

# **ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF PHILOSOPHY**

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# **Part 1**

# **Philosophical Problems**

# INTRODUCTION

## ***1. Why must we study philosophy?***

We propose, in the course of this work, to present and explain the elementary principles of materialist philosophy.

Why? Because Marxism is intimately linked with a philosophy and a method: those of dialectical materialism. It is therefore indispensable to study this philosophy and this method in order to fully understand Marxism and to refute the arguments of bourgeois theories as well as to undertake an effective political struggle.

Indeed, Lenin said, “Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement” (V. I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*). This means firstly: we must tie theory and practice together.

*What is practice?* It is the *act of realizing*. For example, industry and agriculture realize (i.e., transform into reality) certain theories (certain chemical, physical or biological theories).

*What is theory?* It is the *knowledge* of the things which we want to realize.

A person may be only practical—but then he realizes routinely. A person may be only theoretical—but then what he conceives of is often unrealizable. It is necessary therefore for there to be a connection between theory and practice. The question is to know what this theory is to be and what its connection with practice is to be.

We think that the militant worker must have a correct method of analyzing and reasoning in order to realize a correct revolutionary action. We believe that he needs a method that is not a dogma providing him with ready-made solutions, but rather one that takes facts and circumstances—which are never the same—into account, and that never separates theory from practice, reasoning from life. It is precisely this method that is contained in the philosophy of dialectical materialism, the basis of Marxism, which we propose to explain.

## ***2. Is the study of philosophy a difficult thing?***

It is generally thought that the study of philosophy is a very difficult thing for workers and demands a specialized knowledge. It must be admit-

ted that the way in which bourgeois manuals have been written certainly would confirm this idea and discourage workers.

We are not trying to deny the difficulties presented by study in general and by philosophy in particular; but these difficulties are perfectly surmountable, and they stem from the fact that it is a question of something new for many of our readers.

From the beginning, moreover, we are going to ask them to reexamine the definitions of words which have been distorted in colloquial speech.

### **3. What is philosophy?**

Commonly, a philosopher is understood to be either someone who has his head in the clouds, or someone who always sees the good side of things, who does not worry too much about things. However, quite the contrary, a philosopher is someone who wants to find certain precise answers for certain questions; and if we consider that philosophy tries to explain the problems of the universe (Where does the world come from? Where are we going? etc.), we see that, consequently, the philosopher is concerned with many things, and, conversely to what is said, worries quite a bit.

Hence, to define philosophy, we shall say that it seeks to explain the universe and nature and that *it is the study of the most general problems*.

Less general problems are studied by the sciences. Philosophy is thus an extension of the sciences in the sense that it *derives* from the sciences and is *dependent* on them.

We hasten to add that Marxist philosophy provides a method for resolving all problems, and that this method belongs to what is called materialism.

### **4. What is materialist philosophy?**

Here again a confusion exists that we must quickly denounce. Commonly, we consider a materialist to be someone who only wishes to enjoy material pleasures. Playing on the word “materialism,” which contains the word “matter,” people have given it a completely false meaning.

While studying materialism in the scientific sense of the word, we are going to return its true meaning to it. Our being materialists does not prevent us from examining materialism or from having an ideal and fighting for its triumph.

The first men tried to explain nature and the world but were unable to. The sciences enable us to explain the world and the phenomena that surround us; however, the discoveries that have permitted the sciences to progress are quite recent.

The ignorance of the first men was therefore an obstacle to their quest for truth. That is why in the course of history, because of this ignorance, we see religions sprouting up that also try to explain the world, but by supernatural forces. This is an antiscientific explanation. However, gradually, as science develops and as the centuries pass, men will try to explain the world by material facts based on scientific experiments. It is from there—from this desire to explain the world by the sciences—that materialist philosophy is born.

In the following pages, we are going to study what materialism is, but from now on, we must remember that *materialism is nothing other than the scientific explanation of the universe*.

While studying the history of materialist philosophy, we shall see how difficult the struggle against ignorance has been. We must state, moreover, that even today this struggle is not over, since materialism and ignorance continue to subsist side by side.

It is in the heart of this struggle that Marx and Engels intervened. Understanding the importance of the great discoveries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they enabled materialist philosophy to make enormous advances in the scientific explanation of the universe. It is in this way that dialectical materialism was born. They were the first to understand that the laws that govern the world can also explain the progress of societies. This was how they formulated the famous theory of historical materialism.

