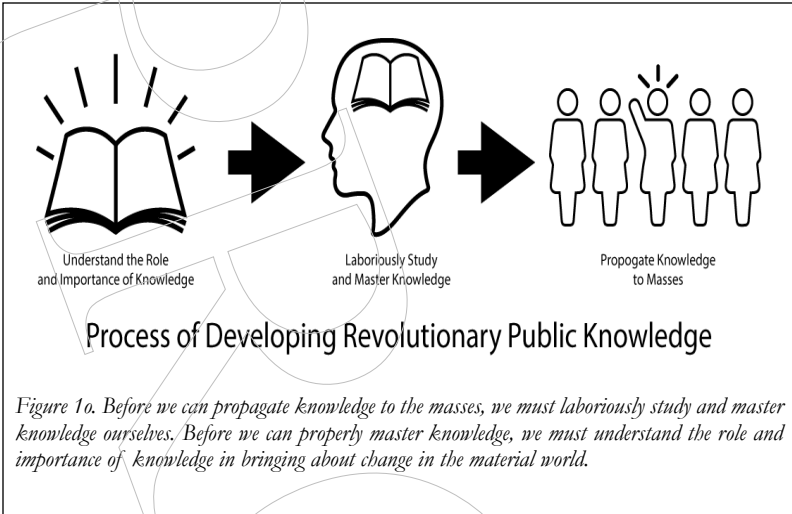
1. We must ensure that our knowledge reflects the objective material world as much as possible, respecting the objective natural and social laws of the material world.
2. We must simultaneously recognize the dynamic and creative nature of our conscious activity.

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, study laboriously to master such knowledge, then propagate such knowledge to the masses to develop public knowledge and belief so as to guide the people's action.

which is referred to throughout the rest of this chapter. For ease of understanding, we will refer to this principle as the *Principle of the Dialectic Relationship Between Matter and Consciousness* and we will note whenever it is referenced in this text.



Moreover, we also have to voluntarily study and practice in order to form and improve our revolutionary viewpoint and willpower 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 disease of being subjective and idealist through such errors as:

- Attempting to impose idealist plans and principles [which are not rooted in material conditions] into reality.
- Consider fantasy, illusion, and imagination instead of reality.
- Base policies and programs on subjective desires.
- Use 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 empiricism which disregards scientific knowledge and theories, and which is also very conservative, stagnant and passive.⁶⁰

60

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 truth, 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 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 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 do not lead to action in the real world, since the principles of idealist socialism are not rooted in material conditions or focused on bringing out change in the real world through material-based knowledge and revolutionary willpower.

Engels concludes by explaining how socialism would need to become *real* (*materially-based*) to affect change in the material world: “To make a science of Socialism, it had first to be placed upon a real basis.”

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:

First part of the paragraph: “Labor is the source of all wealth and all culture.”

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 which prevents proper material analysis and props up the capitalist viewpoint. A failure to grasp the truth of material reality weakens the socialist position, and any movement built on such weak idealist foundations will lead to negative results in trying to bring about revolutionary change.

We have already discussed the shortcomings of empiricism, 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 ultimately 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*.



PART 1

CHAPTER 2

MATERIALIST DIALECTICS

Materialist dialectic 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.”¹

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. There are two forms of dialectic: the objective dialectic and

1 *Karl Marx, V. I. Lenin, 1914.*

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.

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

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.

In Indian philosophy, Buddhist philosophy is a quintessential form of ancient primitive dialectics, which included 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 dialectics⁴: “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.”⁵

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.⁶ According to Engels: “The second form

3 *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, F. Engels, 1880.

4 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.

5 “The Old Preface to Anti-Dühring,” *On Dialectics*, Friedrich Engels, 1878.

6 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 metaphysics, since

inquiries in the initial revolution of scientific study were initially limited to systematic 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.

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:

But 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 which were in common use by natural scientists at the time could not be as useful as dialectics for examining wide-ranging dynamic systems of overlapping fields of inquiry, but unfortunately, dialectics had not been suitably developed for natural science before the work of Marx and Engels in developing dialectical materialism:

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, inter-connections in general, and transitions from one field of investigation to another.

The Idealist Dialectics of Hegel constituted a major development of dialectical thinking, but the non-materialist nature of Hegelian dialectics made them unsuitable for natural scientists, who discarded “Old-Hegelian” dialectics and were left without any suitable dialectical theoretical framework:

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

of dialectics, which is the form that comes closest to the German naturalists [natural scientists], is classical German philosophy, from Kant to Hegel.”⁷

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 philosophies which were plagued by idealism and metaphysics, and which were therefore not suitable for the task:

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 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.] 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.

Hegel believed that the subjective dialectic is the basis of the objective dialectic.⁸ 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."⁹ 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 stated¹⁰ that: "Hegel brilliantly *divined* the dialectics of things (phenomena, the world, *nature*) in the dialectics of concepts."¹¹

8 In other words, Hegel believed that *dialectical thought* determined the *objective dialectics* of the material world.

9 In the quoted passage, Engels was explaining why Hegelian dialectics were unsuitable for use in natural sciences:

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.

10 *Conspectus of Hegel's Book; The Science of Logic, Book Three, Section Three*, V. I. Lenin, 1929.

11 What Lenin means, here, is that Hegel inadvertently and unconsciously discovered the concept of *reflection*. 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

Engels also quoted and emphasized Marx's thoughts [in the *Old Preface to Anti-Dübring*, citing another quote of Marx from the *Afterword to the Second German Edition of Capital I*]: “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.”¹²

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.

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.”¹³

contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.

12 In the *Old Preface to Anti-Dübring*, 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.

13 *Anti-Dübring, The 1885 Preface*, F. Engels, 1878

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.”¹⁴

Engels also emphasized the role of the principles of general relations. As J. B. S. 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.”¹⁵

Lenin emphasized the important role of the principles of development (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.”¹⁶

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.*¹⁷

14 *Anti-Dühring*, “Negation of Negation,” F. Engels, 1878.

15 *Ibid.*

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

17 Remember that *scientific* in Marxism-Leninism refers broadly to a systematic pursuit of knowledge, research, theory, and understanding. And remember that *materialism* in Marxism-Leninism has specific meaning as well, which differentiates it from other forms of materialism. Here, materialism includes an understanding that the material is the first basis of reality, that human consciousness can impact the material world through willpower and labor, and is 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. Thus, a *sci-*

In this way, materialist dialectics fundamentally differs from the classical German idealist dialectics, and especially differs from Hegelian dialectics (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, it is also a tool for humans 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, historical methodology.

This methodology can be used to analyze contradictions in order to find the basic origins and motivations of both motion and developmental 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.

entific 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.

II. BASIC PRICIPLES OF MATERIALIST DIALECTICS

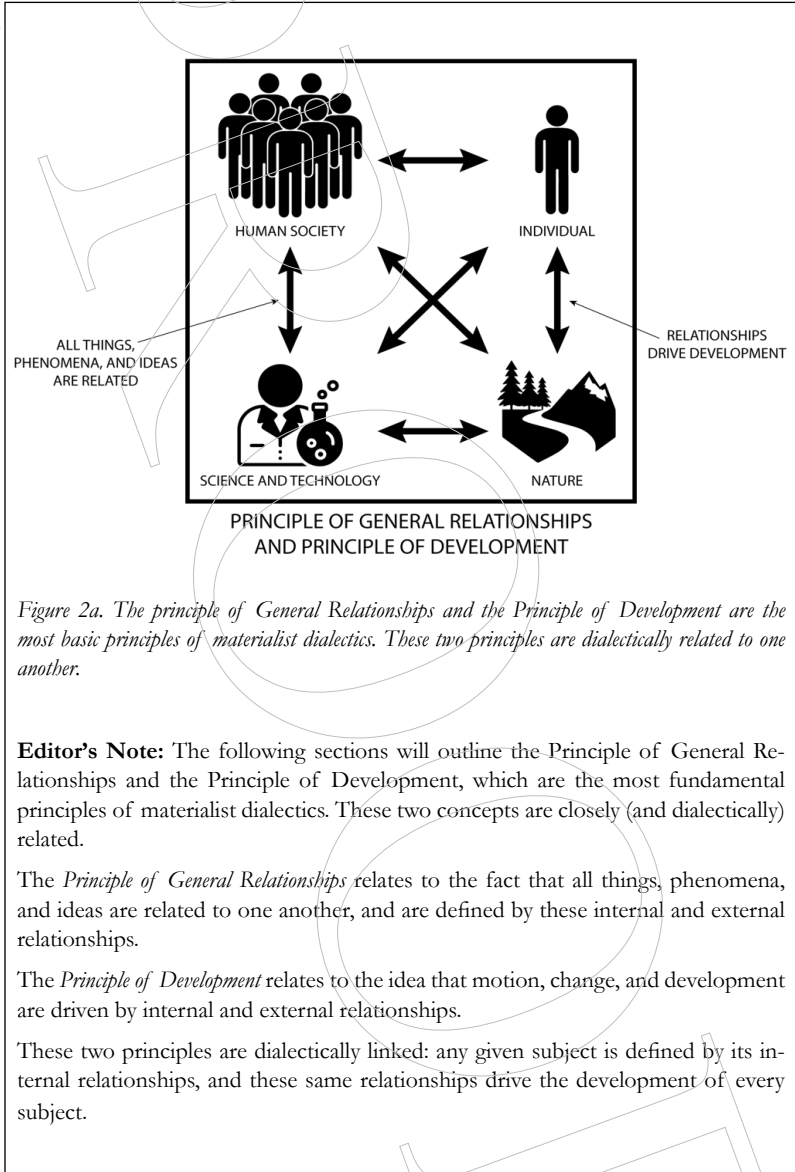


Figure 2a. The principle of General Relationships and the Principle of Development are the most basic principles of materialist dialectics. These two principles are dialectically related to one another.

Editor’s Note: 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.

The *Principle of General Relationships* relates to the fact that 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.

1. The Principle of General Relationships¹⁸

a. Definition of Relationship and Common Relationship

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.¹⁹

18 **Editor's 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.

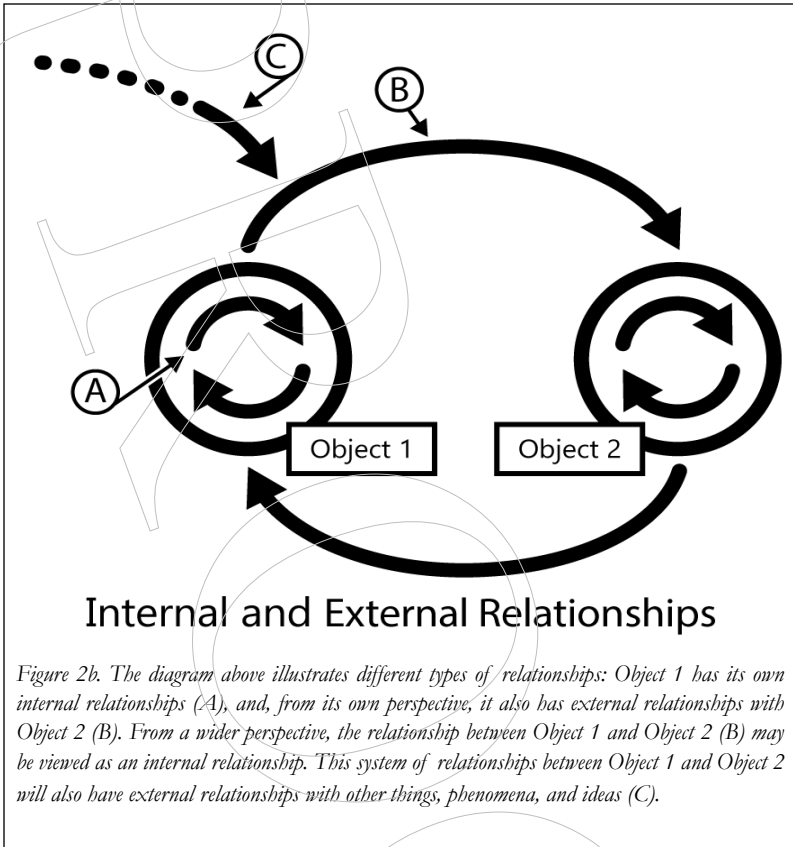
What follows in the rest of this book is a cohesive system of Materialist Dialectics which was built upon the foundations laid out by Engels in *Dialectics of Nature* and many other works of political and scholarly writing from various sources. This is the system of Materialist Dialectics studied by 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" in *Dialectics of Nature*, but Vietnamese political scientists use the term "relationship." Where Engels uses the term "motion," 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.

19 Throughout this book, *phenomenon/phenomena* simply refers to anything that is observable by the human senses.

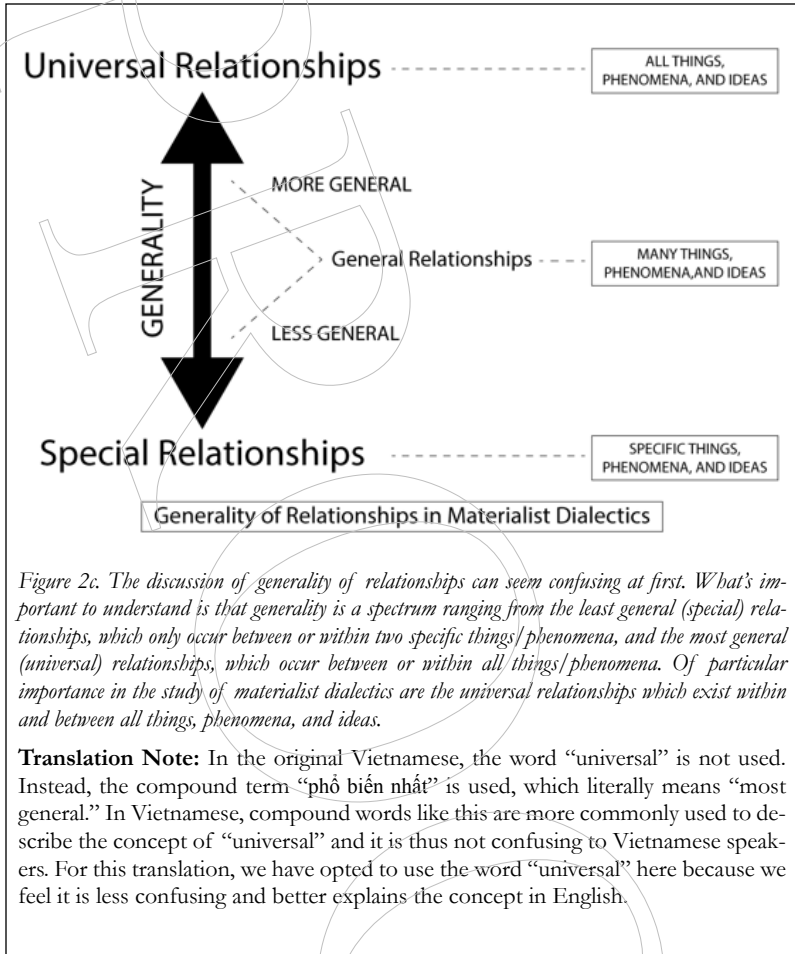
Materialist dialectics examines relationships between things, phenomena, and ideas and *within* things, phenomena, and ideas. A relationship which occurs between two separate things or phenomena is referred to as an *external relationship*. A relationship which occurs *within* a thing or phenomenon is 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.



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.

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 universal relationships include (but are not limited to):

- Relationships between basic philosophical category pairs (Private and Common, Essence and Phenomenon, etc.)
- Relationships between quantity and quality.
- Relationships between opposites.²⁰

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.²¹

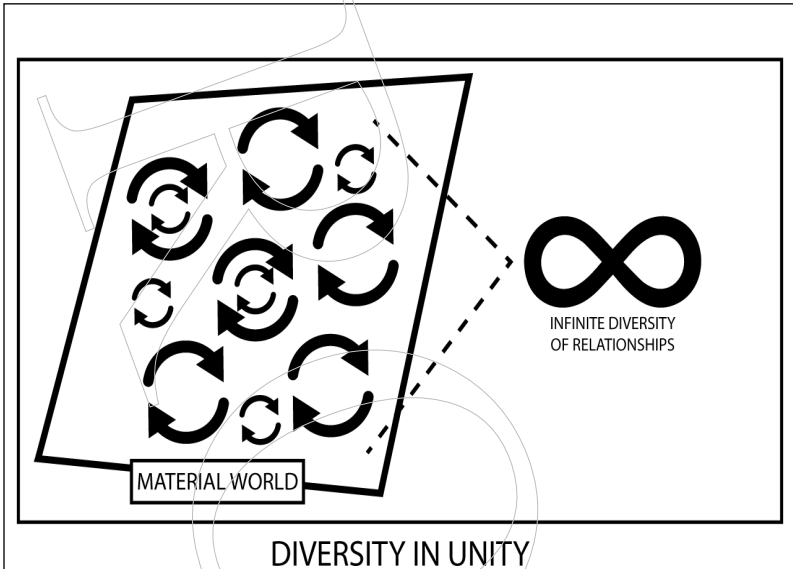


Figure 2d. An infinite diversity of relationships exist within the unity of the material world.

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.

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.

er, 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: *Curriculum of the Philosophy of Marxism-Leninism For University and College Students Specialising in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought*.)

21 Materialist Dialectics recognizes that in unity, there is diversity, and in diversity, there is unity.

Even though all relationships are diversified and different from one another, they also exist in unity, because all relationships share a foundation in the material world.

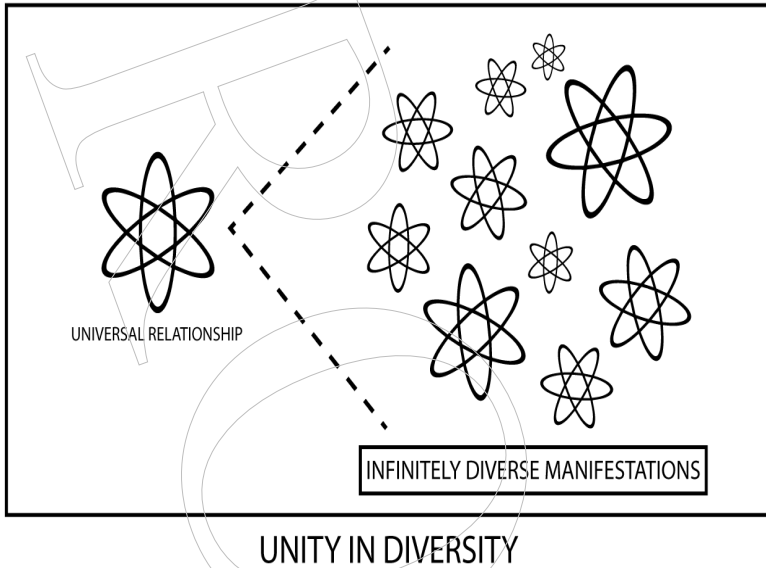


Figure 2e. Universal relationships which unite all things, phenomena, and ideas manifest in infinitely diverse ways.

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.*)

b. Characteristics of Relationships

Objectiveness, generality, and diversity are the three basic characteristics of relationships.

The Objective Characteristic of the Objectiveness of Relationships. According to the materialist dialectical viewpoint, relationships between things, phenomena, and ideas have objective characteristics.²²

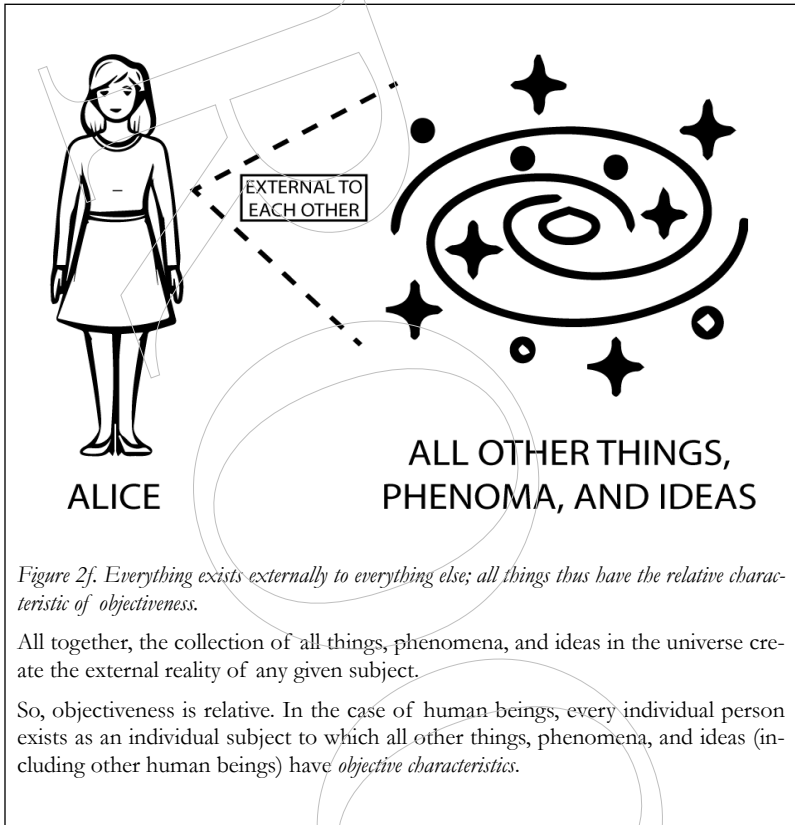
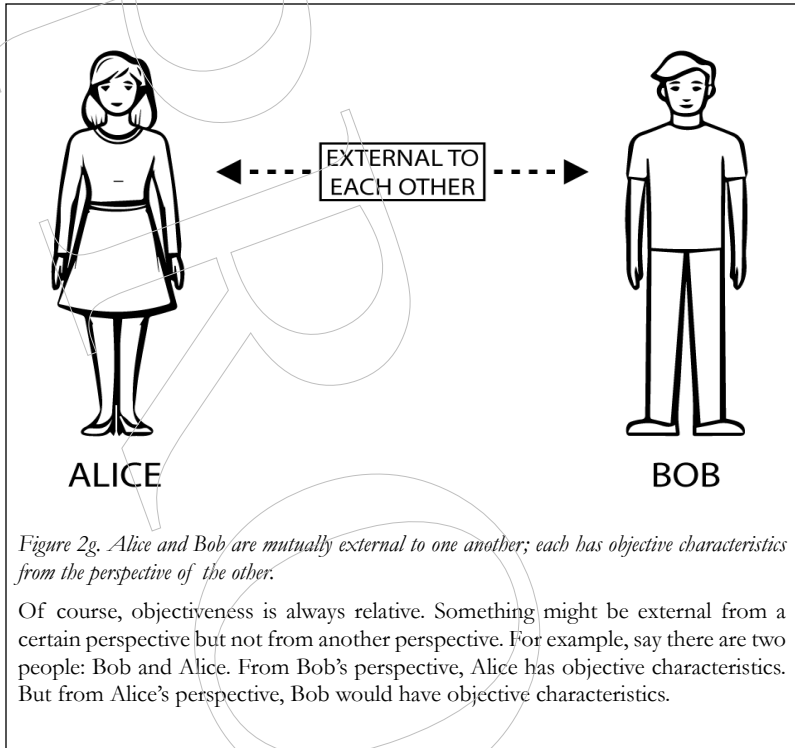


Figure 2f. Everything exists externally to everything else; all things thus have the relative characteristic of objectiveness.

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*.

²² 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.



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 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.²³

²³ **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, with-

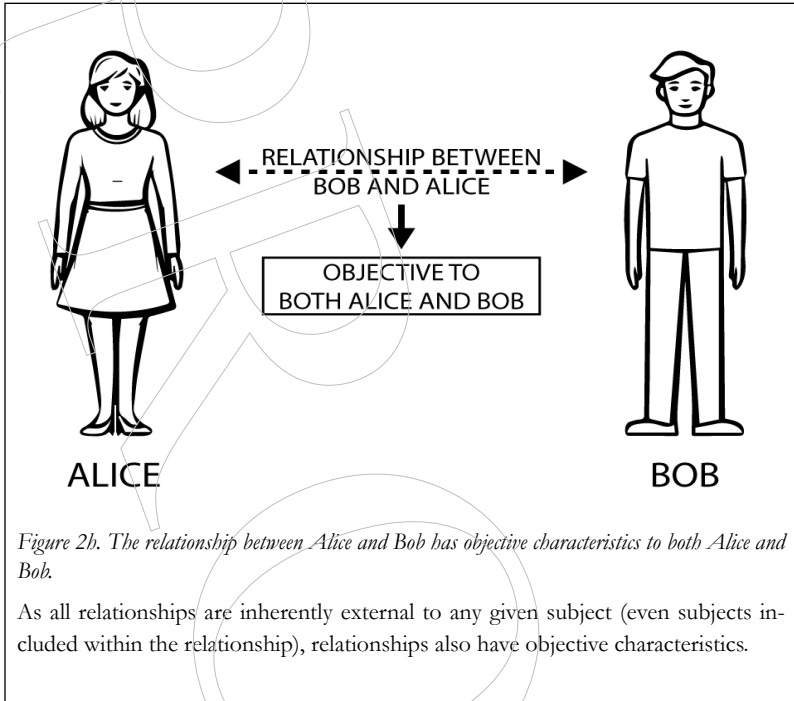


Figure 2b. The relationship between Alice and Bob has objective characteristics to both Alice and Bob.

As all relationships are inherently external to any given subject (even subjects included within the relationship), relationships also have objective characteristics.

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 General Characteristic of the Generality of Relationships. According to the dialectical viewpoint, there is no thing, phenomenon, nor process that exists in absolute isolation from other things, phenomena and processes.²⁴

out external influence.”

24 Although all things, phenomena, and ideas have the characteristic of *externality* and *objectiveness* to all other things, phenomena, and ideas, 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, *all* things, phenomena, and ideas have relationships with *all other* things, phenomena, and ideas.

Simultaneously, there is also no known thing, phenomenon nor process that does not have a systematic structure, including component parts which in turn have their own internal relationships. It 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.²⁵

The Characteristic of Diversity of Diversified Characteristics of Relationships. In addition to affirming the objectiveness and generality 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.²⁶
- 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.²⁷

25 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 basic principle of materialist dialectics that all systems interact and mutually transform one another.

26 One of Marx’s most critical observations was that things are defined by their internal and external relationships. For example, in *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx wrote:

But 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 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.

27 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.

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 of diversified characteristics of characteristics and manifestations 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, phenome-

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.

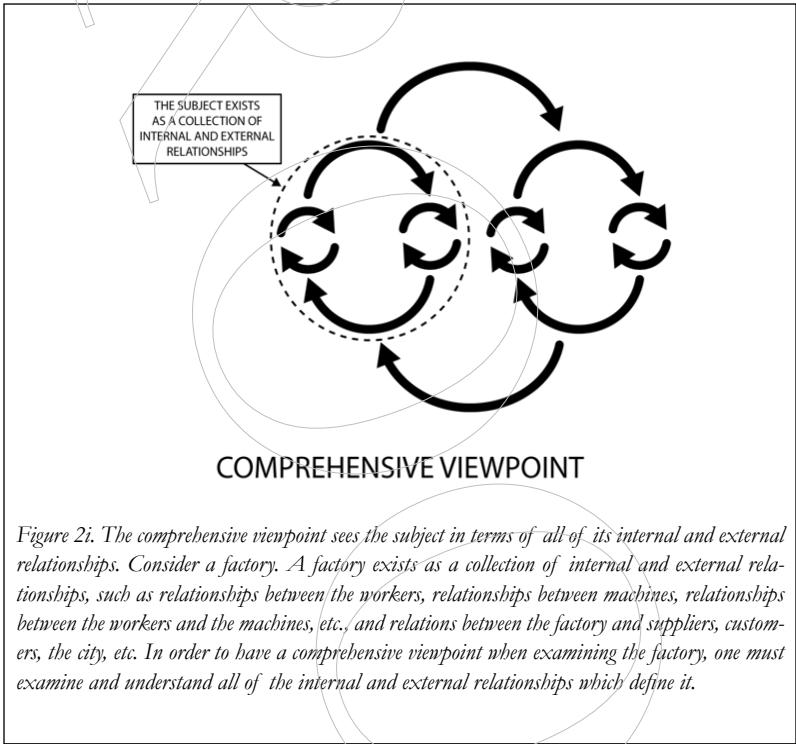
If ten such balls exist, they will all be slightly different. Even if they have the same mass and same material composition of rubber, they will have slightly different variations in size, shape, etc. Even if each ball will melt at 260°C, the melting will manifest differently for each ball—they will 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, 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*.

na, 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 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].”²⁸



28 *Once Again On The Trade Unions, The Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bubkarin*, V.I.Lenin, 1921.

The diversified characteristic of relationships 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.²⁹

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.

29 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 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 and the history of development so that we can develop methods that specifically suit the unique situation at hand.

As an example, it would be disastrous if a revolutionary movement today tried to apply the exact methods used by the Communist Party of Vietnam in the 20th century to win its wars against Japan, France, and the USA, because the material conditions and specific properties of Vietnam in the 20th century were very different from any material conditions existing on Earth today. It might be useful to look for similarities and to learn lessons from studying the history of the Vietnamese revolution and to *adapt* some of the methods and strategies used by 20th century Vietnamese revolutionaries to modern circumstances, but it would be extremely ineffective to try to copy those methods and strategies exactly and directly in the 21st century.

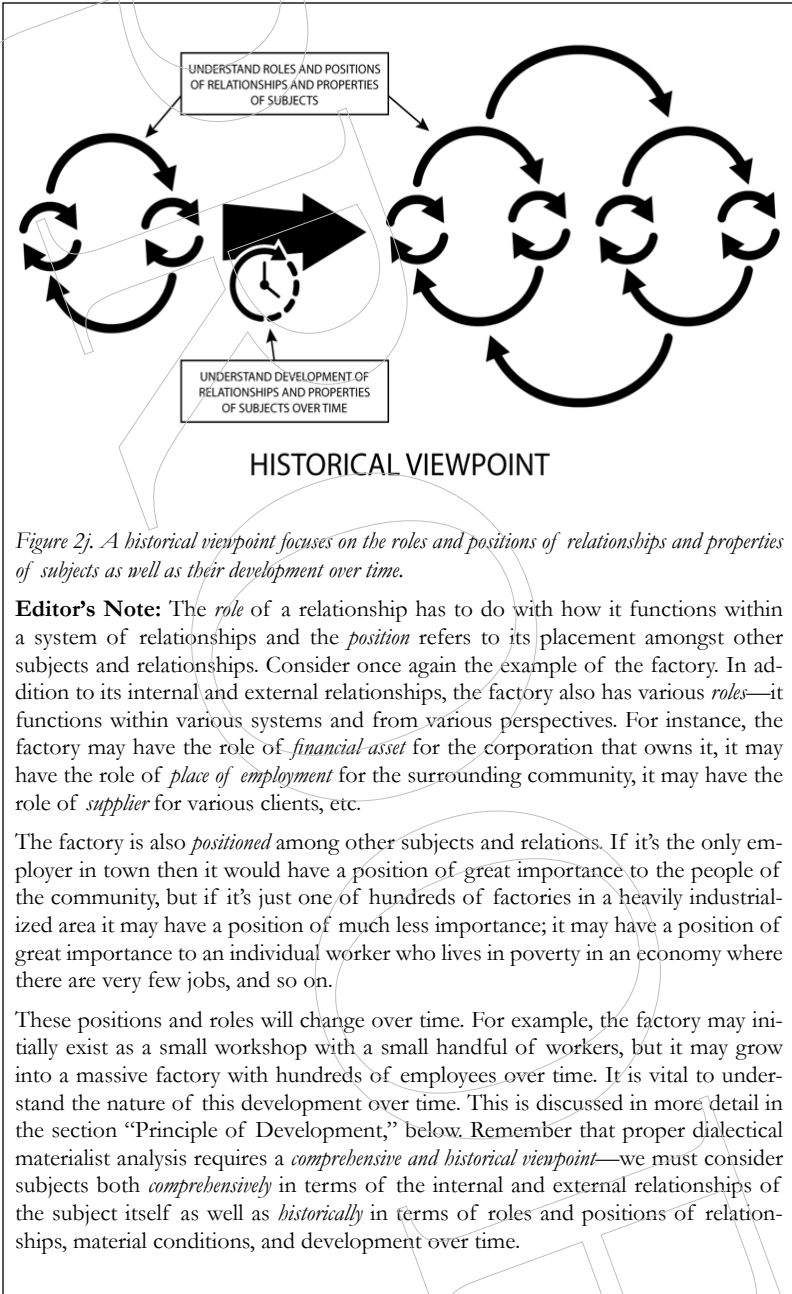


Figure 2j. A historical viewpoint focuses on the roles and positions of relationships and properties of subjects as well as their development over time.

Editor’s Note: 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. 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 clients, 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, but 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 worker who lives in poverty in an economy where there are very few jobs, 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 over time. It is vital to understand the nature of this development over time. This is discussed in more detail in the section “Principle of Development,” below. Remember that 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 relationships, material conditions, and development over time.

So, in both perception and practice, we have to avoid and overcome sophistry and eclectic viewpoints.³⁰

2. Principle of Development

a. *Definition of Development*

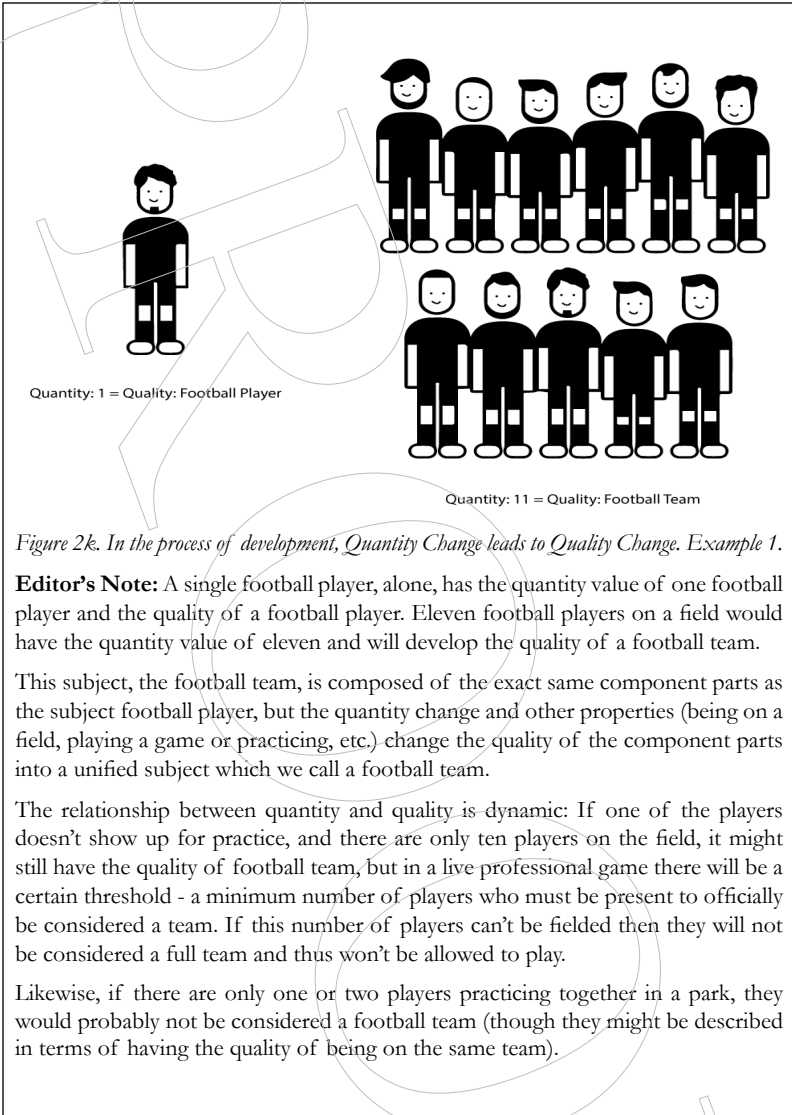
According to the metaphysical viewpoint, development is simply a quantitative increase or decrease; the metaphysical viewpoint does not account for qualitative changes of things and phenomena. Simultaneously, the metaphysical viewpoint also views development as a process of continuous progressions which follow a linear and straightforward path.³¹

30 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.

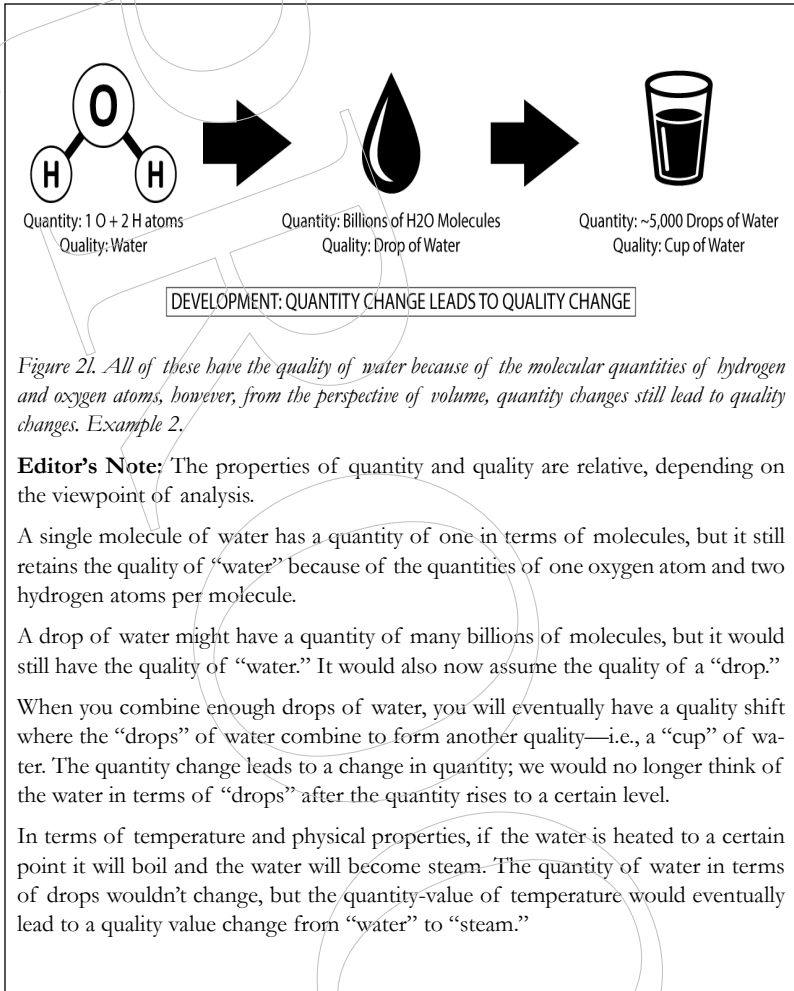
Sophistry is the use of falsehoods and misleading arguments, usually with the intention of deception, and with a tendency of presenting non-critical aspects of a subject matter as critical, to serve a particular agenda. The word comes from the Sophists, a group of professional teachers in Ancient Greece,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

31 In materialist dialectics, it is very important to be able 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.



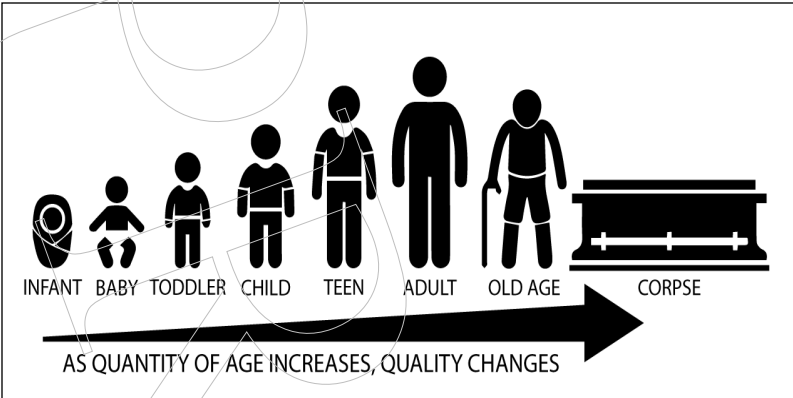


Figure 2m. The same human being will undergo various quality changes as age quantity increases over time. Example 3.

Editor’s Note: 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.

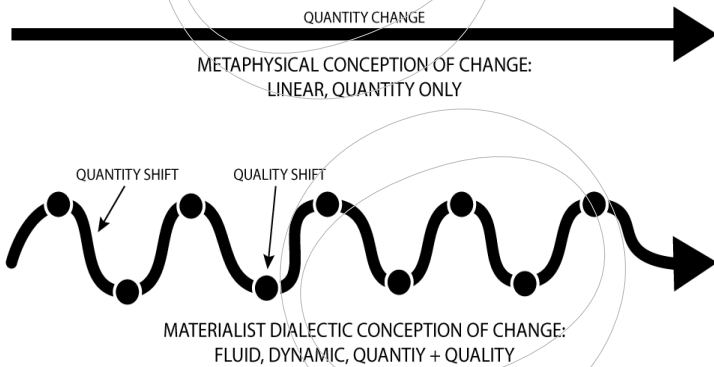
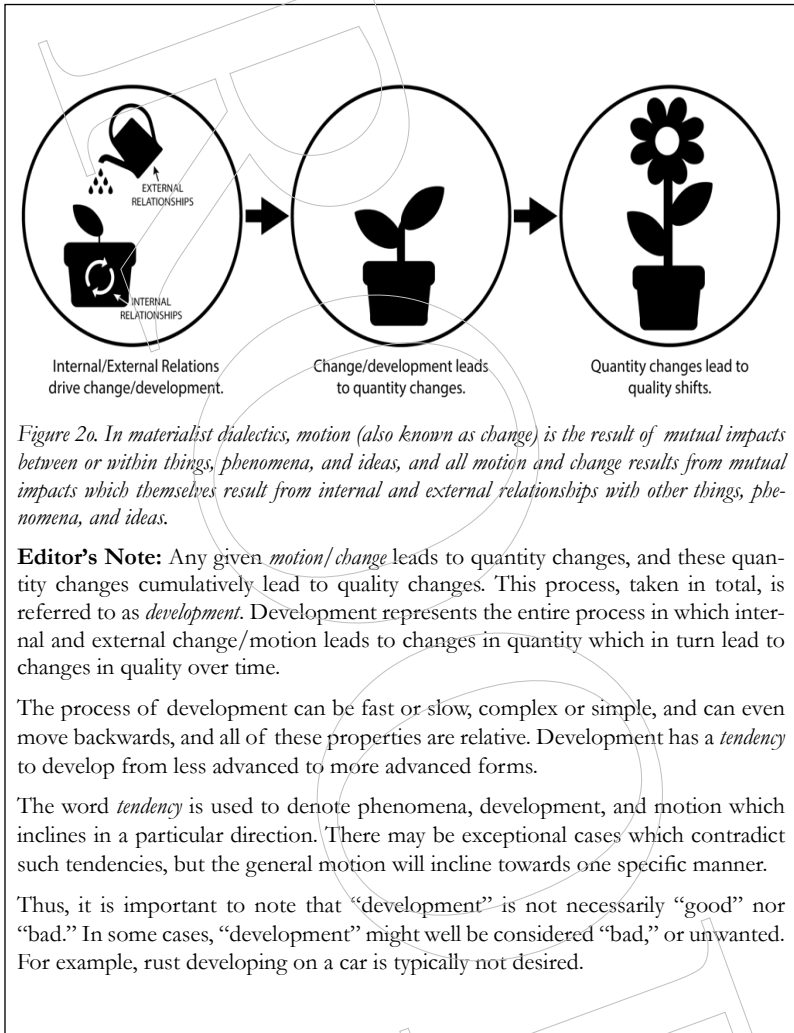


Figure 2n. Materialist Dialectics takes quantity and quality shifts into consideration when considering change over time. Because the metaphysical perspective tries to define the world in terms of static, isolated objects, only quantity is considered and quality shifts are not taken into account. Thus, metaphysical logic sees development as linear, simple, and straightforward. Materialist dialectics 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.



So, the tendency of development from lower to higher levels of advancement simply 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 or reverse; though such a reversal could also be viewed as another form of development in its own right.

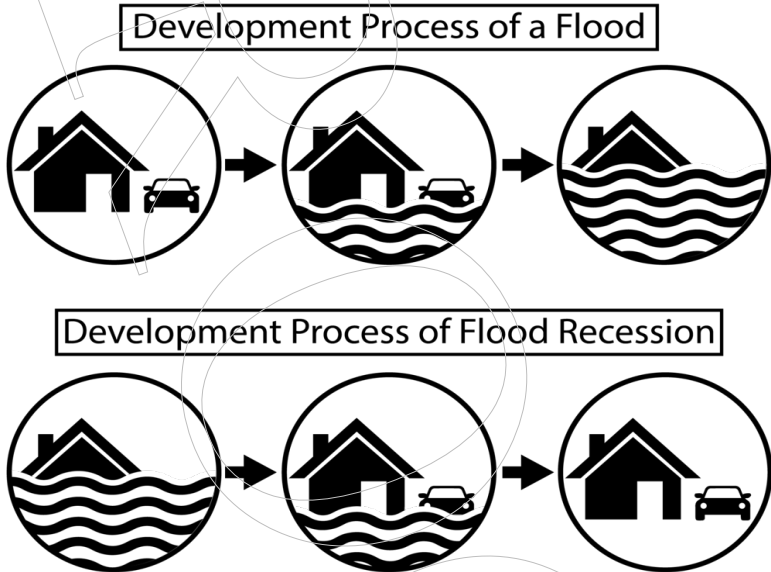


Figure 2p. Both flooding and flood recession are development processes.

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, and a development of the overall “flooding and receding” process.

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.

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.³²

b. Characteristics of Development

Every development has the characteristics of objectiveness, generality, and diversity.

The objective characteristic of objectiveness of development stems from the origin of motion.³³ Development is a process that comes from the thing itself, the process of solving the contradictions within things and phenomena. Therefore, development is inevitable, objective, and occurs without dependence on human will.³⁴

32 A *contradiction* is a relationship in which two forces oppose one another. Although a contradiction might exist in *equilibrium* for some amount of time, eventually, one force will overcome the other force through quantity change, which will result in a change of *quality*.

This process of overcoming is called *negation*. So, taken as a whole, development is the process of changes in quantity and negation of contradictions leading to changes in quality over time in a given subject.

33 Remember that, in materialist dialectics, objectiveness is the relative characteristic that every subject has of existing and developing externally to all other subjects.

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.

34 The “thing itself” refers to the actual material object which exists outside of our consciousness. Development arises from the motion and self-motion with objective characteristics.

Although human will can impact motion and development through conscious activity in the material world, 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.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
MOTION, QUANTITY/QUALITY SHIFTS, AND DIALECTICAL DEVELOPMENT

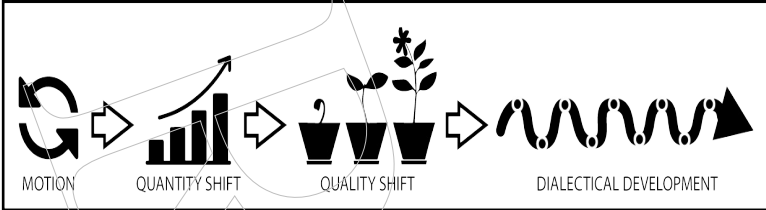


Figure 2q. Dialectical Development consists of Quantity and Quality Shifts, which in turn derive from motion. Because development is simply the process of quality shifts which arise from quantity shifts which arise from motion (which has this objective characteristic), development itself must also have this objective characteristic.

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 process and stage³⁵ of these things and phenomena. 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].

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

³⁵ In materialist dialectics, “stage” or “stage of development” simply 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.

but degeneration in another.³⁶

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 taken [considered] in development, in change, in ‘self-movement.’”³⁷

The development viewpoint requires us to overcome conservatism, stagnation, and prejudice which are opposed to development.³⁸ According to this development viewpoint, in order to perceive or solve any problem in real life, things, phenomena, and ideas need to be considered 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 a historical viewpoint which accounts for the diversity and complexity of development in perceiving and solving issues in reality.³⁹

In summary, as a science of common relations and development,

36 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.

37 *Once Again On The Trade Unions, The Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bukharin*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1921.

38 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.

39 Materialist dialectics requires us to consider the complexity and constant motion of reality. By comparison, the metaphysical viewpoint which tries to consider all things 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.

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."⁴⁰

PART 1

CHAPTER 3

BASIC PAIRS OF CATEGORIES OF MATERIALIST DIALECTICS

*Category*¹ 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.

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

1 **Translation note:** In Vietnamese, the word “phạm trù” is used, 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.

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.

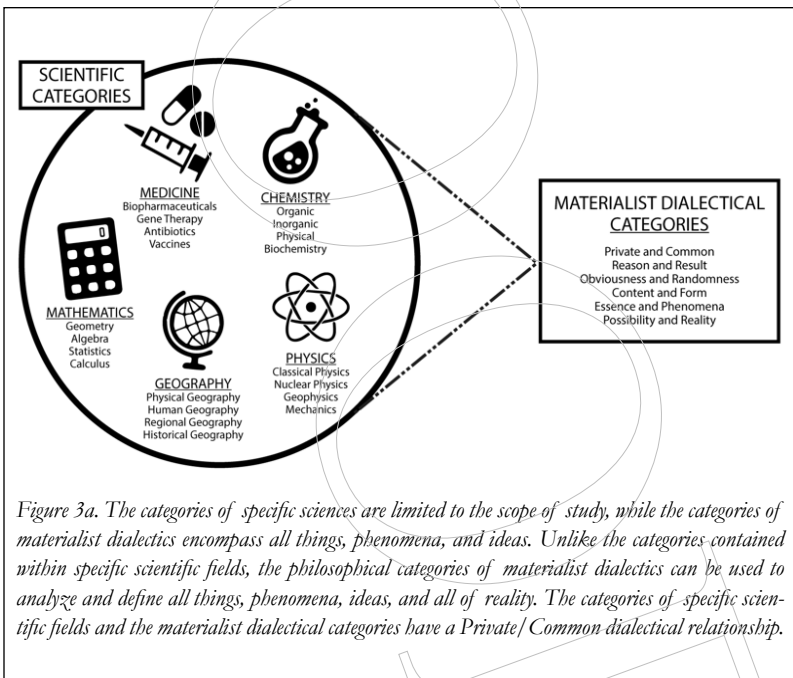


Figure 3a. The categories of specific sciences are limited to the scope of study, while the categories of materialist dialectics encompass all things, phenomena, and ideas. Unlike the categories contained within specific scientific fields, the philosophical categories of materialist dialectics can be used to analyze and define all things, phenomena, ideas, and all of reality. The categories of specific scientific fields and the materialist dialectical categories have a Private/Common dialectical relationship.

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*.²

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.

2 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.

It is important to note that the formalization of this system of category pairs reflects the work of Vietnamese philosophical and political scientists over many decades based on the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Although Marx, Engels, and Lenin certainly discussed all of these dialectical category pairs, they were only organized into this comprehensive system of category pairs in this form through Vietnamese scholarship.

It is also important to 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 to 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 frequently been utilized by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and other prominent materialist dialecticians.