In this work we propose to study first materialism, then dialectical materialism and finally historical materialism. But, firstly, we would like to establish the relationship between materialism and Marxism.

## ***5. What is the relationship between materialism and Marxism?***

This can be summarized in the following way:

1. The philosophy of materialism constitutes the basis of Marxism (V. I. Lenin, *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*).
2. This materialist philosophy, which seeks to provide a scientific explanation for the problems of the world, progresses, in the course of history, at the same time as the sciences. Consequently, Marxism has resulted from the sciences, is based on them and evolves with them.
3. Before Marx and Engels, at several times and in different forms, there were materialist philosophies. But in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the sciences having taken a great step forward, Marx and Engels renewed this old materialism with the help of modern science and gave us modern materialism, which is called *dialectical materialism*, and which constitutes the basis of Marxism.

We see from these few explanations that the philosophy of materialism, contrary to what is said, has a history. This history is intimately linked with that of the sciences. Marxism, based on materialism, did not come out of the brain of a single man. It is the result and the continuation of the old materialism, which was already very advanced with Diderot. Marxism is the flowering of the materialism developed by the Encyclopedists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Marxism is a living theory, and to show right away the manner in which it looks at problems, we are going to take an example which everyone knows: the problem of class struggle.

What do people think about this question? Some think that the fight for their daily bread has nothing to do with political struggle. Others think that it is sufficient to fight in the street, denying the necessity of organization. Still others claim that only political struggle will provide a solution to this question.

For the Marxist, the class struggle includes:

- a. an economic struggle;
- b. a political struggle;
- c. an ideological struggle.

The problem must therefore be placed simultaneously in these three contexts.

- a. One cannot fight for daily bread without fighting for peace, without defending liberty, and without defending all those ideas that help the struggle for these objectives.
- b. The same thing holds true for the political struggle, which, since Marx's time, has become a true science: one is obligated to take into account, at the same time, the economic situation and ideological currents in order to fight such a struggle.
- c. As for the ideological struggle, which appears through propaganda, in order for it to be efficient, one must take into account the economic and political situations.

Thus we see that all these problems are intimately linked and, hence, one can make no decision about any aspect of this great problem, the class struggle—in a strike for example—without taking into consideration each aspect of the problem and the problem as a whole.

Therefore, it is the person who is capable of fighting in all these areas who will give the best leadership to the movement.

This is how a Marxist understands the problem of class struggle. Now, in the *ideological* struggle that we must carry on every day, we find ourselves faced with problems that are difficult to resolve: the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, the origins of the world, etc. It is dialectical materialism that will give us a method of reasoning, that will allow us to resolve all these problems and, as well, to expose all those attempts to distort Marxism, while claiming to complete or renew it.

## ***6. Campaigns of the bourgeoisie against Marxism***

These attempts at falsification are based on quite varied arguments. Some people try to stir up the socialist authors of the pre-Marxist period (before Marx) against Marxism. In this way, we often see the “utopians” used against Marx. Others use Proudhon; still others draw from the revisionists before 1914 (although they were skillfully refuted by Lenin). But what must be especially emphasized is the campaign of silence that the bourgeoisie has undertaken against Marxism. It has done everything to

## Elementary Principles of Philosophy

prevent the Marxist form of materialist philosophy from being known. Particularly striking in this regard is the whole of philosophical instruction given in France.

In establishments of secondary education, philosophy is taught. But one could go through this whole instruction without ever learning that there exists a materialist philosophy elaborated by Marx and Engels. When materialism is spoken of in the philosophy manuals (for it must be mentioned!), Marxism and materialism are treated separately. Marxism is generally presented uniquely as a political doctrine, and when historical materialism is spoken of, it is not mentioned in connection with the philosophy of materialism. Finally, dialectical materialism is totally neglected.

This situation does not exist solely in the primary schools and the high schools: it is exactly the same in the universities. Typically, in France one can be a “specialist” in philosophy, endowed with the highest diplomas available from French universities, without knowing that Marxism has a philosophy, which is materialism, and without knowing that traditional materialism has a modern form, which is Marxism, or dialectical materialism.

What we ourselves wish to show is that Marxism includes a general concept not only of society, but even of the universe itself. It is therefore useless, contrary to what some claim, to regret that the great defect of Marxism is its lack of philosophy, and to try, as some “theoreticians” of the workers’ movement do, to find this philosophy that Marxism lacks. For Marxism does have a philosophy: dialectical materialism.