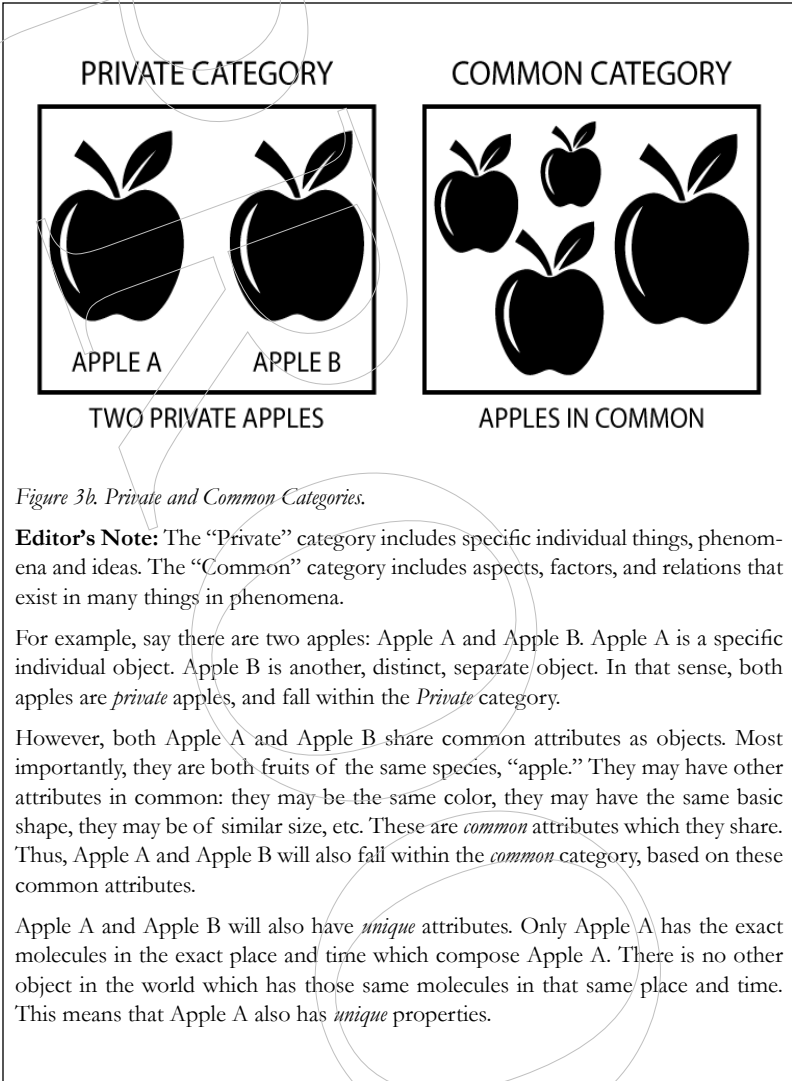


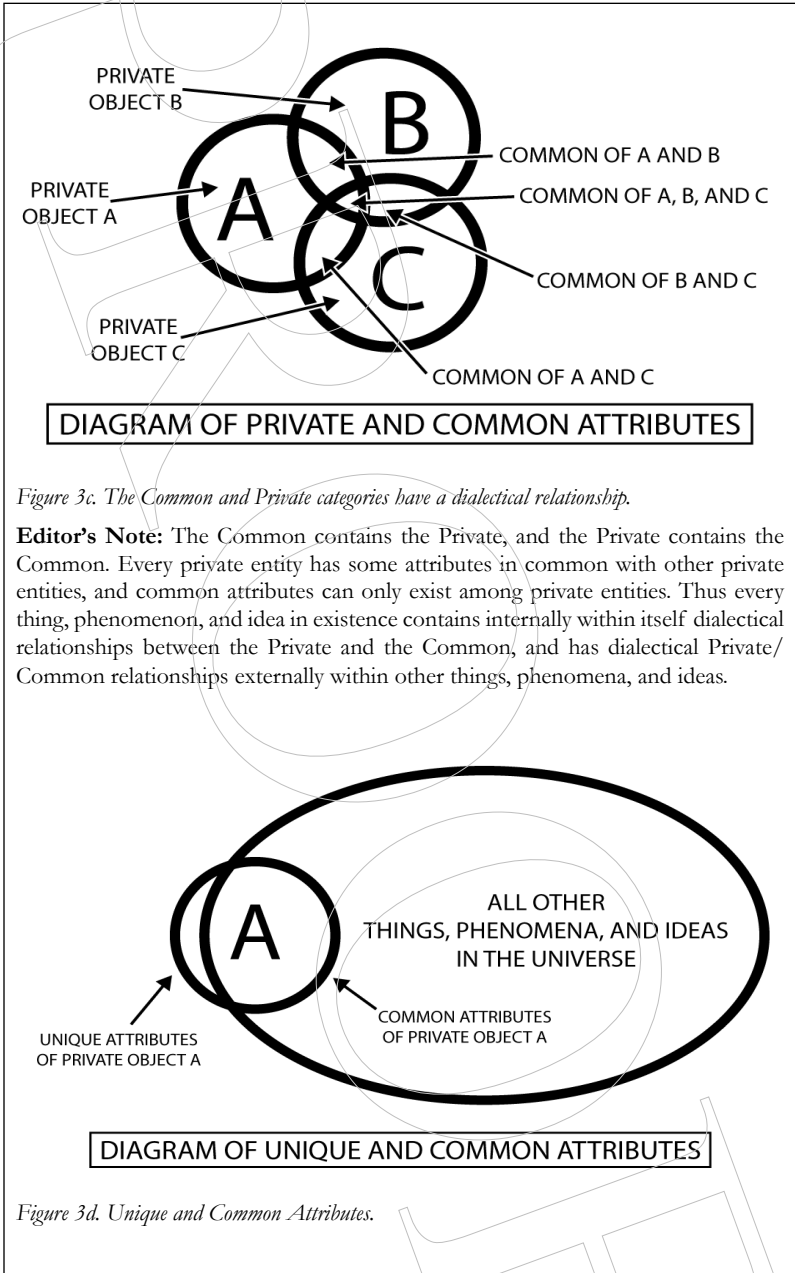
Figure 3b. Private and Common Categories.

Editor's Note: The "Private" category includes specific individual things, phenomena and ideas. The "Common" category includes aspects, factors, and relations that exist in many things in phenomena.

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 as objects. Most importantly, they are both fruits of the same species, "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.



Editor's Note: It is also true that every private entity contains within itself the Unique: attributes which it does *not* share with any other thing, phenomena, or idea in existence.

For example, Mount Everest is 8,850 meters tall. It is unique in this regard, as no other mountain has that exact same height on Earth. This means that the private entity that is Mount Everest has unique properties which it does not share with any other entity, even though it has other attributes in common with countless other private entities.

Whenever two individual entities 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 entities; however, there will also be common attributes and properties which any such relationship will share with other relationships in existence. This recalls the principles of Unity in Diversity and Diversity in Unity.

So, every thing, phenomenon, and idea contains the Common *and* the Unique and has unique *and* common relationships with other things, phenomena, and ideas.

This category pair is very useful in developing a comprehensive viewpoint. 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 the right general overview understanding (comprehensive viewpoint) about any subject, you have to study every (Private) piece of evidence that you can find.

For example:

If a person only ever saw one apple, a green apple, then that person might believe that "all apples are green." Obviously, this isn't true. This conclusion would be premature: the person is attempting to make an assumption about the "Common" without examining enough "Privates." This is a failure to seek a comprehensive viewpoint rooted in mistaking the Private for the Common.

Now, let's take a look at an example of how the "Unique" can become "Common," 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 *Unique* because it was the only AK-47 in existence.

But soon 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:

The prototype remains *Common* because there are many AK-47s; many rifles of the same model which all have common features.

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 specific language of "Private," "Common," and "Unique" is not typically used in English translation of the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, etc. Various other words are used when discussing these philosophical categories.

For instance, in most translations of Lenin, his discussion of such topics uses the English words "universal," "general," "special," "particular," etc.

Example, from *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 some more excerpts from Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks* discussing these same 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, however, it is important to realize that you may encounter the underlying *concepts* which these words are relating using a variety of different words in the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, etc.

b. Dialectical Relationship Between Private and Common

According to the materialist dialectic viewpoint: the Private, the Common and the Unique exist objectively. The Common only exists within the Private. It expresses its existence through the Private.³

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.⁴ The Private category is more all-encompassing

3 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 the *Common* that is “apples.”

It is only by observing the many private objects which are “apples” that we can begin to derive an understanding of what all private “apples” have in common.

4 No commonality can possibly exist without things, phenomena, and ideas because commonality describes features which different things, phenomena, and ideas

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 regulatory predictability of many Privates.⁵

Under specific conditions, the Common and the Unique can transform into each other.

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.⁶

[Note: Lenin’s words are translated using the terms “individual and universal” here to discuss the same underlying concepts of Private and Common (respectively).]

share. No 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.

5 The Private encompasses all aspects of a specific, individual thing, object, 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.

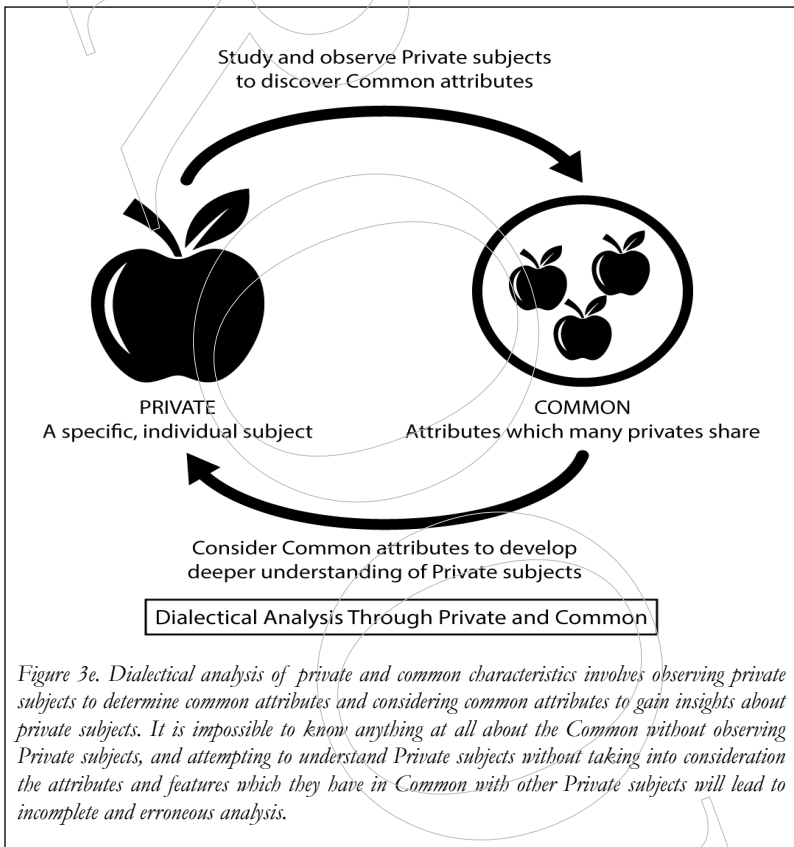
Common attributes offer us a more profound understand of the essence and nature of things, phenomena, and ideas because they offer insights into the *relationships* between and within different things, phenomena, and ideas.

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.

6 *On the Question of Dialectics*, V.I.Lenin, 1915.

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.⁷



⁷ 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.

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.⁸ In our cognitive

8 *Dogmatism and Revisionism in Relation to both the Private and the 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.

It is also worth noting that 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. 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*.

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.⁹

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 mu-

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 Private subjects and Common attributes 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. (Source: *Curriculum of the Philosophy of Marxism-Leninism For University and College Students Specialising in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought*.)

9 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 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.

tual impacts which occur between aspects and factors within a thing, phenomenon, or idea, or externally between different things, phenomena, or ideas.¹⁰

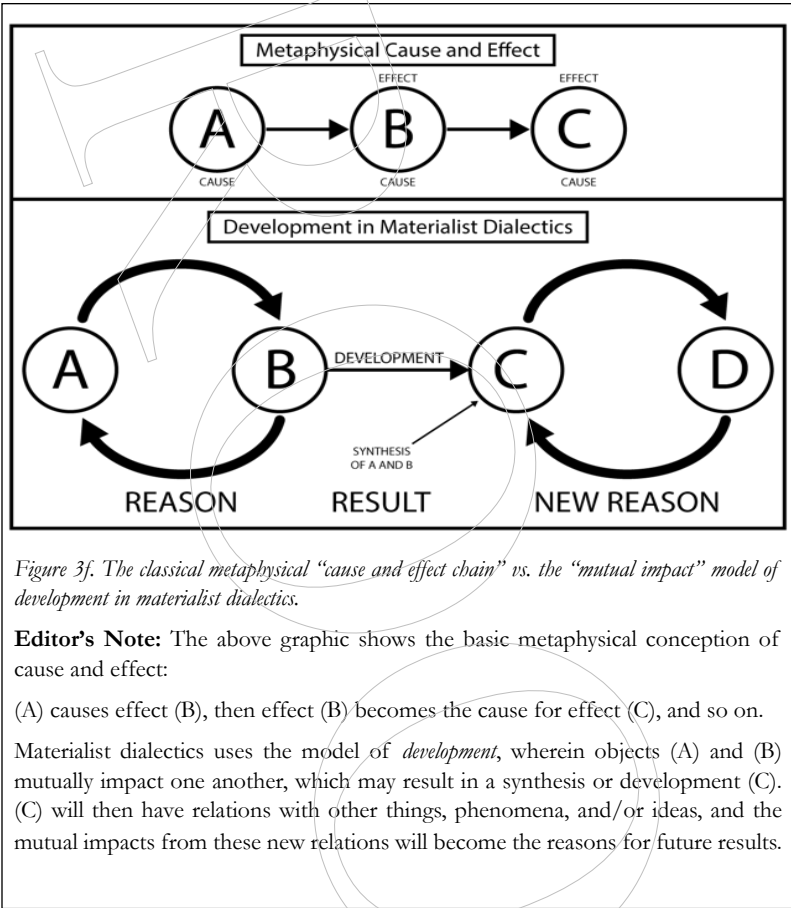


Figure 3f. The classical metaphysical “cause and effect chain” vs. the “mutual impact” model of development in materialist dialectics.

Editor’s Note: The above graphic shows the basic metaphysical conception of cause and effect:

(A) causes effect (B), then effect (B) becomes the cause for effect (C), and so on.

Materialist dialectics uses the model of *development*, wherein objects (A) and (B) mutually impact one another, which may result in a synthesis or 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.

10 **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 between metaphysical ideas about cause and effect. In the classical metaphysical worldview, a given effect is seen to have a single cause.

In materialist dialectics, we instead examine the *mutual impacts* which occur within and between subjects as the result of relational development.

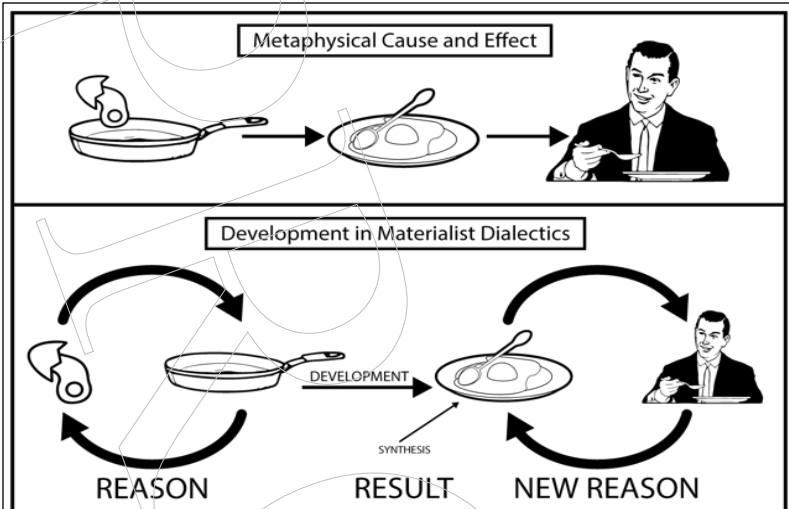


Figure 3g. *Metaphysical vs. materialist dialectical conceptions of frying and eating an egg.*

In the metaphysical “cause and effect chain” model, putting an egg in a hot pan is the cause which results in the effect of producing a fried egg. The hunger of a person then becomes the cause for a person to eat the egg (which is now suitable for human consumption). This is a simplification of the metaphysical conception of causes and effects, since metaphysics does not recognize that one cause can have branches of multiple effects, but the essential characteristic is that every effect must have a cause, and the metaphysical conception of causality breaks down all activity and change in the universe into static and distinct episodes of one event causing another event. 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 focuses 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.¹¹ Likewise, a Reason can cause many Results, in-

11 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):

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 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 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.

So, 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

cluding primary (direct) and secondary (indirect) Results.¹²

In the motion of the material world, there is no known “first Reason” or “final Result.”¹³ Engels said:

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.

12 *Primary* or *direct* Results are Results which are more direct and predictable. *Secondary* or *indirect* Results are Results which are indirect and less predictable. For example, an earthquake may have the primary Results such as the ground shaking, buildings being destroyed, etc.

Secondary Results from the earthquake might include flights being rerouted away from local airports, shortages at grocery stores in neighboring cities, etc.

13 With our current understanding of the universe, there is no way to know for certain what might have caused the creation of all existence (i.e., was it the big bang? If so, did the big bang have some underlying cause?) and there is no way to know if there will ever be a “final Result” (i.e., will the heat death of the universe occur, and if so, will that end all transpiring of relations which would end the cycle of Reasons and Results?).

These issues of whether or not there was any “first Reason” or whether there will be any “final result” are certainly interesting questions, and may be of interest in certain fields of scientific inquiry, but they are of no concern to political revolutionists, as they have no real bearing on our analysis, planning, or strategies, because they are so distantly removed from our present material conditions and lives. What’s important to understand 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 be the Reason which leads to one or more Results.

[W]e find upon closer investigation that the two poles of an antithesis, 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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵

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 in our perception of reality so we can properly analyse, solve and apply Reason-Result relationships.¹⁶

14 In the above passage, Engels is simply explaining that since all things, phenomena, and ideas are relationally linked and inter-related, the mutual impacts and processes of development which lead to change (i.e., the reasons and results which transpire between all things, phenomena, and ideas) are also all linked and inter-related. In addition, what might be viewed as a Reason is also a Result of some prior reason; what we see as a result is also the Reason for some future Result.

15 In political activity, it is important to remember that *every* interaction within every relationship will lead to mutual impacts which will cause development and change; 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, and take care to be aware of the Results of our actions.

16 We must be cautious because there may be many events or relationships which might be falsely described as the Reasons for a given Result.

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 Vietnam-

3. Obviousness and Randomness¹⁷

a. *Categories of Obviousness and Randomness*

The *Obviousness* category refers to events that occur because of the essential internal aspects of the material structure of a subject which become reasons for certain results in certain conditions: the Obvious has to happen in a certain way, it can't happen any other way.¹⁸

The *Randomness* category refers to things that happen because of external reasons: things that happen, essentially, by chance, due to im-

ese 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. But the real “Reason” why the USA declared war on North Vietnam had to do with the underlying contradiction between capitalism/imperialism and communism in Vietnam which had to be resolved one way or another in Vietnam, and indeed, the real reason was the United States of America’s government’s willful desire for war.

In fact, the so-called “Gulf of Tonkin Incident” never even occurred as described—the attack on the ship never really happened. 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.

Understanding the true nature of Reason and the Result is very important for making decisions and choosing a path forward in political action. Misattributing 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 Reasons and Results which drive development.

17 In Vietnamese, the words for these categories are “tất nhiên” and “ngẫu nhiên,” which respectively translate to “obvious” and “random.”

In literature, several words are used to convey the underlying meaning of these categories, i.e. Engels’ use of “necessary” and “accidental.” We have chosen to use the words which most closely match the Vietnamese words used in this text, however 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.

18 *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 when it reaches a certain temperature, based on its internal material structure. If the condition of that certain temperature (and other certain conditions, such as the presence of oxygen, etc.) are present, then the paper *will* catch on fire in a predictable manner. It is *Obvious* that, given certain conditions, then the paper will burn.

pacts 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.¹⁹

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.²⁰ 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.²¹

19 As we discussed above, paper *will* burn if it reaches a certain temperature - that much is *obvious*.

Imagine your friend is holding a piece of paper and a lighter. If your friend holds the 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 over the flame or not. This demonstrates the concept of *Randomness*. Whether your friend will ultimately hold the paper to the flame or not depends on an external relation which is not defined by internal material structure and thus can't be predicted with the same accuracy as obvious events rooted in internal material structure.

20 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.

21 Any events we shall encounter in the complicated world of political action will contain elements of Randomness and Obviousness. Even complex human social systems have some degree of internal structure and internal relations which will generate results which have some degree of Obviousness, but the presence of so many external relations will introduce high degrees of Randomness as well.

For example, in a battle, it could be considered somewhat obvious that charging a fortified position with a smaller, weaker force would lead to defeat, due to the internal material relations: one side has a clear advantage in terms of firepower, defensive capability, etc.

However, there could be external relations which make the outcome less obvious: perhaps a spy has discovered some information that allows the attacking force to bypass the defenses, or perhaps the attacking force has some secret weapon that will give them an advantage, etc.

Our universe is so complex and there are so many different potential external relations which could impact any given situation that some degree of Randomness is always present in any situation; in other words, the presence of Randomness can be seen as obvious, given the nature of the internal relational complexity of

As Engels said: “One knows that what is maintained to be necessary is composed of sheer accidents, and that the so-called accidental is the form behind which necessity hides itself—and so on.”²²

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.²³

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.

our universe. However, understanding the Obviousness of the laws of nature allow humans to “clear a path” through the Randomness by eliminating outcomes which obviously can’t happen and by giving us a sense of the probability of one outcome vs. another.

22 *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, F. Engels, 1886.

23 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, and can dig trenches, light counter-fires, spray water, and enact other operations which can bring the wildfire under control - thus making the situation less Random and bringing about an increasing degree of Obviousness over time.

Editor's Note: 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

In general, 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

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 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.

Stability is, again *relative*: a “spray” of water may only last for a few seconds but we can still conceive of it as having a 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., *physical* systems and objects—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 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.

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 configurations, the paint adheres to the wood through 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 (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 *Marxism-Leninism Textbook of 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*.

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 distinguishes 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 an 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/aspects/features	Stable internal relations within the artwork (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 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, 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.

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 explains:

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.

One last note: importantly, we must reiterate, this book primarily deals with the *inner Form* of things, phenomena, and ideas. That is to say, the inner relations which compose the subject being considered.

b. Dialectical Relationship Between Content and Form

Content and Form have a strong dialectical relationship with each 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 Con-

tent.²⁴ 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.²⁵

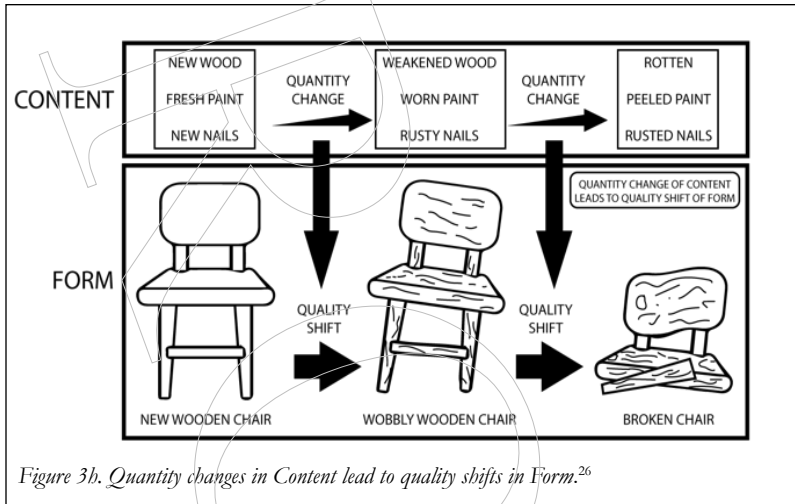


Figure 3b. *Quantity changes in Content lead to quality shifts in Form.*²⁶

24 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 a bunch of wood and nails, but you develop a technique for building a table that doesn't need any nails, then that would be an example of a change in Form reflecting a change in Content.

25 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, the tendency of Content is changing.

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.

26 As soon as a wooden chair is finished being built, the paint is already be-

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.²⁷

gining 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 broken down and 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 nails remain 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.

²⁷ The dialectical relationship between Content and Form is somewhat similar to the dialectical relationship between the material and the ideal. 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.

When we talk about "suitability," we are describing 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 become uncomfortable and cause strain over time.

However, we can use conscious activity to adjust the suitability between Content and Form. Changing the Content by adding cushioning or padding might make the Content and Form more suitable with each other. Or, changing the Form by designing contours and 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

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.²⁸

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. Considering the Content of cups: a porcelain cup might last long and even develop positively over time (by developing 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.

28 In our analysis, it is very important that we consider the subjectiveness of “suitability” and try to be as objective as possible in deciding whether or not Content and Form are “suitable” with each other. We can learn a lot about suitability from observation and practice.

Marx believed that it is very important to consider Content and Form when analyzing human society and political economy. One of Marx’s 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.

Marx 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.

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.²⁹

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 to socialist analysis of human society.

29 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, all obvious and stable attributes which *define the existence, motion, and development* of a subject.

Phenomena are simply external manifestations of a subject *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. 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

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.”³⁰

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.³¹

senses.

30 *Philosophical Notebooks, Conspectus of Hegel's Book Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, The Eleatic School, V. I. Lenin, 1914-16.

31 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 straight-forward. 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).

Knowing that Hegel was an idealist, Lenin wanted to strip his conception of dialectics of idealism, 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.

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 (“appearance,” as Lenin puts it) as both 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. In mental thought, Essence leads to Phenomenon which become the Essence of further thought in a constant flowing of dialectical development.

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, which we’d 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 the Phenomena of the light waves (the light waves being the Essence which exuded the

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.³²

Phenomena 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.

The key difference between Essence and Phenomena of thought vs. Essence and Phenomena of physical subjects is that with thought, the development from Essence to Phenomena is constant and inevitable. The Essence of each thought leads to thought-Phenomena which develop into the Essence of new thoughts in a constant flow.

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, because contradictions are what drive dialectical development of a subject over time.

32 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

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.”³³

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.³⁴

without changes in certain Phenomena.

For example, one Phenomenon of the USA is the flag. The design of the flag has changed over time, but the government which it represents has been essentially the same government since the nation was founded. From another point of view, the current design of the USA flag, when the 50th star was added, occurred in 1960. However, the government of the state which the flag represents has been through many developments and changed since 1960.

33 *Philosophical Notebooks, Conspectus of Hegel's Book Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, The Eleatic School, V. I. Lenin, 1914-16.

34 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 galaxy 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 we believed hundreds of years ago. In this case, the Phenomena were misleading, and it was only by getting a better grasp of the essential nature of the galaxy 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 very easy to misunderstand the relationships between Essence and Phenomena. Sometimes people get a false perception of Essence from real Phenomena, such as believing the Sun revolves around the Earth. Sometimes people attribute the wrong Phenomena to Essences as well, such as believing that all short people are weak or that all poor people are lazy.

Understanding the true Essences based on real Phenomena is one of the most important roles of analysis. It's what science is based on, and, in politics, misunderstanding or mischaracterizing Essences based on improper analysis of Phenomena can reinforce systemic problems like racism, sexism, and other forms of bigotry, or false beliefs about the way society works that lead to dangerous and reactionary ideologies like neoliberalism and fascism.

This is why when we want to study anything, we can't just look at the Phenomena alone. We have to dive deep to discover the essential nature of the things, phenomena, and ideas which we study.

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.³⁵

35 Consider the following excerpts from *Marxism-Leninism Textbook of Students Who Specialize in Marxism-Leninism*:

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. Because Reality has many aspects and tendencies of development, it is useful to classify Possibility. There are at least four categories of Possibility, in two separate categories.

The categories below draw from 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.

First, based on the objective relationships between subjects, we have: Obvious Possibility and random Possibility. Obvious Possibility means the Possibility that *will* happen, because conditions to make it happen are set in place and the Possibility becoming Reality is unavoidable.

With our current level of technology, we have no way of avoiding a hurricane. If the conditions arise for a hurricane to form, it is *obvious* that a hurricane will form.

The random Possibility is Possibility which may or may not happen depending on how external factors develop, our actions, the actions of others, etc.

In social life, in order to transform a Possibility into Reality, there must be objective conditions and subjective factors. Subjective factors such as the social positivity of humans to change Possibility into Reality. Objective conditions refers to the synthesis of the relationships of situations, space, time to make that transformation happen.

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.”³⁶

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 changes and developments which might occur. We must actively make use of subjective factors in perception and practice to

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.

turn Possibility into Reality whenever it would serve our purposes.³⁷

37 “Making use of subjective factors in perception and practice” is best exemplified in the traditional Vietnamese proverb: “you can’t just lay on your back 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.

PART 1

CHAPTER 4

BASIC LAWS OF MATERIALIST DIALECTICS

Laws are the regular, common, obvious, natural, 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.

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 cannot arise and influence beyond the conscious activities of humans, but these social laws are still objective.¹

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.²

1 We have already discussed how relations between human beings are objective. 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.

2 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. These laws do not physically manifest in the material world, but rather represent the ways in which human consciousness perceives and makes sense of the world, as we explain in more detail in the sections below.

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.³ 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.⁴

3 Remember that mode refers to *how* something exists, functions, and develops. 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 changes.

4 Put simply: quantity changes develop into quality changes, and quality changes lead to quantity changes.

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.

We have already explained how 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 could now consider that you 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,” “over-filled,” “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

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 Quantity and Quality

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.⁵

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” has no material basis. It is merely an abstract way of perceiving and considering the quantity and quality of the material subject we call “paper.”

5 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.”

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. We need to delineate and distinguish the component parts of this unified system from each other in order to make sense of it all. As Hegel wrote in *Science of Logic*:

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 *different from one another*. Quality is the basis on which we perceive different subjects as distinct from one another. Any distinct thing, phenomenon, or idea will be 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 which the human being is composed of (the cells, organs, blood, etc., as well as the thoughts, memories, etc., which make the human) *in*

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.⁶

The quality of a thing, phenomenon, or idea is determined by the qualities of its component parts.⁷ 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.⁸

unity.

Quality is a subjective phenomenon: a *reflection* of the material world in human consciousness. 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.”

6 Whether or not an attribute is considered “fundamental” depends entirely on conscious perspective. For example, your grandmother may consider chocolate chips to be “fundamental” for baking cookies while my grandmother 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 gallons of water; i.e., “this is a 5,000 gallon pool.” 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, you might consider the *total number of students*.

7 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 of these components is a quality—a unity of component attributes—in and of itself.

8 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

Any given subject will have multiple qualities, depending on the relations which exist between and within that subject and other subjects.⁹ We cannot consider things, phenomena, and ideas apart from quality. Quality exhibits a subject's relative stability.¹⁰

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.¹¹ Quality and quantity em-

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 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.

9 Any thing, phenomenon, or idea may be perceived from various different perspectives which would cause us to consider it as having different qualities. A 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.

10 Quality is simply 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 we can consider and analyze, which is crucial to developing a scientific understanding of the world through observation and practice.

11 For instance, a car may be measured by many criteria of quantity, such as:

body two different aspects of the same subject. Both quality and quantity exist objectively. 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.¹²

b. Dialectical Relationship Between Quantity and Quality

Every thing, phenomenon, or 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.¹³

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.¹⁴

length in meters, weight in kilograms, speed in kilometers per hour, etc.

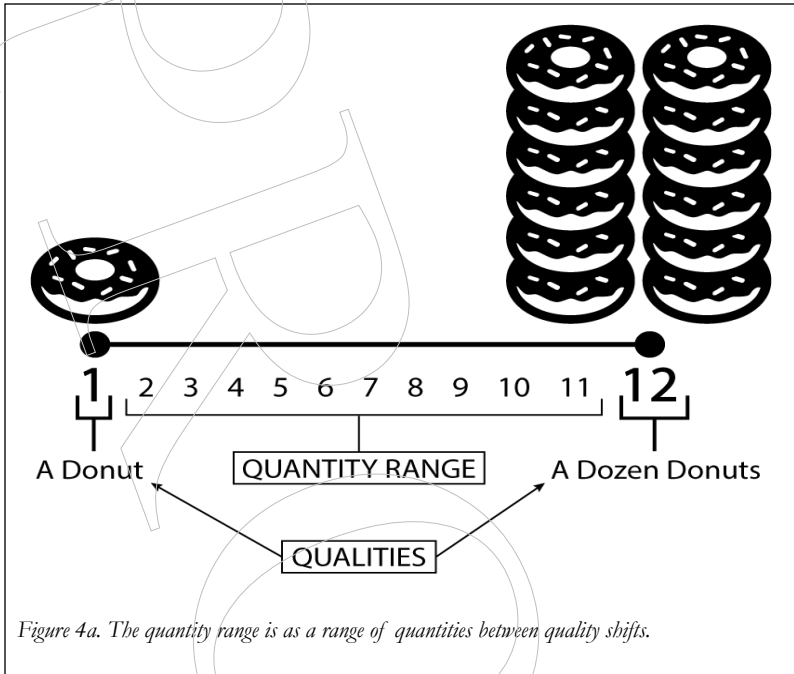
12 If you are filling a box with a dozen donuts, then once you add the 12th donut, one “dozen” may represent the *quality* which you seek. From the perspective of a customer buying donuts for a party, “dozen” may represent the “quantity.” In other words, you need to make an *order* (quality) of three dozen donuts (quantity). And the manager of the store, at the end of the day, may tally ten *orders* (quantity) as the day’s sales goal (quality).

So, quantity and quality are relative to the perspective and type of analysis at hand.

13 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).

14 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 which can be added before the



Motion and change of things, phenomena, and ideas usually start with changes 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.

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 change to “one dozen donuts.” This is the *quantity range* between the qualities of one 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 change to “one half-dozen donuts” to occur once the sixth donut (quantity) is added.

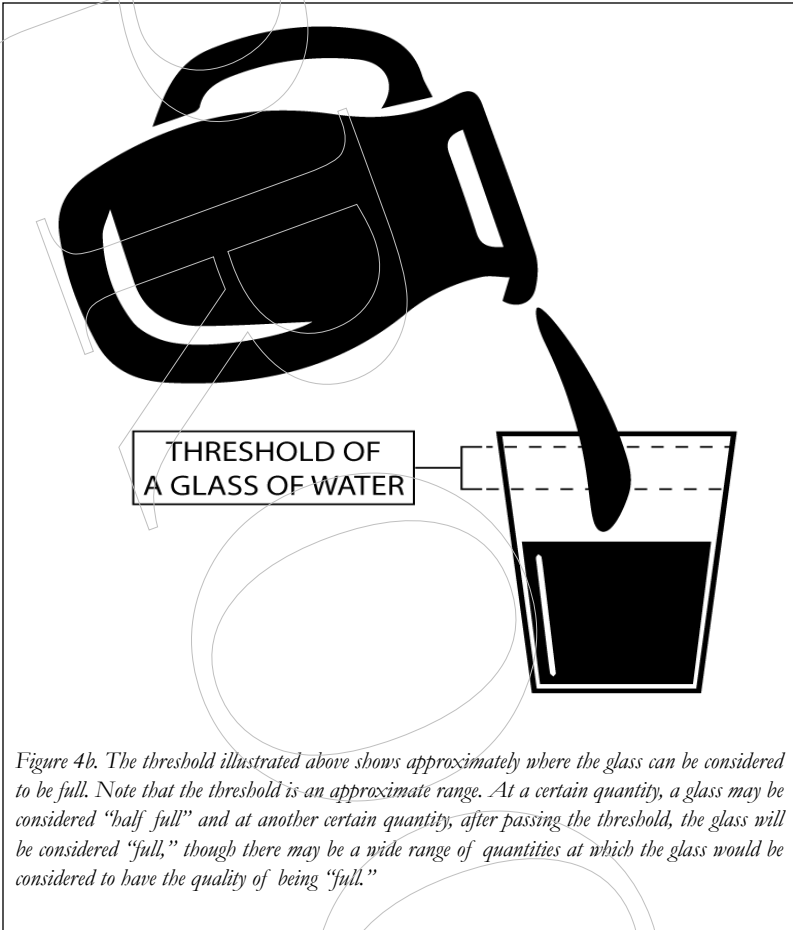


Figure 4b. The threshold illustrated above shows approximately where the glass can be considered to be full. Note that the threshold is an approximate range. At a certain quantity, a glass may be considered “half full” and at another certain quantity, after passing the threshold, the glass will be considered “full,” though there may be a wide range of quantities at which the glass would be considered to have the quality of being “full.”

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*.

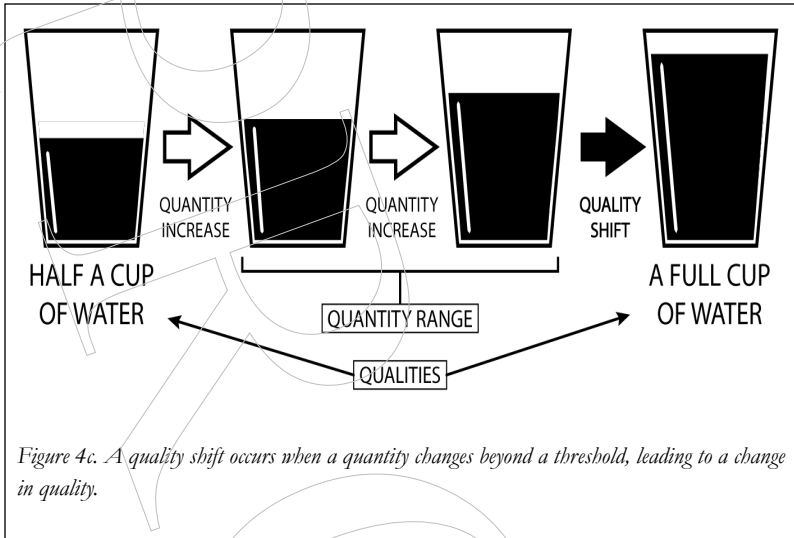


Figure 4c. A quality shift occurs when a quantity changes beyond a threshold, leading to a change in quality.

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.¹⁵

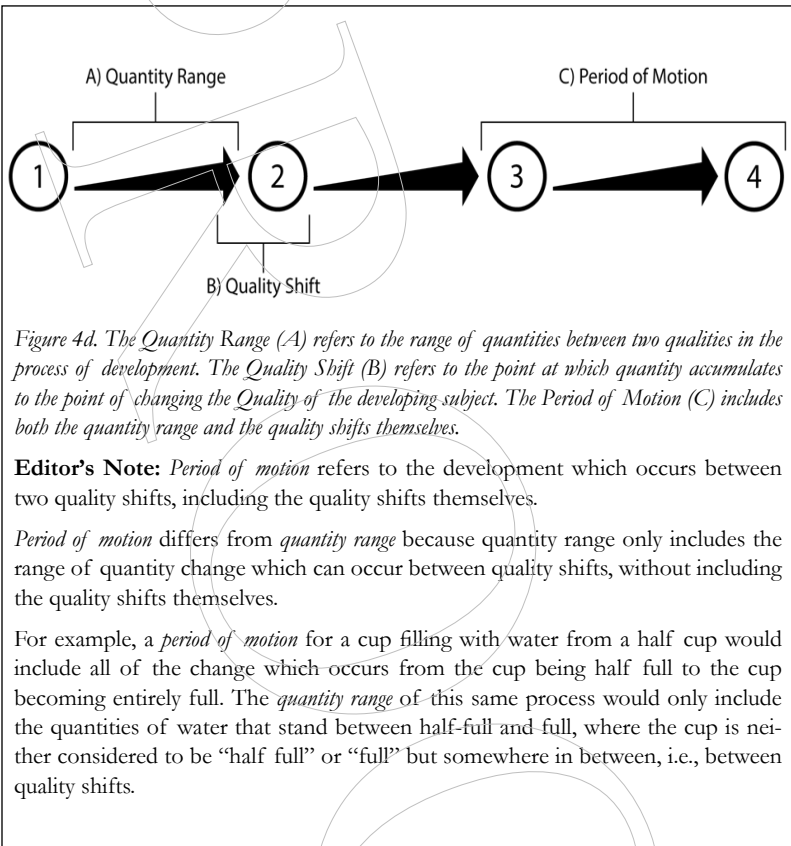
Quality shift is the end of a motion period and the start of a new

15 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.

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.

period.



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 shifts, creating an endless line of nodes, showing how all things, phenomena, and ideas move and develop to increasingly advanced degrees. As Friedrich Engels summarised: “[...] merely quantitative changes beyond a certain point pass into qualitative differences.”¹⁶

16 *Anti-Dübring*, “Quality and Quantity,” Friedrich Engels, 1878.

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.
- 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.¹⁷

17 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.

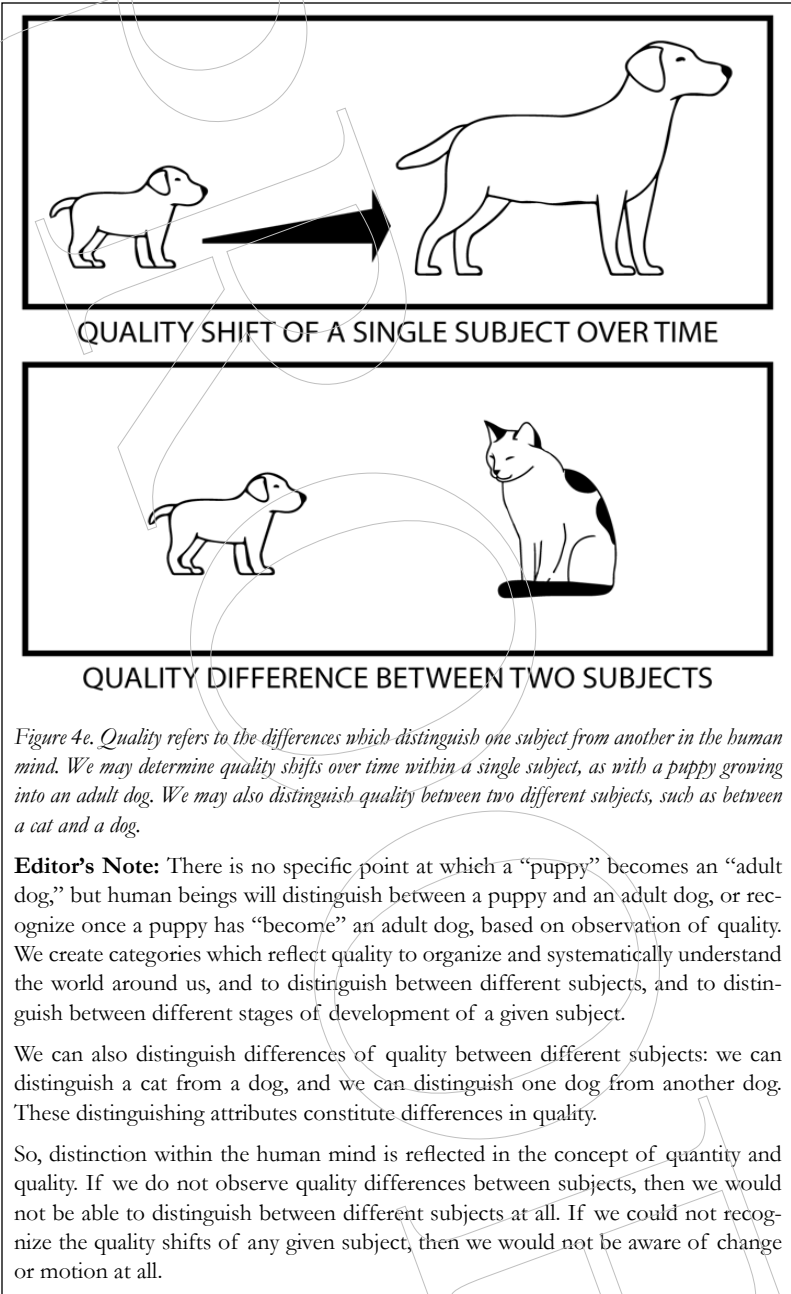


Figure 4e. *Quality* refers to the differences which distinguish one subject from another in the human mind. We may determine quality shifts over time within a single subject, as with a puppy growing into an adult dog. We may also distinguish quality between two different subjects, such as between a cat and a dog.

Editor’s Note: There is no specific point at which a “puppy” becomes an “adult dog,” but human beings will distinguish between a puppy and an adult dog, or recognize once 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.

So, 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 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.

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.¹⁸

18 We have to understand and utilize the law of transformation between quantity and quality in our activities. For instance, if a group of activists wants to address hunger in the community, they have to realize that they can't immediately enact a quality shift which solves the entire problem of hunger.

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 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.¹⁹

19 “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 the liberation of women in human society, or even attempt to reverse developments which have made women more free, wishing to return to previous stages of development when women had fewer freedoms and autonomy.

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

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.

2. Law of Unification and Contradiction Between Opposites

The law of unification and contradiction between opposites is the *Essence* of dialectics.

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.”²⁰

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.²¹

from left-sided thinking, respectively:

Right-wing opportunism is reformist, favors undue compromise, and aims to peacefully “convert” peacefully 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.”

20 *Summary of Dialectics*, V.I. Lenin, 1914.

21 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.

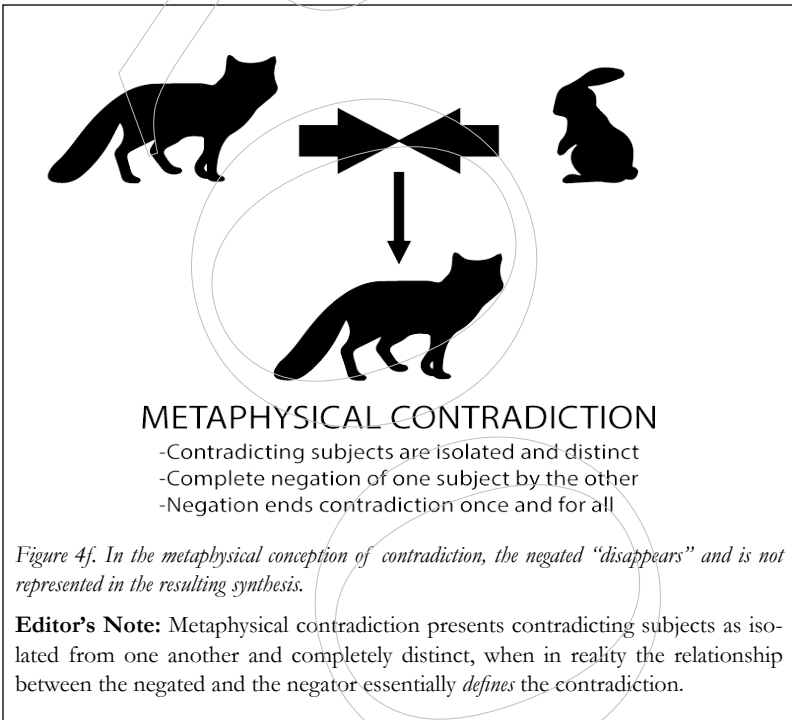
Contradiction is a *fundamental driving force* because it is the most basic driving force which all other forms of motion and development are based upon.

Contradiction is the *originating driving force* because all motion and development develops 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*

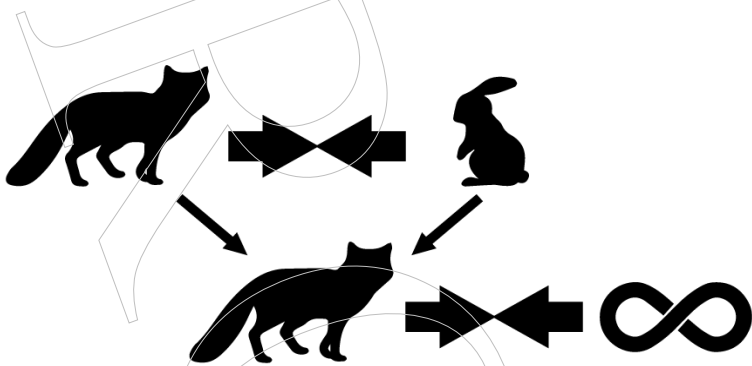
Definition of contradiction. In dialectics, the concept of contradiction is used to refer to the relationship, opposition, and transformation between opposites which takes place within all things, phenomena, and ideas, as well as between all things, phenomena, and ideas. This dialectical concept of contradiction 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.²²



22 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.

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 inaccurately represented as a complete and terminating process.



CONTRADICTION IN MATERIALIST DIALECTICS

- Contradicting subjects are defined by their relationship
- Negated subject impacts negator; characteristics carried forward
- Contradiction and negation cycle continues forever

Figure 4g. The materialist dialectical conception of contradiction recognizes that the 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.

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. Materialist dialectics also recognizes that contradiction continues indefinitely, as the negated becomes negated again, and so on, continuously, forever.

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.
- Anabolism and catabolism within living organisms [anabolism refers to growth and building up molecules within an organism, while catabolism refers to digestion and breaking down molecules within an organism].
- Production and consumption as socioeconomic activities.
- Trial and error which leads to cognitive development.²³

The General Properties of Contradictions. Contradiction is objective and universal. According to Friedrich Engels²⁴: “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

23 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.

24 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.”

Conscious motion and development is also rooted in contradictory forces. Engels uses the example of the seemingly infinite capacity for human beings to learn and grow in our understanding of the world, contradicted by a seemingly infinite amount of knowledge which can be obtained and refined, which drives a seemingly endless process of expanding our knowledge, collectively, over countless generations of humanity.

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."²⁵

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 contradictions²⁶

25 *Anti-Dubring*, F. Engels, 1877.

26 *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. 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.

For example: the *fundamental contradiction* of a nation engaged in total war with one another nation might be the war itself. There will exist many other contradictions; for example, the nation at war might have a trade dispute with a third nation which is not participating in the war. This contradiction is *non-fundamental*, as it does not define the essential characteristic of a nation engaged in total war.

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

Within all the various fields of inquiry, there exist contradictions which have a diverse range of different properties and characteristics.²⁷

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.²⁸

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 replaced, some of the parts of the engine may need to be cleaned and repaired. 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 engine can't be repaired and this stage of development can't be completed.

27 Different fields of study will focus on different forms of contradictions, and one subject 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.

28 Contradictions are *binding* and *inseparable* because they hold a relationship

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 wrote²⁹: “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).”³⁰

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.