Nevertheless, in spite of this campaign of silence, despite all the falsifications made and precautions taken by the ruling classes, Marxism and its philosophy are becoming more and more well known.

# 1 – THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM OF PHILOSOPHY

## ***1. How should we begin the study of philosophy?***

In our introduction, we said repeatedly that the philosophy of dialectical materialism was the basis of Marxism.

The goal that we propose for ourselves is the study of this philosophy—but, in order to attain this goal, we must advance by stages.

When we speak of dialectical materialism, we have before us two words: *dialectical* and *materialism*, which means that materialism is dialectical. We know that materialism already existed before Marx and Engels, but that it was they, with the help of the discoveries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who transformed this materialism and created “dialectical” materialism.

We shall examine later on the meaning of the word “dialectical,” which designates the modern form of materialism.

But since there were materialist philosophers before Marx and Engels (for example, Diderot in the 18<sup>th</sup> century), and since all materialists have points in common, we must first study the *history of materialism* before taking up dialectical materialism. We must also know the concepts with which people oppose materialism.

## ***2. Two ways to explain the world***

We have seen that philosophy is the “study of the most general problems,” and that its goal is to explain the world, nature and man.

If we open a bourgeois philosophy manual, we are bewildered by the numerous different philosophies that we find. They are designated by a variety of more or less complicated words all ending in “ism”: criticism, evolutionism, intellectualism, etc., and this variety creates confusion. The bourgeoisie, moreover, has done nothing to clarify this situation; on the contrary. But we can already classify these systems and distinguish two large currents, two clearly opposed concepts:

- a) The scientific concept of the world; and
- b) The unscientific concept of the world.

### ***3. Matter and spirit***

When philosophers took it upon themselves to explain the world, nature and man—in fact everything that surrounds us—they were obliged to make some distinctions. We ourselves can state that there are some things, material objects, that we see and touch. Then there are other realities that we cannot see or touch, or measure, such as our ideas.

Hence, we may classify things in this way: on the one hand, those that are material; on the other hand, those that are not material and belong to the domain of the spirit, thought and ideas.

This is how philosophers found themselves in the presence of matter and spirit.

### ***4. What is matter? What is spirit?***

We have just seen, generally, how people came to classify things according to whether they are matter or spirit.

But we should note that this distinction is made in different forms and in different words.

Thus, instead of speaking of spirit, we speak also of thought, of our ideas, of our conscience, and of the soul; the same as when we speak of nature, of the world, of the earth, or of being, we are really talking about matter.

Similarly, when Engels, in his book *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, speaks of being and thought, being signifies matter and thought signifies spirit.

To define what thought or spirit, being or matter is, we shall say:

*Thought* is the idea which we conceive of things; some of these ideas ordinarily come to us through our sensations and correspond to material objects; other ideas, like those of God, of philosophy, of the infinite, of thought itself, do not correspond to material objects. The essential thing to remember is that we have ideas, thoughts or feelings because we see and we feel.

*Matter* or being is what our sensations and our perceptions show and present to us; more generally, it is everything that surrounds us, which is called the “exterior world.” For example, my piece of paper is white.

Knowing that it is white is an idea, and it is my senses that give me this idea. But matter is the piece of paper itself.

This is why, when philosophers speak of the relations between being and thought, or between spirit and matter, or between consciousness and the brain, etc., it all deals with the same question and means: between matter and spirit, or between being and thought, which is the more important term? Which one is prior to the other? This is the fundamental question of philosophy.

### ***5. The fundamental problem or question of philosophy***

Each one of us has wondered what happens to us after death, where the world comes from, and how the Earth was formed. And it is difficult for us to admit that there has always been something. We tend to think at a certain moment there was nothing. That is why it is easier to believe what religion teaches: “the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters... then matter came.” Likewise, we wonder where our thoughts are, and thus we have the problem of the relationship between the brain and thought. Moreover, there are many other ways of asking the same question. For example, what is the relation between will and ability? “Will” means here spirit or thought; and “ability” signifies what is possible: being or matter. Also, we frequently run into the question of the relation between “social conscience” and “social being.”

The fundamental question of philosophy is presented, therefore, in different ways. We see how important it is always to recognize the way in which the problem of the relation between matter and spirit is presented, for we know that there can be only two answers to this question:

1. A scientific answer; and
2. An unscientific answer.

### ***6. Idealism or materialism***

This is how philosophers were caused to take a position on this important question.