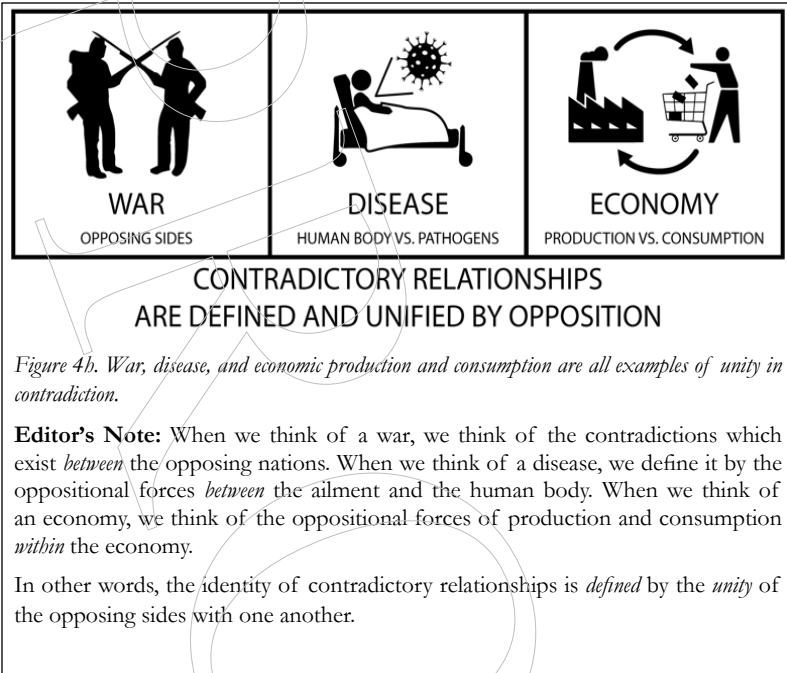
Contradictions are said to be *mutually impacting* because any time a contradiction exists between two opposing sides, both sides are mutually impacted for as long as the contradiction exists and develops.

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 change the products it produces 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).

29 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.

30 *On the Questions of Dialectics*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1915



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.

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.³¹

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 Lenin³²: “The

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:”

- 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 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.

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.

32 “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* is considered absolute, because it is opposition which drives motion and change, and all things, phenomena, and ideas are constantly moving and changing through

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.”³³

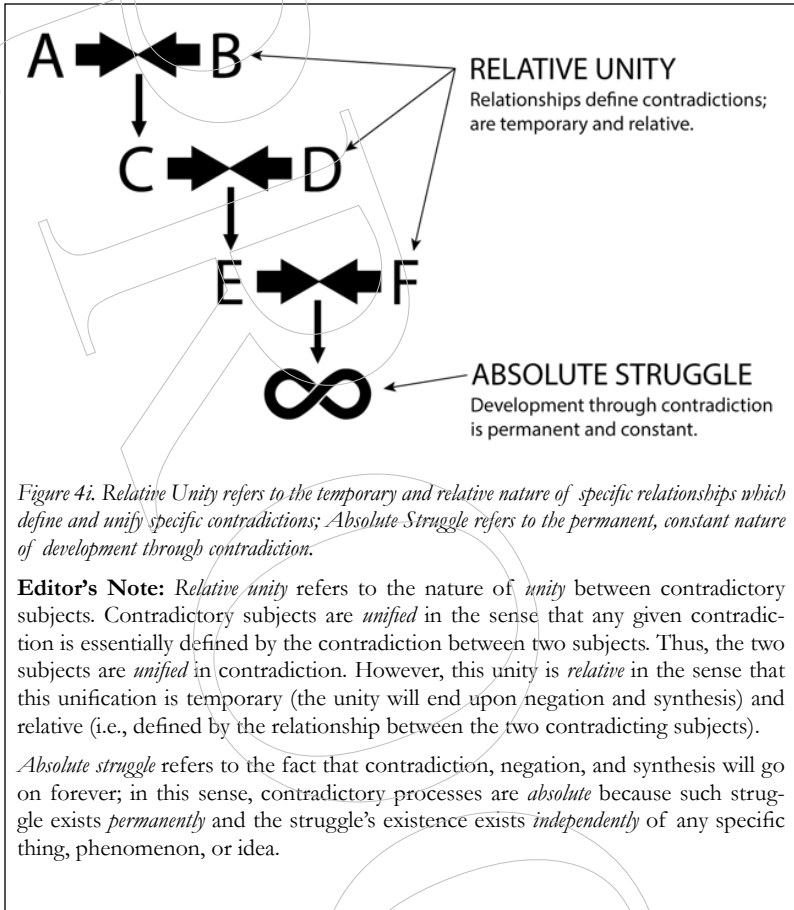
such contradictory processes of opposing sides.

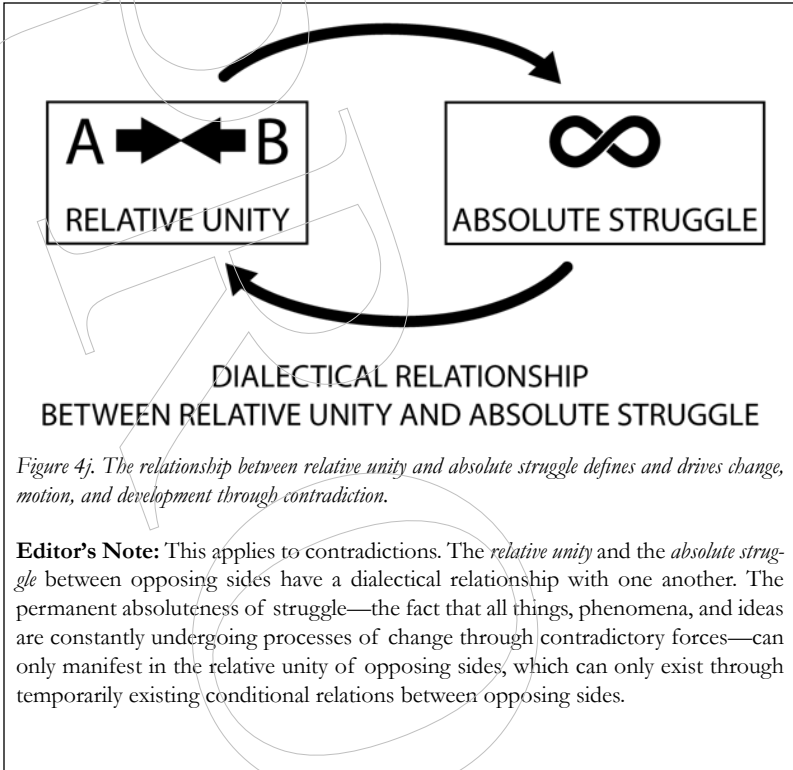
In the same text quoted in the passage above, *On the Questions of Dialectics*, Lenin notes: “The distinction between subjectivism (skepticism, sophistry, etc.) and dialectics, incidentally, is that in (objective) dialectics the difference between the relative and the absolute is itself relative. For objective dialectics there is an absolute within the relative. For subjectivism and sophistry the relative is only relative and excludes the absolute.” Lenin continues:

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.





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 affirmed³⁴: “Development is the

‘struggle’ of opposites.”³⁵

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, therefore, it is necessary to detect, recognize, and understand contradictions, and fully analyze opposing sides, and grasp the nature, origin and tendencies of motion and development in our awareness and practice.

Lenin said³⁶: “The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of

tion - 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 and applied to the wheels 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.

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 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.

35 *On the Questions of Dialectics*, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1915

36 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.

its contradictory parts [...] is the *essence* [...] of dialectics.”³⁷

Since contradictions exist with such rich diversity, it is necessary to have a historical point of view—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.³⁸

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 ne-

37 Ibid.

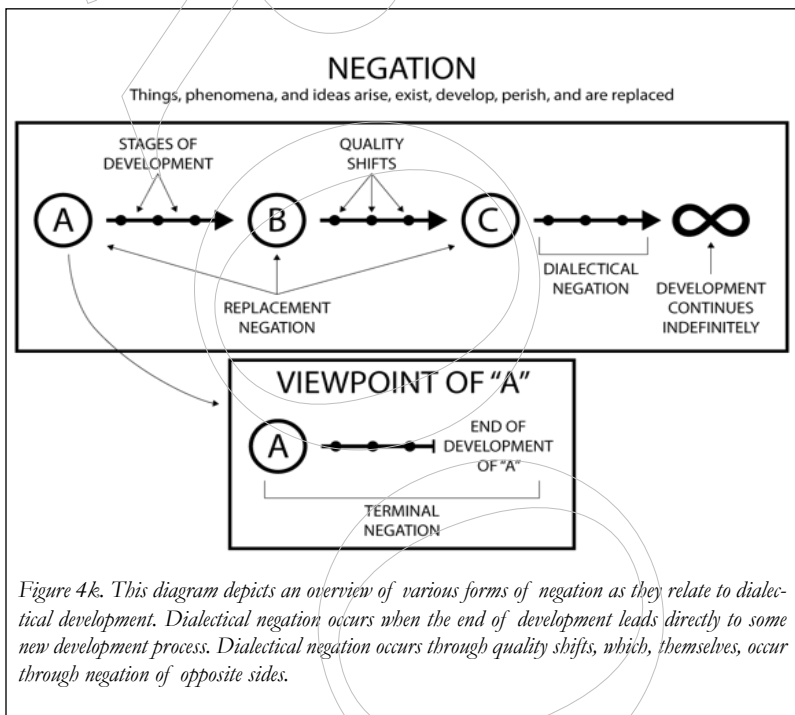
38 The historical viewpoint is vital because in order to fully understand any given contradiction, we must know the process of development which led to its formation.

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 comes down to 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.

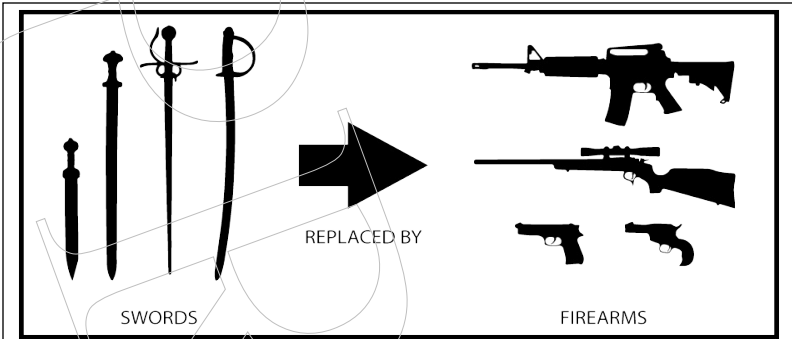
gation.

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.³⁹



39 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 opposition/contradiction occurring either internally or externally. Thus, negation drives all development and motion of all things, phenomena, and ideas.

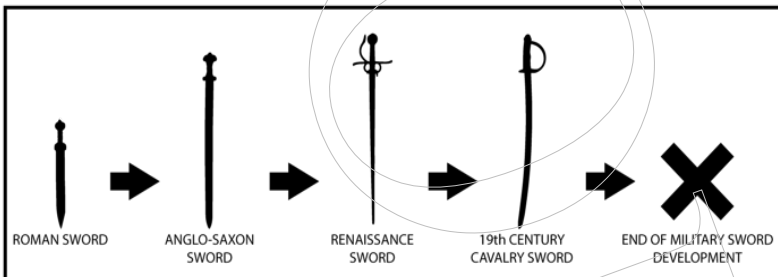
There are various forms of negation, and the same negation process may be seen to take different forms depending on viewpoint or analysis.



REPLACEMENT NEGATION PERSPECTIVE OF MILITARY WEAPONS

Figure 4l. Replacement negation refers to the replacement of one thing, phenomenon, or idea with another through dialectical negation.

Editor's Note: Replacement negation occurs when one thing, phenomenon, or idea disappears and a new thing, phenomenon, or idea takes its place. 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, axes, and other such weapons were gradually replaced by firearms as the primary weapons of war over many centuries. Today, swords have been completely replaced by firearms on the battlefield. This was a process of *replacement negation*—weapons are still used on the battlefield, but the type of weapon used has been completely replaced. Development continued, even though development of swords as battle weapons has essentially ended.



TERMINAL NEGATION PERSPECTIVE OF SWORD DEVELOPMENT

Figure 4m. 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 in terms of use and development.

As another example, we can 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 another perspective, we may see development continue. The individual may have had children, who will continue their familial lineage, they may have produced or contributed to projects in their life which will continue to impact other people for centuries to come, and so on.

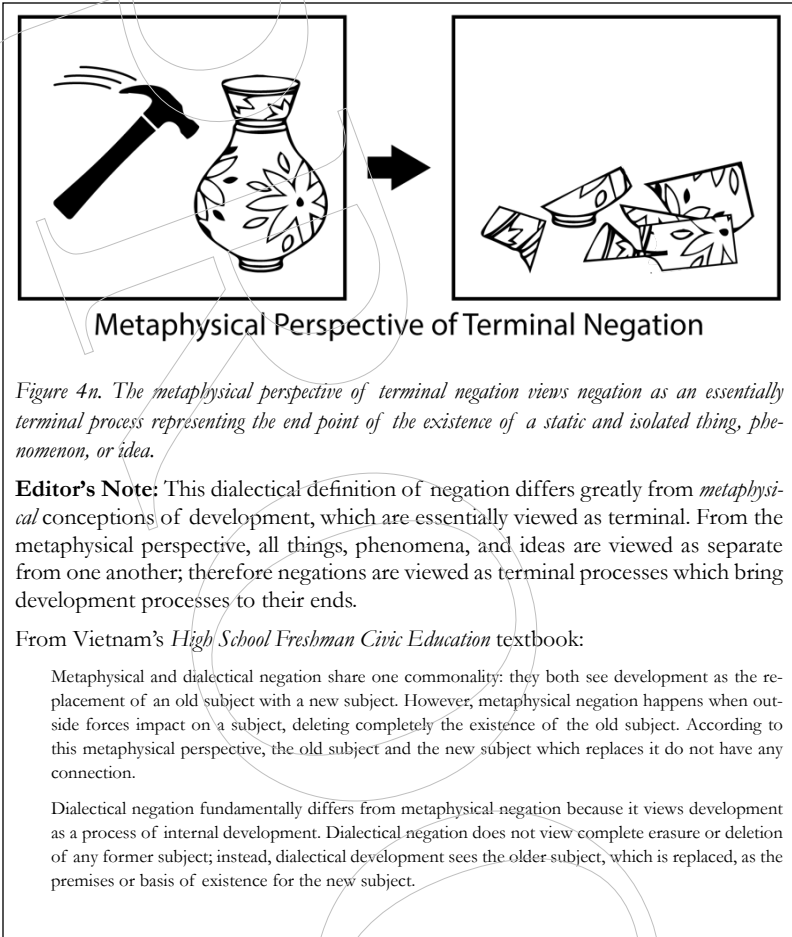
From certain perspectives, replacement negation may be viewed as dialectical negation. For example, someone studying modes of transportation in the history of the USA may see the replacement negations of steam locomotives replacing horses, and then cars replacing steam locomotives, as processes of dialectical negation from the overarching perspective of the transportation system.

Translation Note: *The terms "terminal negation" and "replacement negation" do not appear in the original Vietnamese text, but we felt it necessary to assign terms to these concepts for clarity.*

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.⁴⁰

40 All transformation is driven by processes' negation. Development, as a process, specifically, of *dialectical* negation, is a specific form of transformation in which an end of development creates the conditions for new development, either through internal quality shifts or 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.

Comparison Examples:

Metaphysical Negation	Dialectical Negation
The house was destroyed by an Earthquake.	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.
Water eroded the mountain.	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 car has a new tire because it ran over a nail.	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.

When you add water, sunlight, and nutrition to a seed, it will grow into a plant.

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. Metaphysical negation is thus viewed exclusively as the termination of development.

Dialectical development, on the other hand, is seen as a continuous process of development through negation, and further negation of each negation. A comprehensive and historical perspective must thus be sought to fully comprehend the development and negation processes of any given subject.

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.⁴¹

41 Though any given negation may be viewed as terminal from a certain

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.⁴²

perspective, materialist dialectics is most concerned with processes of development wherein the end of one stage of development creates the conditions for further development.

Therefore, all development is seen, ultimately, as *internal processes* which occur *within* a relationship between two opposing sides. These opposing sides may, from certain perspectives, be seen to take place *within* a subject or *between* two subjects, but they are always *external* (and, therefore, objective) from the perspective of either opposing side.

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.

42 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. War is thus simultaneously an objective process of development as well as an internal process of self-negation of the relationship between two 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, permanently. 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 relation-

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.⁴³

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, through the process of filtering out unsuitable factors, while retaining content. V.I. Lenin described⁴⁴ dialectical negation as such:

ship between the two formerly warring nations.

43 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. Therefore, the negated will impact the negator; in other words, the negated side will be somehow *reflected* in the negator.

This means that the negator will inherit and carry forward certain attributes, factors, and characteristics which it receives from the negated side.

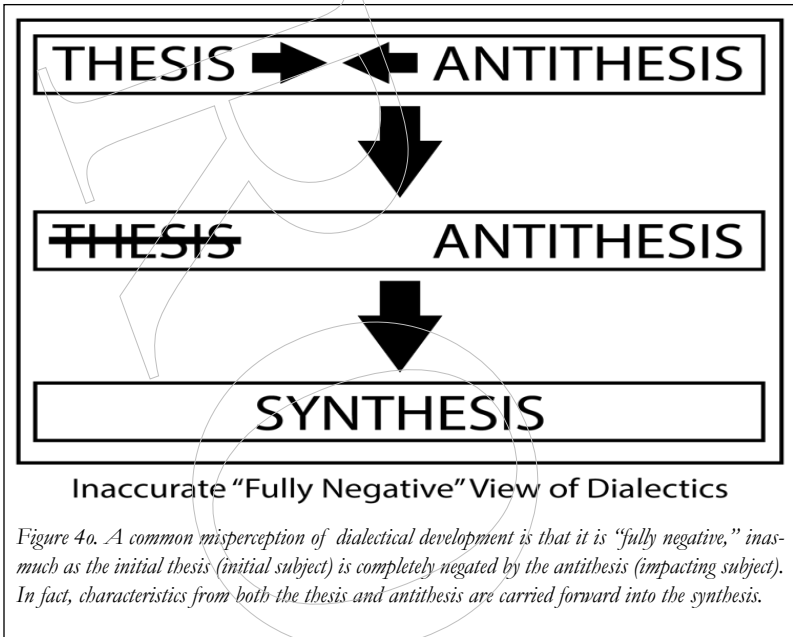
Take, for example, a war between two nations. Even if one nation completely conquers and subjugates the other in total victory, the victorious nation will still inherit certain factors from the defeated nation. Which factors are inherited will depend on the conditions. The victorious nation may pick 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].

44 The quotation comes from one of Lenin’s notebooks and is therefore somewhat difficult to parse. Below is our translation from the Vietnamese version of this text, which we hope might be somewhat easier to read:

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.⁴⁵



It [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 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. It [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 understand what Lenin is responding to. Lenin's notes are referring to the chapter titled "The Absolute Ideal" within Hegel's *Science of Logic*. In this chapter, Hegel recounts various critiques of dialectics and counters them.

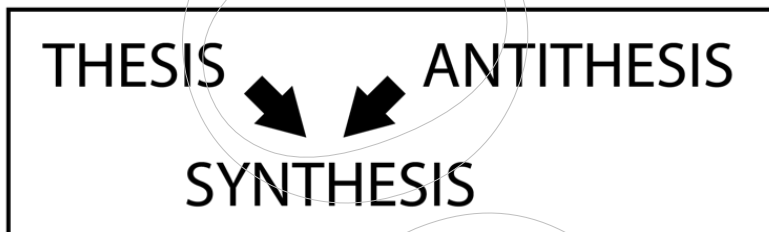
One important critique which Hegel is responding to is that dialectics are only *negative* in nature. A common perception of dialectics is that dialectics take the form of rhetorical arguments, in which one idea is presented, and a second idea is offered to counter the first idea, which completely and totally negates the first idea. According to this argument, dialectics is, therefore, a *totally negative process*.

45 *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic - Book III (Subjective Logic or the Doctrine of the Notion)*, V.I. Lenin, 1929.

Editor’s Note: In the referenced chapter from *Science of Logic*, Hegel is arguing that this 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, 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.



Accurate “Retention” View of Dialectics

Figure 4p. 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.

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 skeptical is rooted in the idea that one opposing side (i.e., a counter-argument) *completely negated* the original supposition. But the fact that, in dialectical development, the negator *always* retains features and aspects from the negated side 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—is also used to counter one more common critique of dialectics: that dialectical analysis is simply a system of rhetorical trickery, sophistry, and eclecticism.

Eclecticism is a conceptual approach that is completely unsystematic, drawing from a variety of theories, styles, and ideas. One critique of dialectics is that dialectics must be eclectic in nature because it is seen as simple rhetorical combativeness in which any given supposition is counter-argued and negated.

Since Lenin’s conception of dialectics retains features of the negated in the negator in any given dialectical negation, this accusation of sophistry and eclecticism can’t be applied, since, again, no opposing side is ever completely and fully negated and every dialectical negation is, therefore, a step “forward” which includes features from both opposing sides.

The most important thing to understand from all this abstract theory is the idea that nothing is ever 100% negated; nothing is ever completely deleted or erased from existence in the materialist-dialectical conception of development and negation. Instead, any time one opposing side negates another, aspects of the negated side are *inherited* by the negating side.

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.”⁴⁶

Editor’s Note: It’s important to note that this conception of development as a spiral is simply an abstraction to help distinguish the idea of materialist dialectical development from metaphysical conceptions of development.

The “Spiral Development” model of materialist dialectics sees every stage of development as a higher form of the previous stage of development. Each stage of development carries forward characteristics from previous stages of development.

In the example on the following page, 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.

46 The idea that development is cyclical in nature stems from the nature of dialectical negation, according to the following logic:

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.

Spiral Development Tendency in Materialist Dialectics: Development Into Higher Form; Retention of Characteristics

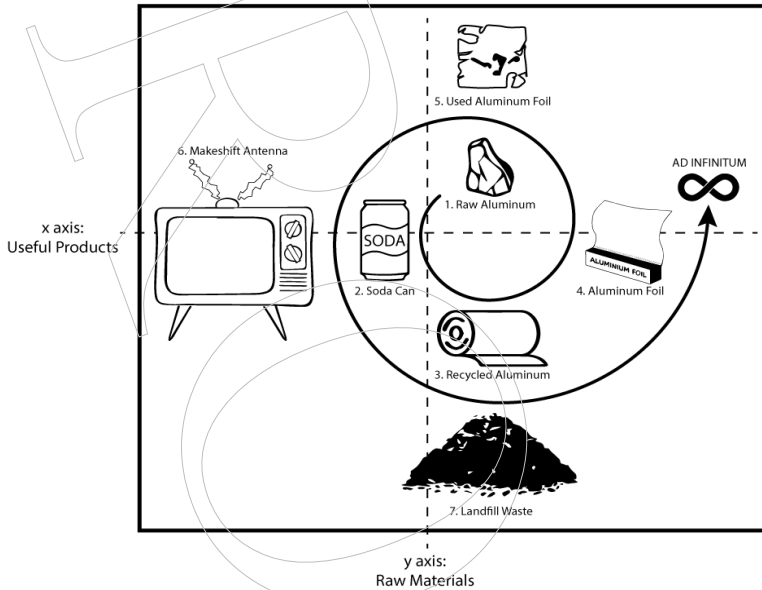


Figure 4q. Spiral Development.

Editor's Note: The “raw aluminum” stage of development is not truly the beginning of the development process; there were millions of years of development which led to the formation of the raw aluminum. Similarly, the landfill will not be the end of the 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.

The graph above looks at the development of aluminum from one perspective: the cycle between raw materials and refined products. Another perspective might depict development differently. For example, if we are examining development in terms of external relations with other materials, the development pattern might be depicted quite differently. In reality, all subjects have countless internal and external relations and development processes which can be examined.

Regarding point 2 above: 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.

Metaphysical Line Development: Complete Replacement

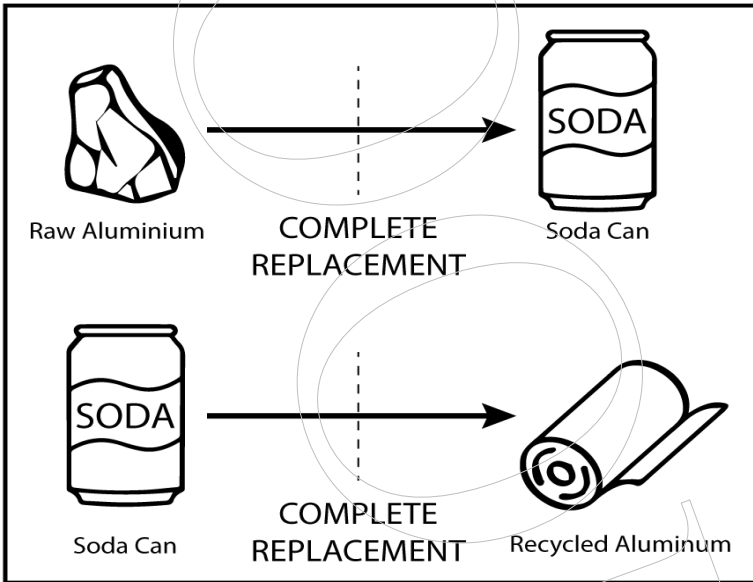


Figure 4r. The metaphysical “line development” model sees an initial form as being “replaced” or entirely negated into a completely distinct entity.

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.

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 perspective*.

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*.⁴⁷

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.

47 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 the Roman, but it would be impossible for Roman society to ever take on the *exact characteristics* of the Roman Empire ever again.