The first men, completely ignorant, having no knowledge of the world or of themselves—and possessing only poor technical means of act-

ing on the world—attributed the responsibility for everything that surprised them to supernatural beings. In their imagination, they arrived at the conclusion that each one of us has a double existence. Troubled by the idea of this “double,” they came to imagine that their ideas and their sensations were produced not by activities of their “bodies, but of a distinct soul which inhabits the body and leaves it at death....” (Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, New York: International Publishers, 1941, p. 20).

Afterwards was born the idea of the immortality of the soul and of a possible life of the spirit independent of matter.

Similarly, the weakness and anxiety of these men, when confronted with the forces of nature and all those phenomena which they did not understand—and that the level of technology did not permit them to dominate (germination, storms, floods, etc.)—led them to suppose that, behind these forces, there were all-powerful beings, “spirits” or “gods,” benevolent or malevolent, but, in any case, capricious.

Thus they believed in gods, in beings more powerful than men, but they imagined them in the form of men or animals, as material bodies. It was only later that souls and gods (then *the* only God, which replaced the gods) were conceived of as pure spirits.

Then they arrived at the idea that there existed in reality spirits who had a quite specific life, completely independent of that of bodies, and who did not need bodies to exist.

Later this question was raised in a more precise manner with relation to religion, in the following form: “Did God create the world or has the world been in existence eternally? The answers which the philosophers gave to this question split them into two great camps” (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 21).

Those who, adopting the unscientific explanation, acknowledged the creation of the world by God, i.e., affirmed that spirit had created matter, formed the faction of idealism.

The others—those who tried to give a scientific explanation of the world and who thought that nature or matter was the principal element—belong to the different schools of materialism.

At their origin, these two expressions, idealism and materialism, meant only that.

Hence, idealism and materialism give two opposed and contradictory answers to the fundamental problem of philosophy.

Idealism is the unscientific concept of the world. Materialism is the scientific concept of the world.

We shall see the proof of this statement later, but we can say at present that, while one may observe in one's experience that there are bodies devoid of thought, like stones, metals, or earth, one can never find, on the other hand, the existence of a spirit without a body.

To conclude this chapter unambiguously, we see that to answer the question "How is it that man thinks?" there can be only two quite different and totally opposed answers:

First answer: Man thinks because he has a soul.

Second answer: Man thinks because he has a brain.

According to which answer we give, we will be led to give different solutions to the problems which flow from this question.

According to our answer, we are idealists or materialists.

## 2 – IDEALISM

### 1. *Moral idealism and philosophical idealism*

We have denounced the conclusion created in popular language regarding materialism. The same confusion is found with regard to idealism; indeed, we mustn't confuse *moral* idealism with *philosophical* idealism.

Moral idealism consists of devoting oneself to a cause or an ideal. The history of the international workers' movement teaches us that an incalculable number of revolutionaries, of Marxists, devoted themselves even to the point of sacrificing their lives for a moral ideal. However, they were adversaries of that other idealism, which is called philosophical idealism.

Philosophical idealism is a doctrine whose basis is the explanation of the world by spirit.

It is the doctrine that answers the fundamental questions of philosophy by saying, "It is thought that is the principal, the most important, the first element." And idealism, by affirming the primary importance of thought, declares that it is thought that produces being, or, in other words, that "it is spirit which produces matter."

Such is the primary form of idealism; it has found its full development in religions by affirming that God, "pure spirit," is the creator of matter.

Religion, which has claimed and still claims to be beyond philosophical discussion, is in reality, on the contrary, the direct and logical representation of idealist philosophy.

Now, when science gradually intervened in the course of history, it became necessary to explain matter, the world and things otherwise than by God alone. For, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, science began to explain natural phenomena without taking God into account and without using the hypothesis of creation.

To combat these scientific, materialist and atheistic explanations better, it therefore became necessary to push idealism further and to *deny the very existence of matter*.

That was the aim, in the beginning of the 18th century, of an English bishop, Berkeley, who has been called the Father of Idealism.

## 2. Why should we study Berkeley's Idealism?

The goal of his philosophical system was then to destroy materialism, to try to show us that material substance does not exist. He writes in the preface to his book *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*:

If these principles are accepted and regarded as true, it follows that atheism and skepticism are, with the same stroke, completely beaten, that obscure questions are made clear, that nearly insoluble questions are resolved and that the men who used to enjoy paradoxes are brought back to common sense.

Thus, for Berkeley the truth is that matter does not exist and that it is paradoxical to claim the contrary.