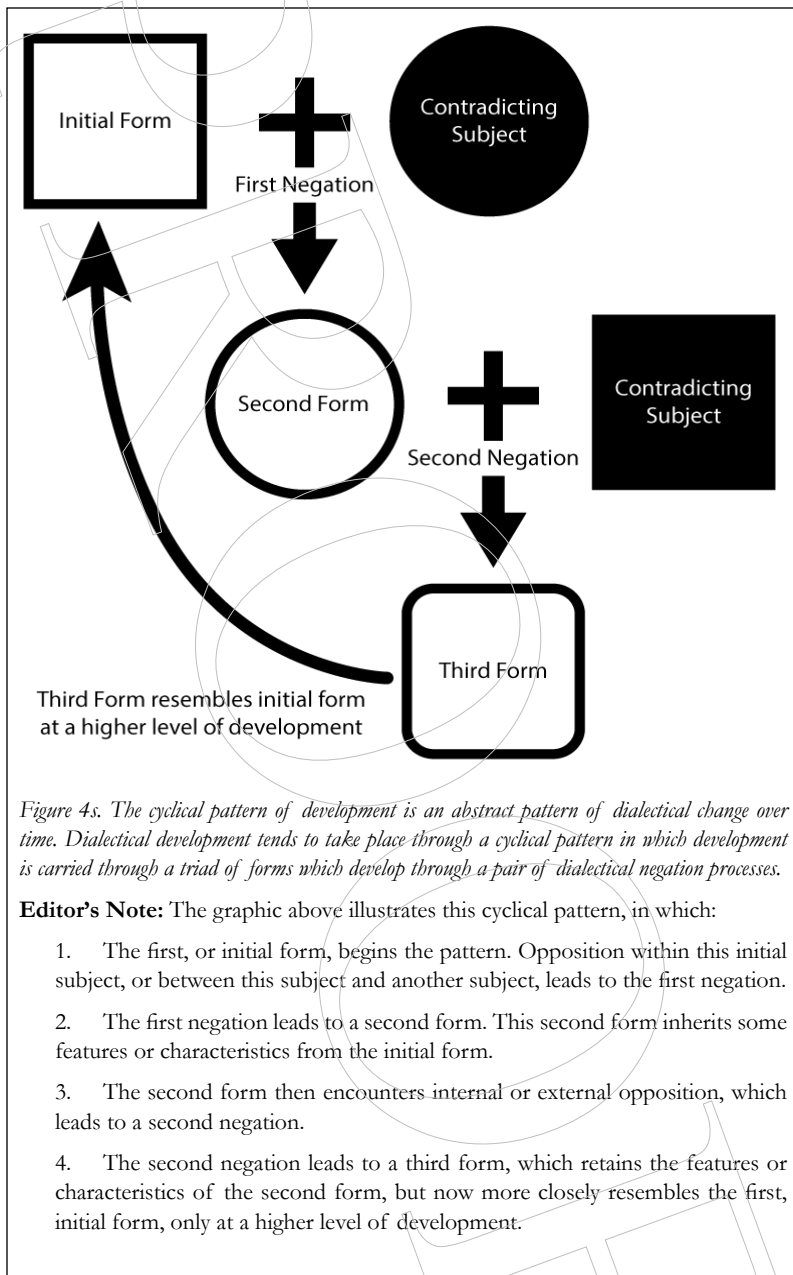


Figure 4s. The cyclical pattern of development is an abstract pattern of dialectical change over time. Dialectical development tends to take place through a cyclical pattern in which development is carried through a triad of forms which develop through a pair of dialectical negation processes.

Editor's Note: The graphic above illustrates this cyclical pattern, in which:

1. The first, or initial form, begins the pattern. Opposition within this initial subject, or between this subject and another subject, leads to the first negation.
2. The first negation leads to a second form. This second form inherits some features or characteristics from the initial form.
3. The second form then encounters internal or external opposition, which leads to a second negation.
4. The second negation leads to a third form, 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.

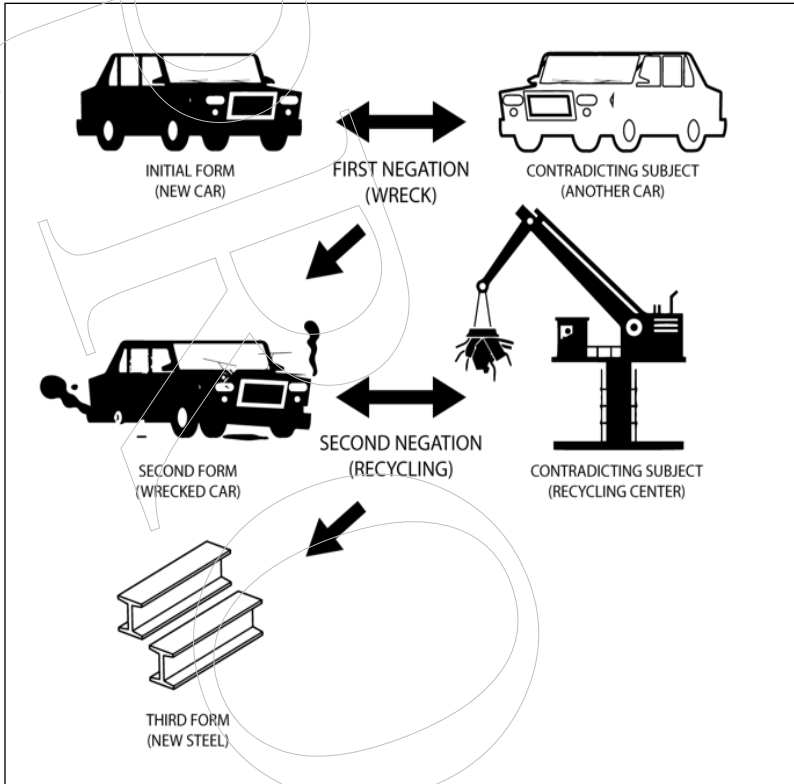


Figure 4t. In this example, a new car goes through a cyclical pattern of development in which the third form (new steel) possesses characteristics of the first form (a new car).

For example: 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 "destroyed" 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.: "deformed," in no condition to be sold on the market, etc.).

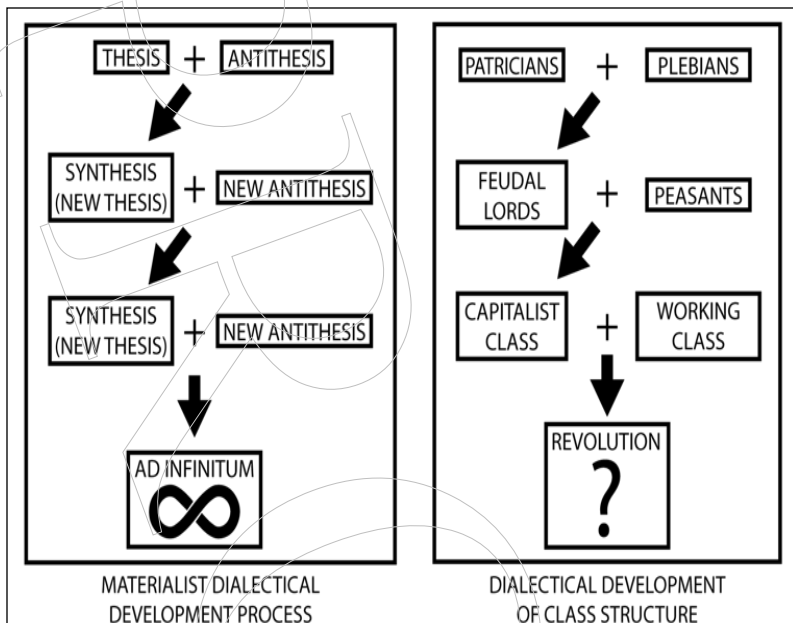


Figure 4u. According to Marx and Engels, the development of capitalism from feudalism assumed a cyclical pattern. The development of class structure is a dialectical process in which different classes synthesize to form the next era of class society. For example, the capitalist class emerged primarily as a synthesis of the feudal lords and peasants of the medieval era.

Note that this is only an abstract description of a tendency of dialectical development; exceptions can and do occur. For example, the development of communism as a stateless, classless society would presumably break this pattern of development and lead to some new, as-yet-unknown “spiral of development.”

Also note that determining which form is the “first” or “initial” pattern is entirely relative. Using the example above of the development of class society: from one perspective, the Patricians may be seen as the “initial” pattern, but from another perspective the Plebeians might be considered the “first” form. This depends entirely on the viewpoint of analysis.

So, in summary, these conceptions of “spirals of development” and the pattern of “three forms through two negations” describe general tendencies of development to help us understand the basic characteristics of dialectical negation and development, and should not be taken too literally as 1-to-1 representations of reality.

Lenin describes this cycle of dialectical development as going “from assertion⁴⁸ to negation—from negation to ‘unity’ with the asserted—without this, dialectics becomes empty negation, a game, skepticism.”⁴⁹

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.”⁵⁰

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.

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] 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 wrote⁵¹: “what is the negation of the negation? An extremely

48 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.

49 *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic - Book III* (Subjective Logic or the Doctrine of the Notion), V.I.Lenin, 1929.

50 *Karl Marx, The Marxist Doctrine*, V.I.Lenin, 1914.

51 In the same text quoted above, Engels elaborates that dialectical develop-

general—and for this reason extremely far-reaching and important—law of development of nature, history, and thought.”⁵²

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. 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.⁵³

ment 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.”

52 *Anti-Dühring*, “Dialectics: Negation of Negation,” F. Engels, 1878.

53 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 revo-

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.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵

lutionary 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.

54 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, 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.

55 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*

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.⁵⁶

processes of development and motion rather than attempting to reverse, restrain, or halt such processes.

56 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.

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.

PART 1

CHAPTER 5

A 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.⁵⁷

57 Epistemology is the theoretical study of knowledge. It also deals with the philosophical question of: “how do we know what we know?”

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.

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

1. Praxis, Consciousness, and the Role of Praxis for Consciousness

a. *Praxis and Basic Forms of Praxis*

Praxis includes all human material activities which have purpose and historical-social characteristics in order to 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.⁵⁸

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 changes in the world.

58 In the English version of this book, we have chosen to distinguish between the words “practice” and “praxis,” however, the concepts underlying these terms are closely related, and we should also note that in the original German, Marx and Engels used the German word “Praxis” for both concepts. Similarly, in the original Vietnamese text of this book, as well, the same word—“thực tiễn”—is used for both “practice” and “praxis.”

We are using “practice” to refer to human activity which provides more information about the world around us. As Engels explains 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.

We are using “praxis” to refer to conscious human activity which is intended to change the world in some manner. For example, as Marx wrote in *Theses on Feuerbach*:

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice [original German: *revolutionäre Praxis*].

Engels further expounds upon this concept in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. Note that Engels uses the word *Praxis* here, in the original German, as well:

The most telling refutation of this as of all other philosophical fancies is practice [original German:

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

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.

One reason that these concepts are so closely related is that the same human activity can both tell us more about reality *and* consciously change reality. For example, by pushing a heavy stone, you may be able to move the stone a small amount—constituting progress towards your goal—while simultaneously learning that the stone is too heavy to be moved completely on your own.

In this sense, not all human activity (practice) might be considered praxis; only practice 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.

So, we are using the word *praxis* to refer specifically to human activities which have a desired outcome of changing nature or human society in some manner which contributes to the development of human society.

Praxis defines the nature of human beings because human beings are (to our present knowledge) the only animals 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.

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.

the development of society, especially in the current historical period of modern science and technological revolution.⁵⁹

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.⁶⁰

59 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*.

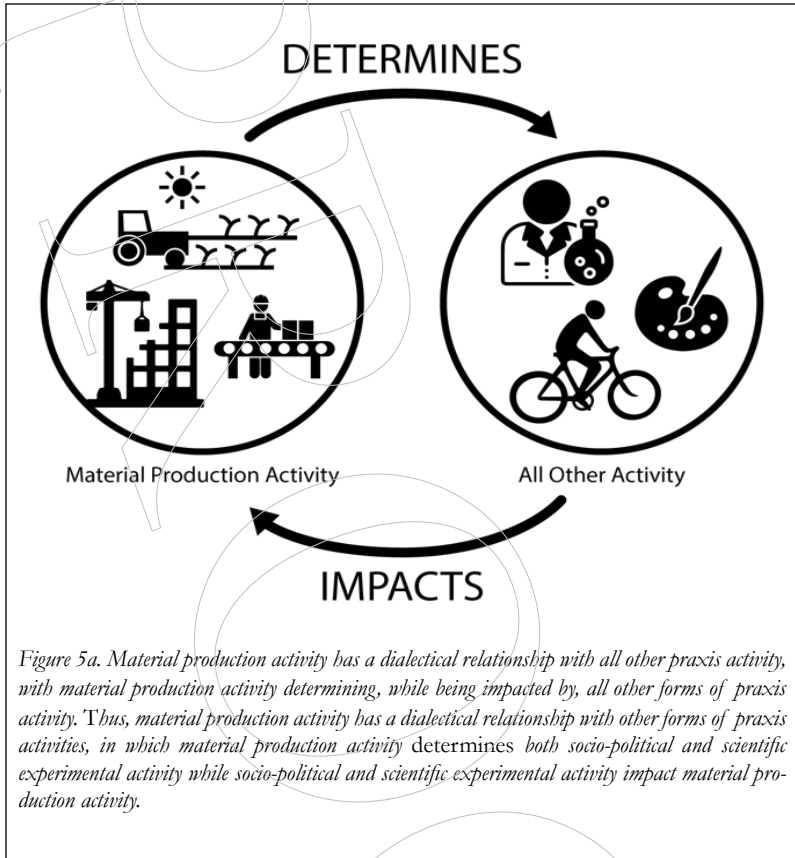
Material production activity has a very clear purpose: to improve the material conditions of an individual human being or a group of human beings. Material production activity has historical-social characteristics because developing material conditions for human beings leads directly to the development 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, creating art is not always praxis, 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.

60 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.

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 about the objective world. Consciousness is a self-aware process which is productive and creative.

This view stems from the following basic principles:

1. The dialectical materialist worldview acknowledges that the material world exists objectively and independently of human consciousness.
2. The dialectical materialist worldview recognizes the following human abilities:
 - a. To perceive the objective world.
 - b. To reflect the objective world into the human mind, which enables human subjects to learn about external objects.
 - c. 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.
3. The dialectical materialist worldview affirms that conscious reflection 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.⁶¹

61 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:

The Absolute Idealism of Hegel, which upholds the 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; no such terminal end point of human understanding. 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

4. The dialectical materialist worldview considers practice [including 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 the truth.⁶²

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*.⁶³

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.

62 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.

To put it another way, 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.

63 In dialectical materialist philosophy, all systems of relation exist as processes of development in motion. Thus, consciousness can be defined as a system of relations between human brain activity and two forms of data input:

1. *Sense experience*: our observations of the external material world.
2. *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 forthcoming sections, the text 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.

Editor's Note:

Concrete	→	Abstract
Empirical Consciousness	<i>Develops into</i>	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.

Directly Observed	→	Systematically Derived
Ordinary Knowledge	<i>Develops into</i>	Scientific Knowledge

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*:

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 [...]

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 direct and immediate observation of the world, which results in concrete knowledge, to 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*.

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, then back to the other, again and again, continuously.

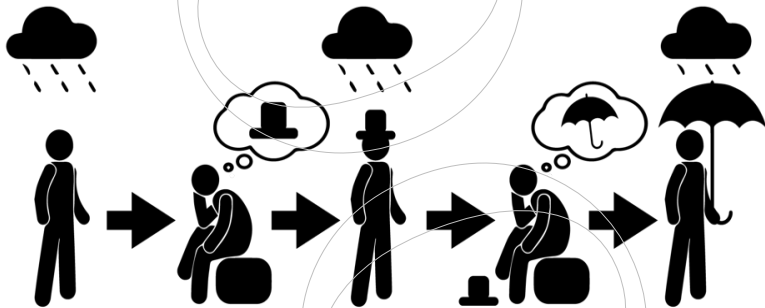


Figure 5b. Empirical and theoretical consciousness have a dialectical relationship in which empirical consciousness and theoretical consciousness lead to and mutually develop one another.

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 and the pursuit of understanding through systematic observation and indirect experiences (i.e., experiences that do not occur in daily activity—such as scientific experimentation) is referred to as scientific consciousness.

Passive and Direct	→	Active and Indirect
Empirical Consciousness	<i>Develops into</i>	Scientific Consciousness

These concepts will all be discussed in 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.⁶⁴

Theoretical consciousness is the indirect, abstract, systematic level of perception in which the nature and laws of things and phenomena are generalized and abstracted.

64 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.

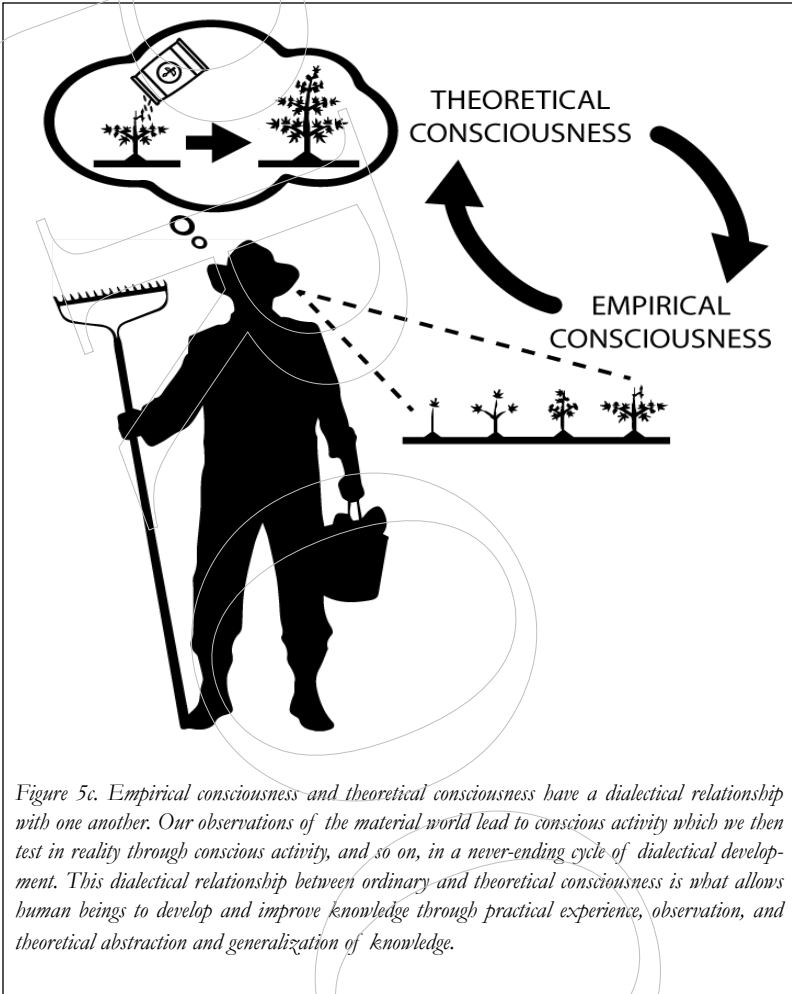
Thus the ordinary knowledge we gain through daily practice can enrich and yield scientific knowledge, and vice versa.

Empirical consciousness and Theoretical consciousness 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.⁶⁵

65 Empirical consciousness and theoretical consciousness have a dialectical relationship with each other in which empirical consciousness provides the basis for theoretical consciousness, as 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.

For example, a farmer may notice that plants grow better in locations where manure was discarded—an act of empirical consciousness. They might then form the theory that adding manure to the soil will help plants grow—an act of theoretical consciousness. They could then test this theory against reality by mixing manure into the soil and observing the results, which would be another act of empirical consciousness. They may then form the theory that more manure will help plants grow even more—another act of theoretical consciousness—then test and observe, through empirical consciousness, and so on.



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, individu-

al, and solitary knowledge to a higher form of generalized and abstract knowledge [what we might call *theoretical knowledge*].

Editor's Note: Knowledge which comes from individual empirical observations (i.e. empirical consciousness) can be referred to as empirical consciousness.

Theoretical knowledge is a product of theoretical consciousness. 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.

	Ordinary Knowledge	Scientific Knowledge
Empirical Knowledge	Ordinary Empirical Knowledge Individual and isolated knowledge from sense observations accumulated through passive activity in daily life.	Scientific Empirical Knowledge Individual and isolated knowledge accumulated through methodological measurement and/or systematic observation.
Theoretical Knowledge	Ordinary Theoretical Knowledge Abstract and generalized knowledge accumulated through passive activity in daily life.	Scientific Theoretical Knowledge Abstract and generalized knowledge accumulated through methodological measurement and/or systematic observation.

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.⁶⁶

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. 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

66 Over time, scientific consciousness tends to develop and become increasingly prominent in society. For instance, fifty years ago, most human beings on earth knew nothing about computer technology. As computer technology has developed and become increasingly prominent, human beings have had to broadly and generally develop scientific consciousness of computers and how to operate them in our daily lives.

ordinary consciousness, and therefore develops ordinary consciousness. Scientific consciousness therefore enhances our everyday passive perception of the world.⁶⁷

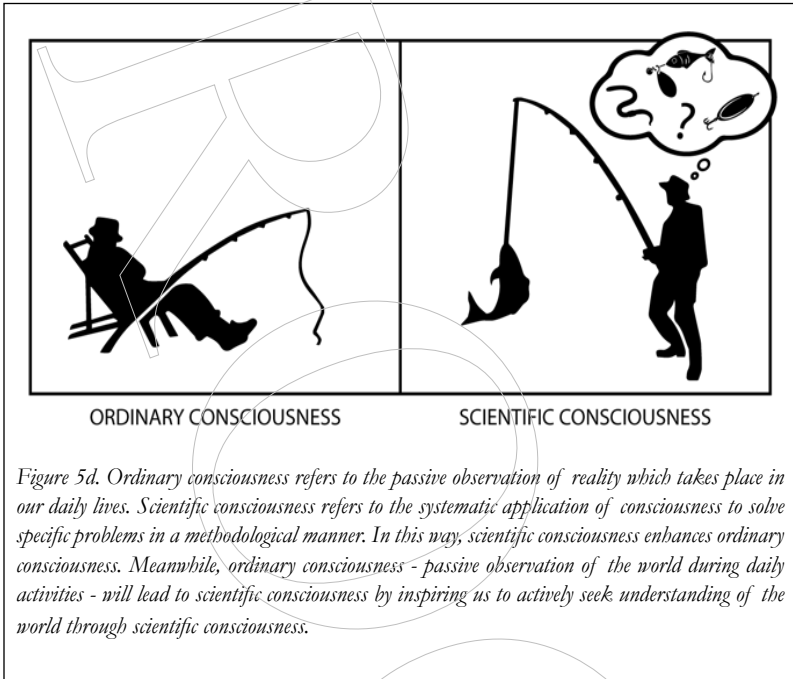


Figure 5d. Ordinary consciousness refers to the passive observation of reality which takes place in our daily lives. Scientific consciousness refers to the systematic application of consciousness to solve specific problems in a methodological manner. In this way, scientific consciousness enhances ordinary 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.

⁶⁷ 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.

c. The Relationship Between Practice and Consciousness

Practice serves as the *basis, driving force, and purpose of consciousness*. Practice serves as the criterion of truth by testing the truthfulness of our thoughts.

Practice 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.⁶⁸

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, practice 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

68 Remember that the material world defines consciousness while consciousness allows us to impact the material world through conscious activity. Consciousness itself arose from the physical needs of the material world, 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.

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.”⁶⁹

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.”⁷⁰

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

69 *Theses On Feuerbach*, K. Marx, 1845.

70 *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, V.I. Lenin, 1908.

[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.⁷¹

On the contrary, if the role of practice is deified, it will fall into pragmatism and empiricism.⁷² Thus, the principle of the *unification* of

71 A failure to incorporate practice into theoretical consciousness leads to a variety of mistakes and problems:

Subjectivism occurs when one centers one's own self and conscious activities in perspective and worldview, failing to test their 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 and other human beings. 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. Dogmatists ignore practical experience and use 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.

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.

72 In this context, *pragmatism* refers to a form of subjectivism in which one centers one's own immediate material concerns over all other considerations. For example, a member of a sports team may be more concerned with showing off and impressing the crowd with their personal ability, at the expense of working collaboratively with the rest of the team, which might ultimately lead to an otherwise avoidable

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.⁷³

2. Dialectical Path of Consciousness to Truth

a. Opinions of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin about the Dialectical Path of Consciousness to Truth⁷⁴

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).⁷⁵

loss of a game.

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.

73 As Ho Chi Minh once said: “Study and practice must always go together. Study without practice is useless. Practice without study leads to folly.”

74 The section below outlines and explains *the Universal Law of Consciousness*, which states:

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.

75 Given that consciousness has a material basis, and that practical activities are the driving force of consciousness, 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.

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.⁷⁶

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 at a more rational and abstract level.

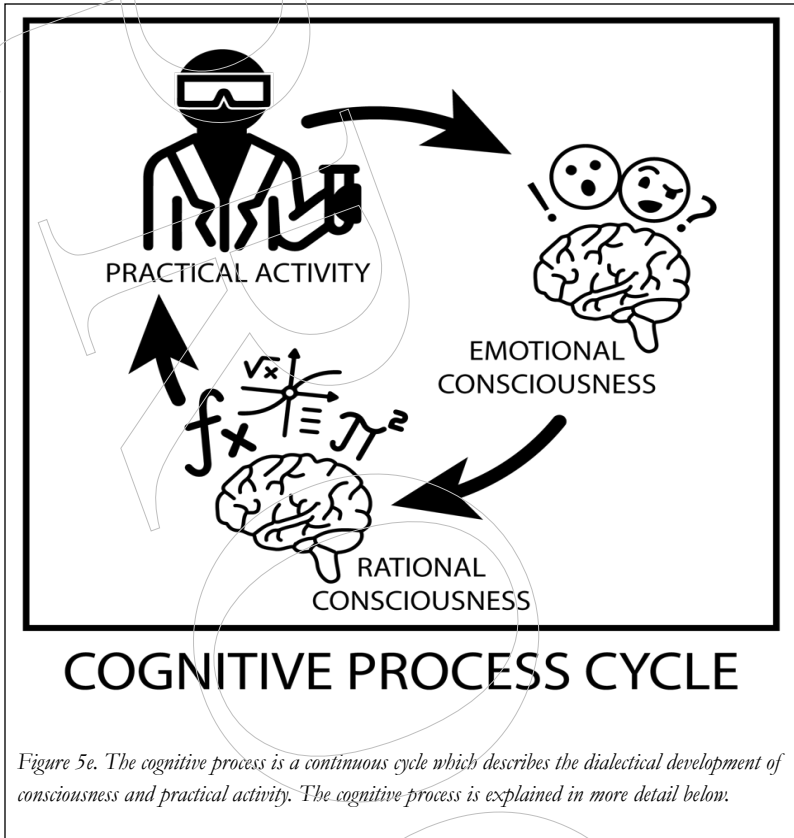
For example, if a zoologist in the field sees a species of bird they have never encountered before, their first conscious activity will be at the sensory-emotional level: they will observe the shape, coloration, and motion of the bird. They may feel excitement, happiness, and other emotions. This is 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.

76 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*.



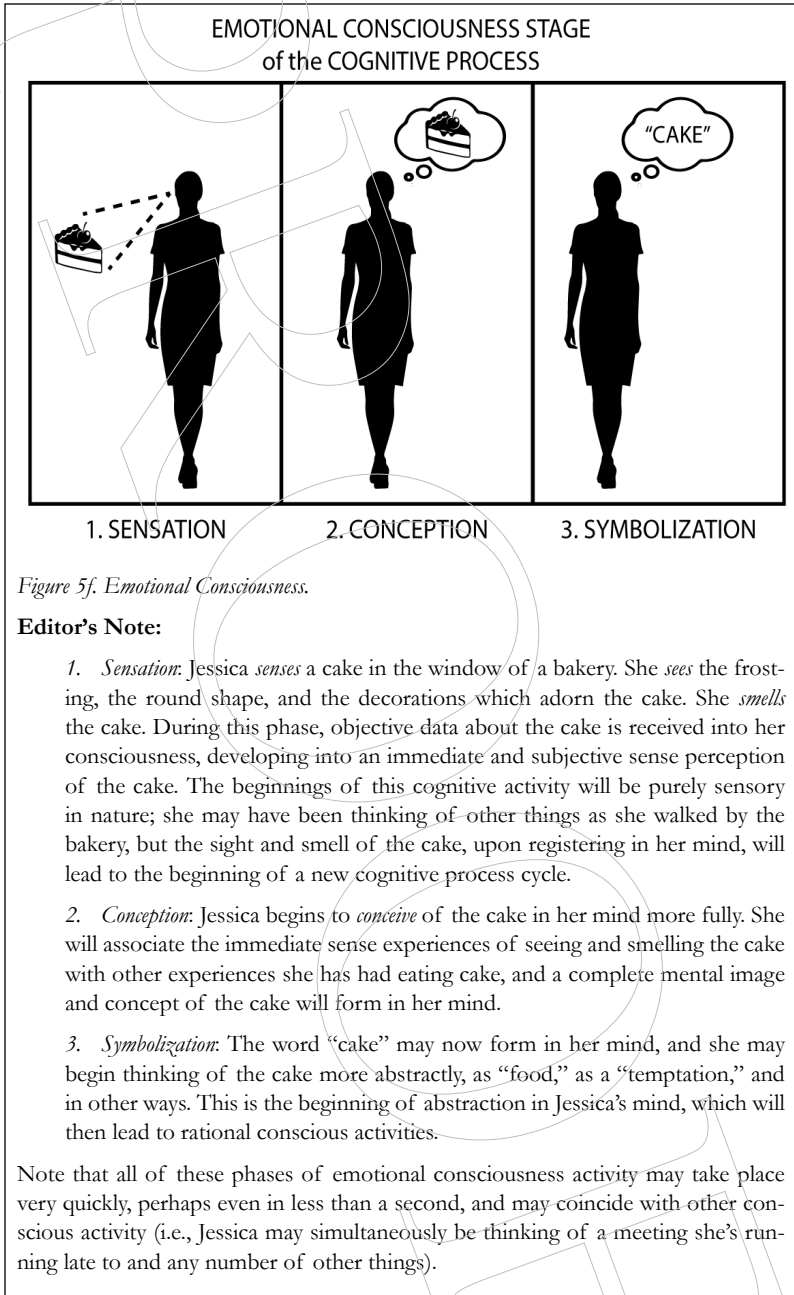
Development from Emotional Consciousness to Rational Consciousness; Emotional Consciousness is the Lower Stage of the Cognitive Process. In this stage of cognitive development, humans, through practical activities, use our senses to reflect objective things and phenomena (with all their perceived specific characteristics and rich manifestations) in human consciousness. During this period, consciousness only reflects the phenomena—the external manifestation—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, 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 [i.e., *phenomena*, as opposed to *essence*] of objective things and phenomena. 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.⁷⁷

77 See the figure on the following page for an example of the three phases of the emotional consciousness stage of the cognitive process.



At this point, conscious activity 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. 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: inductive inference (which extrapolates the general from the specific), and deductive inference (which extrapolates the specific from the general).

Editor's Note: Below 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.

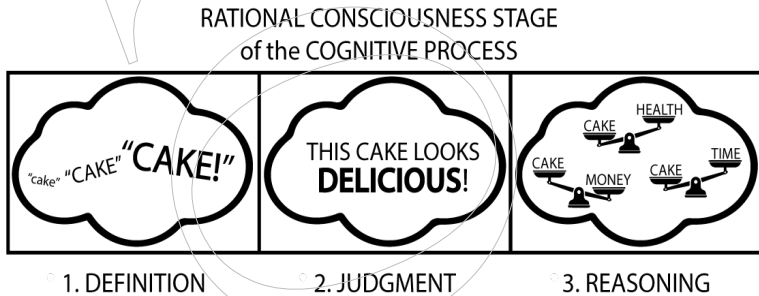


Figure 5g. Rational consciousness and the cognitive process.

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" in Jessica's head may become more pronounced and defined in her 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: "If I have time, 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 is perceived and carrying through to the final reasoning phase of the rational stage, and so on, indefinitely.

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.⁷⁸

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.

78 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, but if someone has spent more time considering bicycles at the level of rational consciousness, however, 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.

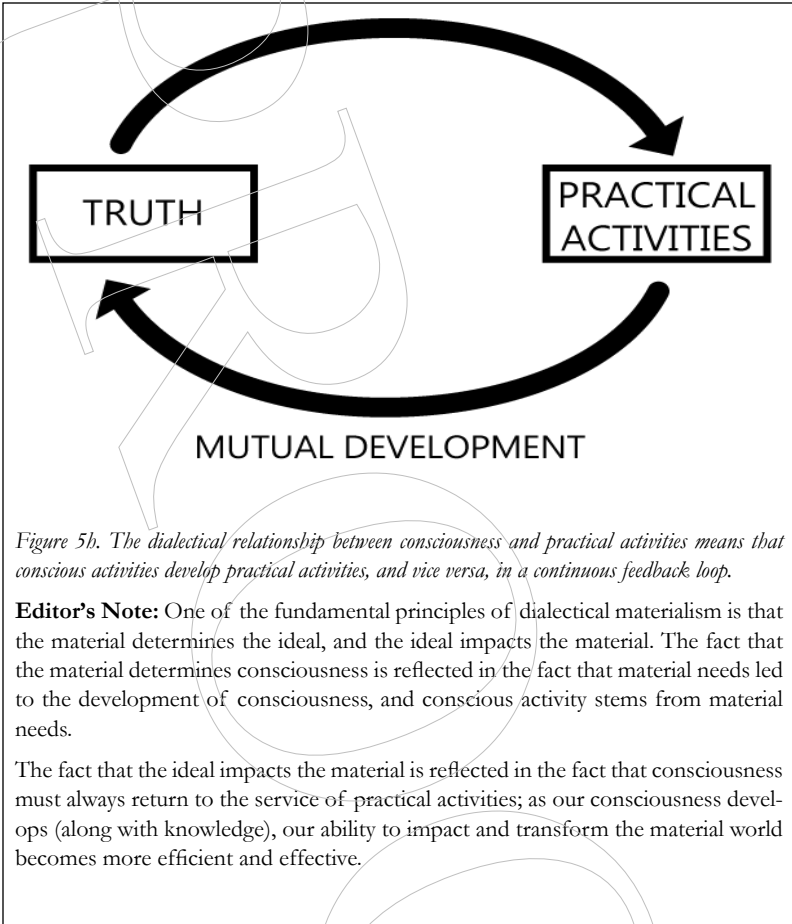
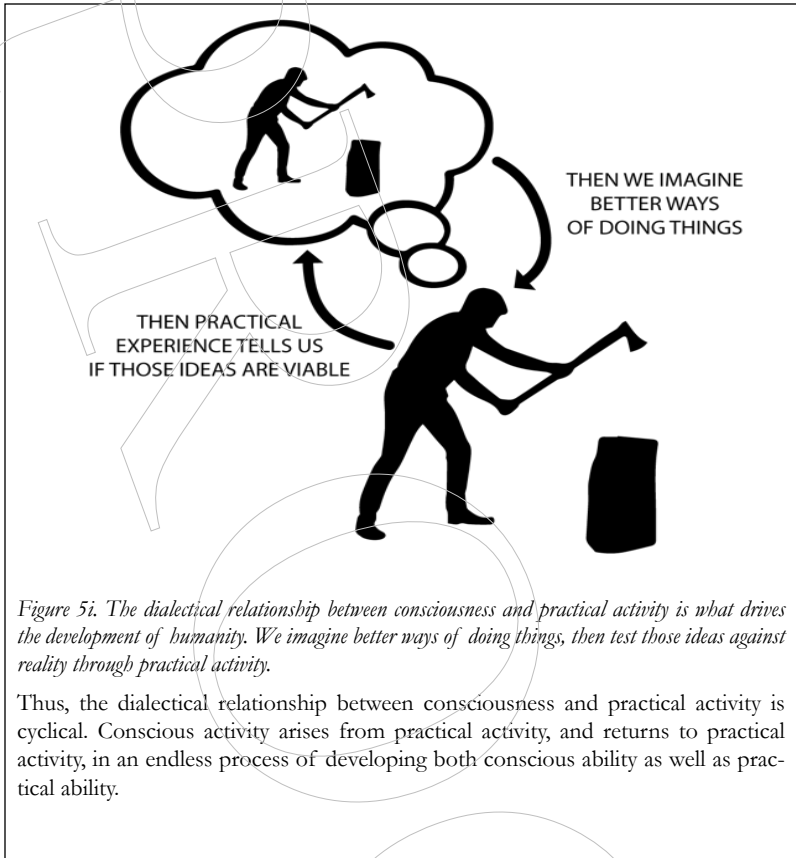


Figure 5b. The dialectical relationship between consciousness and practical activities means that conscious activities develop practical activities, and vice versa, in a continuous feedback loop.

Editor's Note: One of the fundamental principles of dialectical materialism is that the material determines the ideal, and the ideal impacts the material. 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.

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 develops (along with knowledge), our ability to impact and transform the material world becomes more efficient and effective.



Thus, 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 is also a concrete and vivid manifestation of the universal laws of ma-

terialist 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 universal truth.⁷⁹

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 real-

79 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, and then develops into improved practical activity, which then develops into improved conscious activity, 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 “learning how to ride a bicycle.”

The Law of Unity and Contradiction Between Opposites states that all things, phenomena, and ideas contain contradictions, and that these contradictions *define* the subject which they exist within. 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 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.

ity. 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 by practice. In this sense, the concept of truth is not identical with the concept of “knowledge,” nor with the concept of “hypothesis.” According to Lenin⁸⁰:

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 [...]⁸¹

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 funda-

80 Here, Lenin is dispelling Hegel’s conception of “absolute truth,” which is the idea that there will eventually come some “end” to the process of consciousness at which we will finally arrive at some final stage of knowledge and consciousness. He 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, breathing process which will never end, since the development of reality will never end.

81 *Conspectus of Hegel’s Science of Logic - Book III (Subjective Logic or the Doctrine of the Notion)*, V.I. Lenin, 1929.

mental points that distinguishes the concept of universal truth of dialectical materialism from the concept of universal 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.⁸²

Truth is not only objective, but also *absolute* and *relative*. Absolute truth 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 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.⁸³

82 This notion of the objectivity of truth stands in contrast to *idealism*, which states that conscious reasoning leads to truth, and that the ideal dictates material reality. The 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.

83 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-Dubring*:

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

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.⁸⁴

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.

84 *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* of false consciousness is found often in the works of Marx and Engels. For instance, it is discussed in *The Holy Family*, by Marx and Engels:

It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment

“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:

[A]bsolute 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.⁸⁵

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 conscious-

regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do.... They (the 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.

* 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.

85 *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Chapter Five: The Recent Revolution in Natural Science and Philosophical Idealism, 8. The Essence and Significance of “Physical” Idealism, V.I.Lenin, 1908.

ness of metaphysics, dogmatism, conservatism, and stagnation.⁸⁶

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.⁸⁷

86 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. 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 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 view certain positions or views as representative of absolute in nature when, in fact, no such absolute truths have yet been discovered.

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.

87 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. Subjectivism is a position which denies that truth can be discovered in the external material world, and thus misidentifies the nature of absolute truth by falsely believing that the only absolute truth stems from internal conscious activity.

Revisionism is a failure to recognize and accept commonalities in conscious

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.”⁸⁸ Mastering the principle of the concreteness 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. 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.⁸⁹

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.

Sophistry is the use of falsehoods and fallacious arguments to deceive. 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 holds that 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.

88 *Once Again On The Trade Unions, The Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bubkarin*, Dialectics and Eclecticism “School” and “Apparatus”, V.I.Lenin, 1921.

89 In other words, Marxism is rooted in seeking truth by examining reality from a historical and comprehensive viewpoint.

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 - voluntarily or involuntarily - 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.

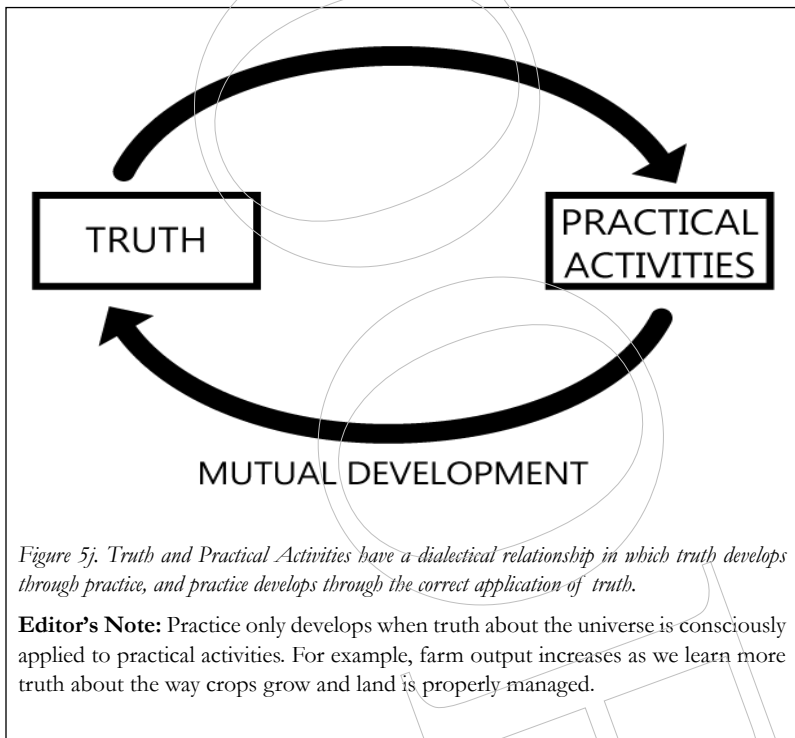


Figure 5j. Truth and Practical Activities have a dialectical relationship in which truth develops through practice, and practice develops through the correct application of truth.

Editor's Note: 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 land is 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.

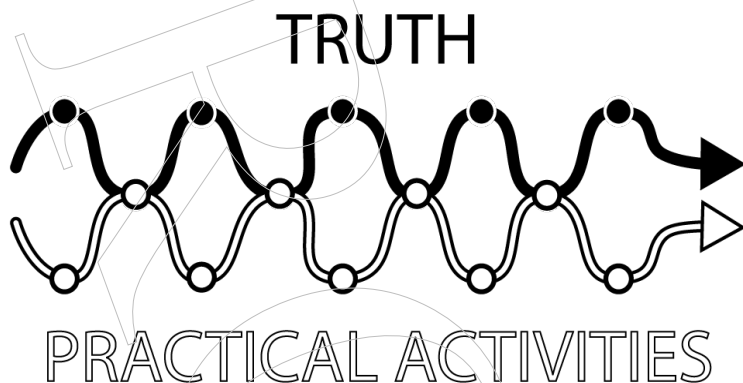


Figure 5k. Truth and practical activities mutually develop one another over time.

This dialectical relationship between truth 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.

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 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*:

[...] 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 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, 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. [...] This line of reasoning seems undoubtedly hard to beat by mere argumentation.

Here, Lenin explains how only a proper understanding of the dialectical relationship between theory and practice can lead to the negation of false consciousness and the dialectical development of both practice and theory. Simply arguing 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 of Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*:

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. 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 piece: *Practice Generates Knowledge, Understanding Advances Theory, Theory Leads to Practice*. In this article, Ho Chi Minh writes:

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.

In order to have a dialectical viewpoint of the relationship between truth and practice we must seek truth in reality, and we must understand that seeking truth is a process. Simultaneously, we must regularly and actively apply truth to our practical activities in order to develop our practice, and to improve the efficiency of natural and social transformation activities.

We must recognize the importance of scientific knowledge, and actively and creatively apply such knowledge to our socio-economic activities. Improving the efficiency of these activities, in essence, is also promoting the role of scientific truth in our current society.



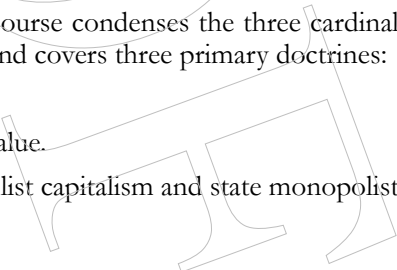
AFTERWORD

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 came. If you are reading this afterword after reading the entirety of the preceding contents, then congratulations, you have completed the equivalent to the coursework of a full semester's class on dialectical materialist philosophy which all Vietnamese college students are required to take!

The next classes in this curriculum, each covered in the original full volume, include:

Part 2: Historical Materialism. This course 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 in Vietnam, we see historical materialism as an applied field of dialectical materialist philosophy and materialist dialectical methodology.

Part 3: Political Economy. This course 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 to the analysis and understanding of the capitalist mode of production from the perspective of the socialist revolutionary movement.

Part 4: Scientific Socialism. This course relies on an established understanding of dialectical materialism, historical materialism, and political economy as a foundation for developing socialist revolution. The three sections of this course on scientific socialism include:

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 within a year of this publication. 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 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 established. 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. 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 such 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 of making mistakes, we are only afraid of making mistakes but are not determined to correct them.

As we mentioned in the foreword, many leftists in the West have a problem with *engagement*. We hope that this book has impressed upon the reader that simply arguing about theory is a useless and futile pursuit; sparring verbally over such “scholastic questions,” as Marx described them, is counter-productive.

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 theoretical development, 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 framework for the dialectical relationship between theory and practice, and their inseparability.

In short, dialectical materialism demands that we think and act like *scientists* to change the world, rather than simply speculating and imagining ineffectually like armchair philosophers. To quote Marx yet again: "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 can 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 it's critical to develop an understanding of the *spirit* of the ideas of any particular text, and not to get bogged down in 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 quickly leads to sophistry and undue conflict.

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 in good faith and doing our best to understand the principles and concepts which underlie revolutionary discourse and which guide practice instead of getting bogged down with metaphysical constructs of what constitutes the “proper usage” of philosophical vocabulary.

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.

V. I. 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 of Europe. However, the specific objective conditions of Russia, with its autocratic monarchy, call 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

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 want 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 resource of time to translate and annotate this work.

Finally, we want to thank the team at the Center for Communist Studies and Iskra Books, who have provided invaluable editing and peer review services, typesetting, design, promotion, and guidance.

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Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains.

*Luna Nguyen, Translator, and
Emerican Johnson, Editor & Annotations*

GLOSSARY

Absolutization: To hold a belief or supposition as *always true* in all situations and without exception.

Abstract Labor: 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 is taken into consideration, it is referred to as *concrete labor*.

Adam Smith: (1723-1790) British logic professor, moral philosophy professor, and economist. Along with David Ricardo, Adam Smith was one of the founders of political economy, which Marx both drew from and critiqued in his analysis and critique of capitalism.

Ahistorical Perspective: 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 over time.

Base: Also known as Economic Base, Economic Basis. The material processes which humans undertake to survive and transform our environment to support our ways of living. In the dialectical relationship between base and *superstructure*, the base refers to the relationship which humans have with the means of production, including the ownership of the means of production and the organization of labor. See also: *Superstructure*.

Biological Motion: One of the five basic forms of motion described by Engels in *Dialectics of Nature*. Biological motion refers to changes and development within living objects and their genetic structure.

Biological Reflection: A complex form of reflection found within organic subjects in the natural world and expressed by excitation, induction, and reflexes.

Bourgeoisie: The *owners* of the means of production and the ruling class under capitalism; also known as the capitalist class. See also: *Proletariat*, *Petty Bourgeoisie*.

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.

C→M→C: C = a commodity, M = the money commodity, M' = the money commodity (containing surplus labor derived through exploitation of workers). The mode of circulation described by Marx as occurring under pre-capitalist economies of simple exchange, in which 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 with their own labor, and they directly consume the commodities which they purchase. Marx called this mode of circulation "simple commodity production." See also: $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M'$

Capitalist Class: See *Bourgeoisie*.

Capitalist Commodity Production: The capitalist mode of production which utilizes 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. Capitalists then sell these commodities for profits which are not shared with the workers who provided the labor.

Category: 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.

Category Pair: A pair of philosophical categories within materialist dialectics. Materialist dialectics tend to focus on universal category pairs which can be used to examine the characteristics, relations, and development of all things, phenomena, and ideas. Examples of category pairs include: private and common; content and form; reason and result; essence and phenomena.

Characteristics: The features and attributes that exist *internally*—within—a given thing, phenomena, or idea.

Chemical Motion: Changes of organic and inorganic substances in processes of combination and separation.

Chemical Reflection: The reflection of mechanical, physical, and chemical changes and reactions of inorganic matter (i.e., changes in structures, position, physical-chemical properties, and the processes of

combining and dissolving substances).

Circulation: The way in which commodities and money are exchanged for one another.

Commodity: In Marxist political economy, commodities include anything which can be bought and sold, with both a *use value* (i.e. it satisfies a need of any kind) and a *value-form* (aka. 'Exchange value' and understood as the average socially necessary labour time needed to produce this object). Under capitalism, more and more human activity and production is 'commodified' (mediated through market exchange).

Common Laws: Laws (of nature and/or human society) that are applicable to a broader range of subjects than private laws, and which impact many different subjects. For instance: the law of preservation of mass, the law of preservation of energy, etc.

Comprehensive Viewpoint: A viewpoint which seeks to consider the internal dialectical relationships between the component parts, factors, and aspects within a thing or phenomenon, and which considers external mutual interactions with other things, phenomena, and ideas. Dialectical materialist philosophy *demand*s a comprehensive basis in order to fully and properly understand things and phenomena in order to effectively solve problems in real life and develop humanity towards communism.

Conception: A relatively complete reflection within human consciousness of objective things and phenomena.

Concrete Labor: The production of a specific commodity with a specific value through labor. When labor is considered without the consideration of output value, it is referred to as abstract labor.

Conditioned Reflex: Conditioned reflexes are *reactions* which are learned by organisms. These responses are acquired as animals associate previously unrelated neural stimuli with a particular reaction.

Consciousness: The dynamic and creative reflection of the objective world in human brains; the subjective image of the objective world which is produced by the human brain.

Content and Form: Content is the philosophical category which 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. Content and Form have a dialectical relationship with one another, in which content determines form and form impacts back on content.

Contradiction: A contradiction is a *relationship* in which two forces oppose one another, leading to mutual development.

David Ricardo: (1772 - 1823) British economist who, along with Adam Smith, was one of the key figures in the development of Political Economy which was a basis for much of the work of Marx and Engels.

Deductive Inference: Logical inference which extrapolates from the general to the specific.

Definition: 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.

Development: The change and motion of things, phenomena, and ideas with a forward tendency: from less advanced to more advanced; and/or from a less complete to a more complete level.

Dialectic(al): In Marxism-Leninism, the term *dialectic* (adjective: dialectical) refers to regular and mutual relationships, interactions, transformations, motions, and developments of things, phenomena, and processes in nature, society and human thought.

Dialectical Materialism: A universal philosophical and methodological system which forms the theoretical core of a scientific worldview. Dialectical Materialism was first developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels with the express goal of achieving communism. Dialectical Materialism has since been defended and developed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin as well as many others.

Dialectical Negation: A stage of development in which a new subject arises from a contradiction between two previous subjects; dialectical negation is never an endpoint of development, as every dialectical negation creates conditions for further development and negation.

Dialectical Relationship: A relationship in which two things, phe-

nomena, or ideas mutually impact one another, leading to development and negation.

Dialectics: A philosophical methodology which searches for truth by examining contradictions and relationships between things, phenomena, and ideas.

(Characteristic of) Diversity: The characteristic which all things, phenomena, and ideas share, dictating that no two subjects (and no two relationships between any two subjects) are exactly the same, even if they exist between very similar things, phenomena, and ideas and/or in very similar situations.

Diversity in Unity: The universal principle which states that even though all relationships are diverse and different from one another, they also exist in unity, because all relationships share a foundation in the material world.

Dogmatism: An 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.

Duality of Labor: The Marxist economic concept which recognizes labor as having two intrinsic and inseparable aspects: abstract labor and concrete labor.

Dynamic and Creative Reflection: The most advanced form of reflection, which only occurs in matter that has the highest (known) level of structural complexity, such as the human brain.

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.

Economic Base: See *Base*.

Economism: Economism is a style of political activism, typified by the ideas of German political theorist Eduard Bernstein, which stresses directing the struggle towards short-term political/economic goals (such as higher wages for workers) at the expense of the larger socialist revolutionary project.

Eduard Bernstein: (1850 - 1932) German political theorist who rejected many of Marx's theories.

Emotional Consciousness: The lower stage of the cognitive process. In this stage of cognitive development, humans, through practical activities, use our senses to reflect objective things and phenomena (with all their perceived specific characteristics and rich manifestations) in human consciousness.

Empirical Consciousness: 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: Knowledge which results from processes of empirical consciousness and which is characterised by rich and detailed, but still incomplete, understanding of phenomena. It can be utilized for practical ends, but still falls short of full theoretical analysis and comprehension.

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 the dialectical (changing) relationships between objects.

Empirio-criticism: A reified form of empiricism which argues that, since sense data and experience are the sole sources of knowledge, philosophy should be based on scientific principles. As such it can be considered a methodological approach of the empiricist perspective. This school of thought, proposed by Mach and Avenarius, was roundly attacked by Lenin in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which highlights the logical (and undesirable) endpoints of such a philosophy, including that of solipsism, as well as an inability to analyse and theorise processes of change.

Epistemology: The theoretical study of knowledge. It primarily deals with the philosophical question of: "how do we know what we know?"

Equilibrium: A state of motion in which one or more subjects are not undergoing changes in position, form, and/or structure. Equilibri-

um is only ever a temporary stasis of development which will eventually yield to motion, development, and/or negation.

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. Essence always determines which phenomena appear, but phenomena do not always accurately reflect essence in human perception; in other words, it is possible to misinterpret phenomena, leading to a misunderstanding of essence, or to mistake phenomena for essence.

Exchange Value: A quantity relationship which describes the ratios of exchangeability between different commodities, with Marx's famous example of 20 yards of linen being equivalent in exchange value to one coat. Through analysis Marx shows that in reality the thing being compared is the amount of socially necessary labour required to make the commodities being compared.

Excitation: Reactions of simple plant and animal life-forms which occur when they change position or structure as a direct result of physical changes in their habitat.

External Contradictions: Contradictions which exist between two or more subjects as external relations.

False Consciousness: Forms of consciousness (ideas, thoughts, concepts, etc.) which are incorrect and misaligned from reality. Equated with 'ideology' by Engels, it refers to an idealistic, dogmatic perspective which will inevitably result in errors of analysis and therefore practice.

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.

(Basic) Forms of Motion: Engels broke motion down into five basic forms which are dialectically linked; the different 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 mis-

understandings and confusion about motion and development.

Form: Philosophical category which relates to how we perceive objects, phenomena, and ideas.

Form of Existence of Matter: The ways in which we perceive the existence of matter in our universe; specifically, matter in our universe has the form of existing in space and time.

Form of Value: See *Value Form*.

Forward Tendency of Motion: The tendency for things, phenomena, and ideas to move from less advanced to more advanced forms through processes of motion and development.

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

Fundamental and Non-Fundamental Contradictions: A fundamental contradiction *defines* the essence of a relationship. 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.

(Characteristic of) Generality: A universal characteristic which holds that all things, phenomena, and ideas interact and mutually transform one another.

General Relationship: 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.

Generality of Relationships: Relationships can exist with across a spectrum of generality; this spectrum ranges from the least general relationships - known as special relationships - which only occur between or within two specific things/phenomena on one end; to the most general relationships - known as universal relationships - which occur between or within all things/phenomena.

George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: (1770 - 1831) German philosophy professor & objective idealistic philosopher; developed the system

of idealist dialectics which Marx and Engels used as a basis for developing materialist dialectics.

Historical Materialism: The application of materialist dialectics and dialectical materialism to the study of human history.

Historical Viewpoint: A viewpoint which demands that subjects be considered in their current stage of motion and development, while also taking into consideration the development and transformation of the subject over time.

Idealism: A philosophical position which holds that the only reliable experience of reality occurs within human consciousness. Idealists believe that human reason 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.

Induction: The reaction of animals with simple nervous systems which can sense or feel their environments. Induction occurs through unconditioned reflex mechanisms.

Inductive Inference: Logical inference which extrapolates from specific observations to general conclusions.

Intelligibility: The human cognitive capacity to accurately perceive the external material world.

Internal and External Contradictions: Internal contradictions are contradictions which exist within the internal relations of a subject, while external contradictions exist between two or more subjects as external relations.

Internal Contradictions: See *Internal and External Contradictions*.

Judgment: The 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.

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

Labor Value: The amount of value which workers produce through *labor*.

Law of Transformation Between Quantity and Quality: The universal law of dialectical materialism which concerns the universal mode of motion and development processes of nature, society, and human thought, which states that 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.

Law of Unification and Opposition Between Opposites: The universal law of dialectical materialism which states that the fundamental, originating, and universal driving force of all motion and development processes is the inherent and objective contradictions which exists in all things, phenomena, and ideas.

Laws: In dialectical materialism, laws are the regular, common, obvious, natural, objective relations between internal aspects, factors, and attributes of a thing or phenomenon or between things and phenomena.

Laws of Nature: Laws that arise in the natural world, including within the human body (and are never products of human conscious activities). Such law includes the laws of physics, chemistry, and other natural phenomena which govern the material world.

Laws of Society: Laws of human activity in social relations; such laws are unable to manifest beyond the conscious activities of humans, but they are still objective.

Laws of Thought: Laws which govern the intrinsic relationships between concepts, categories, judgments, inference, and the development process of human rational awareness.

Life-Process: Processes of motion and change which occur within organisms to sustain life.

Ludwig Feuerbach: (1804 - 1872) German philosophy professor, materialist philosopher; Marx and Engels drew many of their ideas from the works of Feuerbach (whom they also criticized).

M→C→M': The mode of circulation described by Marx as existing

under capitalism, in which capitalists spend money to buy commodities (including the commodified labor of workers), with the intention of selling those 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. See also: $C \rightarrow M \rightarrow C$

Machism: See *Empirio-Criticism*.

Manifestation: How a given thing, phenomenon, or idea is expressed externally in the material world.

Marxism-Leninism: A system of scientific opinions and theories focused on liberating the working class from capitalism and achieving a stateless, classless, communist society. The core ideas of this system were first developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, then defended and further developed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.

Material Conditions: The material external environment in which humans live, including 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.

Material Production Activity: 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.

Materialism: A philosophical position that holds that the material world exists outside of the mind, and that human ideas and thoughts stem from observation and sense experience of this external world. Materialism rejects the idealist notion that truth can only be sought solely through reasoning and human consciousness.

Materialist Dialectics: A scientific system of philosophy concerned with motion, development, and common relationships, and with the most common rules of motion and development of nature, society, and human thought.

Matter: A philosophical category denoting things and phenomena, existing in objective external reality, which human beings access through our sense perceptions.

Means of Production: Physical inputs and systems used in the production of goods and services, including: machinery, factory buildings, tools, equipment, and anything else used in *producing* goods and services.

Mechanical Motion: Changes in positions of objects in space.

Mental Reflection: Reactions which occur in animals with central nervous systems. Mental reflections occur through conditioned reflex mechanisms through learning.

Metaphysical Materialism: Metaphysical materialism was strongly influenced by the metaphysical, mechanical thinking of classical mechanics, which was a scientific and philosophical movement which explored mechanical machines and compared natural phenomena to mechanical devices. The classical mechanics developed a belief that all things—including living organisms—were built and could be built as mechanical devices, 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.

Metaphysics: A branch of philosophy that attempts to explain the fundamental nature of reality. 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. Generally speaking, metaphysics presents nature as a collection of objects and phenomena which are isolated from one another and fundamentally unchanging.

Methodology: 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.

Mode: The way or manner in which something occurs or exists.

Mode of Existence of Matter: Refers to how matter exists in our universe; specifically, matter exists in our motion in a mode of motion.

Motion: Also known as “change;” motion/change occurs as a result of the mutual impacts which occur between two things, phenomena, or ideas in relation with one another.

Motion in Equilibrium: Motion in equilibrium is motion that has not changed the positions, forms, and/or structures of things. Motion in Equilibrium is only ever temporary in nature; all motion will eventually lead to changes in position, form, and/or structure.

Narodnik: Agrarian socialist movement of the 1860s and 70s in the Russian Empire, composed of peasants who rose up in a failed campaign against the tsar.

Natural Law: See *Laws of Nature*

Natural Science: Science which deals with the natural world, including chemistry, biology, physics, geology, etc.

Negation: The development process through which two contradicting objects mutually develop one another until one is overtaken by the other. In dialectical materialism, negation takes the form of dialectical negation.

New Economic Policy: Also known as the NEP; this early Soviet policy was devised as Vladimir Illyich Lenin 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.

Objective Dialectics: The dialectical processes which occur in the material world, including all of the motion, relationships, and dynamic changes which occur in space and time.

Objective Existence: Existence which manifests outside of and independently of human consciousness, whether humans can perceive it or not.

Objective Idealism: A form of idealism which asserts that the ideal and consciousness are the primary existence, while also positing that the ideal and consciousness are objective, and that they exist independently of nature and humans.

Objectiveness: 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, all other subjects exist as external objects.

Obviousness and Randomness: The philosophical category of Ob-

viousness refers to events that occur because of the essential internal aspects of a subject which become reasons for certain results in certain conditions: the obvious has to happen in a certain way, it can't happen any other way. 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, and may occur in many different ways. Obviousness and Randomness have a dialectical relationship with one another and obvious and random aspects can mutually impact one another and/or lead to one another.

Opportunism: A system of political opinions with no direction, no clear path, and/or no coherent viewpoint, focusing on whatever actions or decisions might be beneficial for the opportunist in the short term.

Opposites: Such aspects, properties and tendencies of motion which oppose one another, yet are, simultaneously, conditions and premises of the existence of one another.

Ordinary Consciousness: Perception that is formed passively, stemming from the daily activities of humans.

Period of Motion: Development which occurs between two quality shifts, including the quality shifts themselves.

Petty Bourgeoisie: 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. Also called the petite bourgeoisie.

Petty Commodity Production: See *Simple Commodity Production*.

Phenomenon: Anything that is observable by the human senses.

Physical Motion: Motion of molecules, electrons, fundamental particles, thermal processes, electricity, etc., in time and space.

Physical Reflection: Reflection which occurs any time two material objects interact and the features of the objects are transferred to one other.

Point of View: See *Viewpoint*.

Populism: The political philosophy of the Narodnik movement; this

political philosophy was focused on bringing about 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. Populism overtly opposed Marxism and dialectical materialism and was based on subjective idealist utopianism

Positivism: The belief that we can test scientific knowledge through scientific methods, and through logic, math, etc.; positivism tends to overlap significantly with empiricism in theory and practice.

Possibility and Reality: The philosophical category of Possibility refers to things that have not happened nor existed in reality yet, but that would happen, or would exist given necessary conditions. The philosophical category of Reality refers to things that exist or have existed in reality and in human thought.

Practice: Human activity which provides more information about the world around us.

Pragmatism: Pragmatism refers to a form of subjectivism in which one centers one's own immediate material concerns over all other considerations.

Praxis: Human activities which have intentionality and purpose to transform nature and society. Note that Marx and Engels, in the original German, also used the word *praxis* to refer to *practice*.

Primary and Secondary Contradictions: 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, and it depends heavily upon the material conditions and the situation being analyzed.

Primary Existence: Existence which precedes and determines other existences; materialists believe that the external material world is the primary existence which determines the ideal, while idealists believe that human consciousness ("the ideal") is the primary existence from which truth is ultimately derived.

Primitive Materialism: An early form of materialism which recog-

nizes that matter is the primary existence, 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. This was later developed into Metaphysical Materialism and, later, Dialectical Materialism.

Principle of General Relationships: A principle of dialectical materialism which states that all things, phenomena, and ideas are related to one another, and are defined by these internal and external relationships.

Private and Common: The *Private* philosophical category encompasses specific things, phenomena, and ideas; the *Common* philosophical category defines the common aspects, attributes, factors, and relations that exist in many things and phenomena. Private and Common are relative in nature and have a dialectical relationship with one another.

Private Laws: Laws which apply only to a specific range of things and phenomena, i.e. laws of mechanical motion, laws of chemical motion, laws of biological motion, etc.

Production Force: The combination of the means of production and workers within human society.

Proletariat: The people who provide labor under capitalism; the proletariat do not own their own means of production, and must therefore sell their labor to those who do own means of production; also called the Working Class. See also: *Bourgeoisie*, *Petty Bourgeoisie*.

Quality: The unity of component parts, taken together, which defines a subject and distinguishes it from other subjects.

Quality Shift: A change in quality which takes place in the motion and development process of things, phenomena, and ideas, occurring when quantity change meets a certain perceived threshold.

Quantity: The total amount of component parts that compose a subject.

Quantity Range: The range of quantity changes which can accumulate without leading to change in quality related to any given thing, phenomenon, or idea.

Quintessence: Original Vietnamese word: *timh boa*. Literally, it means “the best, highest, most beautiful, defining characteristics” of a con-

cept, and, unlike the English word quintessence, it has an exclusively positive connotation.

Rational Consciousness: The higher stage of the cognitive process, which 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.

Reason and Result: The Reason philosophical 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* philosophical 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. Not to be confused with the metaphysical concept of “cause and effect,” which attributes a single cause to any given effect.

Reasoning: The final phase of rational consciousness, formed on the basis of synthesizing judgments so as to extrapolate new knowledge about the perceived subject.

Reflection: 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.

Relative and Absolute: “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.

Relativism: A position that all truth is relative and that nothing can ever be absolutely, objectively known.

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.

Scientific: An adjective which describes methodologies, approaches, and practices of gaining knowledge and insight which are methodological and/or systematic in nature.

Scientific Consciousness: Conscious activities which actively gather information from the methodological and/or systematic observations of the characteristics, nature, and inherent relationships of research subjects. Scientific consciousness is considered indirect because it takes place outside of the course of ordinary daily activities.

Scientific Experimental Activity: 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.

Scientific Materialist Viewpoint: 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.

Scientific Socialism: A body of theory and knowledge (which must be constantly tested against reality) focused on the practical pursuit of changing the world to bring about socialism through the leadership of the proletariat.

Scientific Worldview: A worldview that is expressed by a systematic pursuit of knowledge that generally and correctly reflects 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.

Second International: Founded in Paris in 1889 to continue the work of the First International; it fell apart in 1916 because members from different nations could not maintain solidarity through the outbreak of World War I.

Self-motion: In the original Vietnamese, the word *tự vận động*. Literally meaning: “it moves itself.”

Sensation: The subjective reflection of the objective world in human consciousness as perceived through human senses.

Sensuous Human Activity/Sensuous Activity: A description of human activity developed by Marx which acknowledges that all human activity is simultaneously active in the sense that our conscious activity can transform the world, as well as passive in the sense in that

all human thoughts fundamentally derive from observation and sense experience of the material world.

Simple Commodity Production: What Marx called the “ $C \rightarrow M \rightarrow C$ ” mode of circulation.

Simple Exchange: When individual producers trade the products they have made directly, themselves, for other commodities.

Social Being: The material existence of human society, as opposed to social consciousness. See also: *Base*.

Social Consciousness: 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, as opposed to social being. See also: *Superstructure*.

Social Motion: Changes in the economy, politics, culture, and social life of human beings.

Socialization: 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.

Socialized Production Force: A production force which has been socialized - that is to say, a production force which has been organized into collective social activity.

Socio-Political Activity: Praxis activity utilized by various communities and organizations in human society to transform political-social relations in order to promote social development.

Solipsism: A form of idealism in which one believes that the self is the only basis for truth.

Sophistry: The use of misleading arguments, usually with the intention of deception, 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 works) for being shrewd and deceptive rhetoricians.

Stage of Development: 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.

Struggle of Opposites: The tendency of opposites to eliminate and negate each other.

Subjective Dialectics/Dialectical Thought: 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.

Subjective Idealism: Subjective idealism asserts that consciousness is the primary existence and that truth can be obtained only or primarily through conscious activity and reasoning. Subjective idealism asserts that all things and phenomena can only be experienced as subjective sensory perceptions, with some forms of subjective idealism even explicitly denying the objective existence of material reality altogether. See also: *Empirio-Criticism*, *Objective Idealism*

Subjectivism: A philosophical position in which one centers one's own self and conscious activities in perspective and worldview, failing to test their own perceptions against material and social reality.

Superstructure: The ideal (non-material) components of human society, including: 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. See also: *Base*.

Surplus Value: The extra amount of value a capitalist is able to secure by exploiting wage-labourers (by paying workers less than the full value of their labour). Workers will spend part of their workday reproducing their own labour-power (through earning enough to eat, secure shelter and other cultural needs) and the rest of the time will be spent producing surplus value which is then appropriated by the capitalist as profit.

Symbolization: The representation of an objective thing or phenomenon in human consciousness which has been reflected by sensation and conception.

Systematic Structure: A structure which includes within itself a system of component parts and relationships.

The Law of Negation of Negation: A universal law of materialist dialectics which states that the fundamental and universal tendency of motion and development occurs through a cycle of dialectical negation, wherein each and every negation is, in turn, negated once more.

Theoretical Consciousness: The indirect, abstract, systematic level of perception in which the nature and laws of things and phenomena are generalized and abstracted.

Theoretical Knowledge: Knowledge which is abstract and generalized, resulting from theoretical conscious activities which include repeated and varied observations.

Thing-in-Itself: The actual material object which exists outside of our consciousness, as it exists outside of our consciousness.

Third International: Also known as the Communist International (or the ComIntern for short); founded in Moscow in 1919, 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.

Three Component Parts of Marxism-Leninism: 1. The Philosophy of Marxism. 2. The Political Economy of Marxism. 3. Scientific Socialism.

Threshold: The amount, or degree, of quantity change at which quality change occurs.

Truth: A correct and *accurate* reflection of objective reality.

Unconditioned Reflex: Reactions which are not learned, but simply occur automatically based on physiological mechanisms occurring within an organism, characterized by permanent connections between sensory perceptions and reactions.

Unilateral Consideration: The consideration of a subject from one side only.

Unintelligibility: A philosophical position which denies the human cognitive capacity to accurately perceive the external material world.

Unity in Diversity: A concept in materialist dialectics which holds that within universal relationships 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.

Universal Laws: Laws that impact every aspect of nature, society, and human thought. Materialist dialectics is the study of these universal laws.

Universal Relationship: The most general kind of relationship; relationships that exist between and within every thing and all phenomena; along with development, universal relationships are one of the two primary subjects of study of materialist dialectics.

Use Value: A concept in classical political economy and Marxist economics which refers to tangible features of a commodity (a tradable object) that can fulfill some human requirement or desire, or which serve a useful purpose.

Utopianism: A political and philosophical movement which held the belief that “a New Moral World” of happiness, enlightenment, and prosperity could be created through education, science, technology, and communal living.

Value-Form: Also known as “form of value;” the social form of a commodity. Under capitalism, through the exchange of qualitatively different commodities, the money form of value is established as the general equivalent which can functionally be exchanged for all other values; money is therefore the most universal value-form under capitalism.

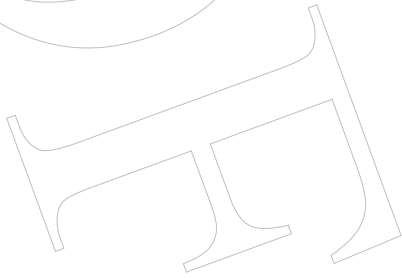
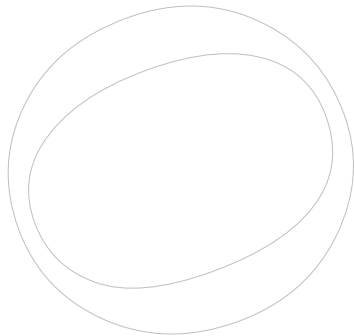
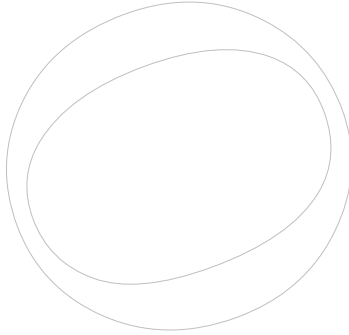
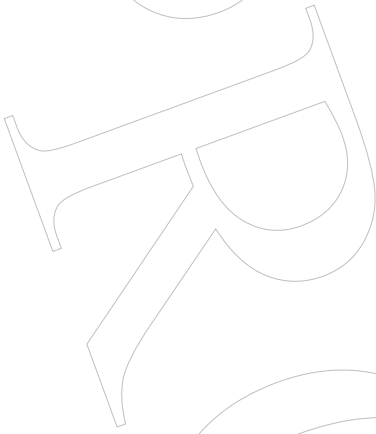
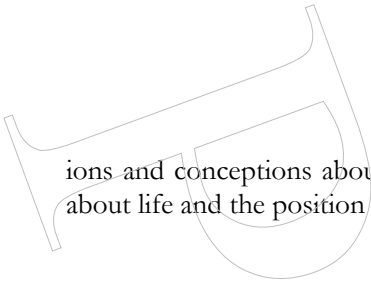
Viewpoint: Also known as point of view or perspective; the starting point of analysis which determines the direction of thinking from which phenomena and problems are considered.

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

Working Class: See *Proletariat*.

Worldview: Refers to the whole of an individual's or society's opin-

ions and conceptions about the world, about humans ourselves, and about life and the position of human beings in the world.



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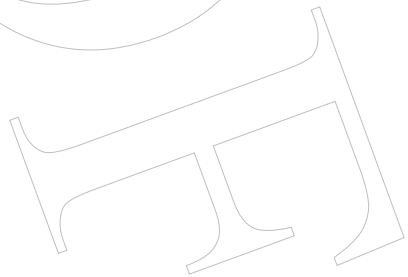
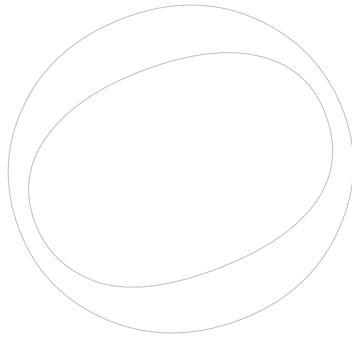
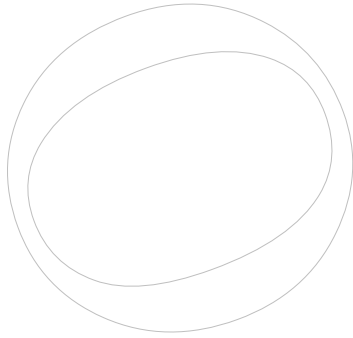
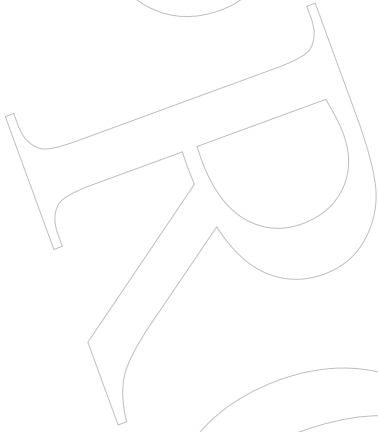
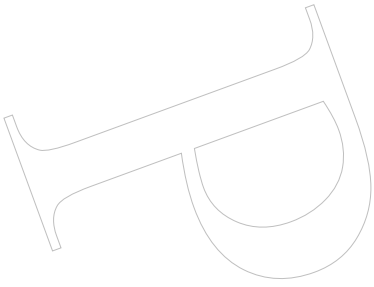
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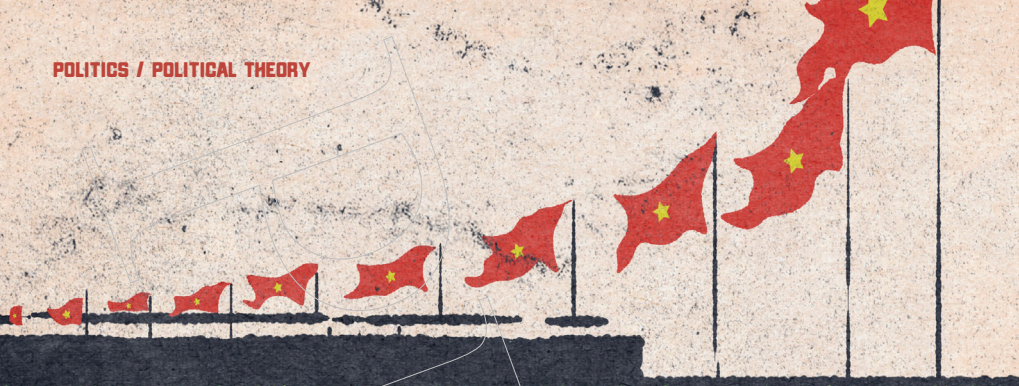
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