We are going to see how he goes about showing us this. I think that it is not useless to insist on this, so that those who wish to study philosophy will take Berkeley's theory into very great consideration.

I know full well that Berkeley's theses will make some smile, but we mustn't forget that we are living in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and that we benefit from all the studies of the past. We shall see, moreover, when we study materialism and its history, that materialist philosophers of the past also bring a smile to the lips at times.

We should know, however, that Diderot, who was the greatest materialist philosopher before Marx and Engels, attached some importance to Berkeley's system since he describes it as "a system which, to the shame of human intelligence and philosophy, is the most difficult to combat, although the most absurd of all" (Diderot, quoted by Lenin in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, New York: International Publishers, 1927, p. 27).

Lenin himself dedicated many pages to Berkeley's philosophy and writes, "the 'recent' Machians have not adduced a single argument against the materialists that had not been adduced by Bishop Berkeley" (V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, New York: International Publishers, 1970, p. 30).

Finally, here is a judgment of Berkeley's immaterialism, which is given in a history of philosophy manual used in French high schools: "A certainly still imperfect but admirable theory which should destroy forever, in philosophical minds, the belief in a material substance."

This points out how important his philosophical reasoning is for everyone, although for different reasons, as these quotations have shown you.

### ***3. Berkeley's Idealism***

The goal of this system therefore, is to show that matter does not exist. Berkeley used to say:

Matter is not what we believe it to be when we think that it exists outside of our minds. We think that things exist because we see and touch them; it is because they give us these sensations that we believe in their existence.

But our sensations are but ideas which we have in our minds. Therefore, the things which we perceive through our senses are nothing but ideas, and ideas cannot exist outside of our minds.

For Berkeley things exist; he does not deny their nature and their existence. But he claims that they exist only in the form of sensations, which make us know them, and concludes that our sensations and objects are one and the same thing.

Things exist, that is certain, he said, but *in us*, in our minds; and they have no reality outside of the mind.

We conceive of things with the help of vision; we perceive them with the help of touch; the sense of smell tells us of their odor; that of taste informs us of their taste; hearing tells us of sounds. These different sensations give us ideas which, combined together, make us give them a common name and regard them as objects.

Thus, for example, a certain color, taste, smell, figure and consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted one distinct thing, signified by the name apple; other collections of ideas constitute a stone, a tree, a book, and the like sensible things (*Lenin, Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, p. 15).

We are then deluding ourselves when we think we know the world and things to be exterior to us, since they exist only in our minds.

In his book, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, Berkeley demonstrates this argument in the following way:

Is it not an absurdity to believe that the same thing at the same moment can be different? For example, hot and cold at the same instant? Imagine that one of your hands is hot and the other cold and that both are plunged at the same time into a vase full of water, at an intermediate temperature: will the water not appear hot to one hand and cold to the other?

Since it is absurd to believe that a thing can be in itself different at the same time, we must conclude that this thing exists only in our minds.

What does Berkeley do then in his method of reasoning and discussion? He strips objects and things of all their properties.

You say that objects exist because they have a color, an odor, a flavor, because they are big or small, light or heavy? I am going to show you that this does not exist in the objects, but in our minds.

Here is a piece of cloth: you tell me it is red. Are you sure? You think that the red color is in the cloth itself. Are you certain? You know that there are animals that have eyes which are different from ours and who will not see this cloth as red; the same for a man who has jaundice and who will see it as yellow! So what color is it? That depends, you say? The red color, therefore, is not located in the cloth but in the eye, in us.

You say that this cloth is light? Let it fall on an ant and it will certainly find it heavy. Then who is right? You think that the weather is hot? If you had a fever, you would find it cold. So is it hot or cold?

In a word, if the same things can be at the same instant red, heavy or hot for some and for others exactly the opposite, this means that we are victims of illusions and that things exist only in our minds.

By removing all properties from objects, we arrive at the conclusion that the latter exist only in our thoughts, that is, that matter is an idea.

Already, before Berkeley, Greek philosophers used to say, and correctly so, that certain qualities such as taste and sound were not in things themselves but rather in us.

But what is new about Berkeley's theory is that he extends this observation to all the qualities of objects.

Greek philosophers had in fact established the following distinction between qualities of things:

On the one hand, there are *primary qualities*—that is, those that are in objects, such as weight, size, resistance, etc.

On the other hand, there are *secondary qualities*—that is, those that are in us, such as odor, flavor, heat, etc.

Yet Berkeley applies the same thesis to primary qualities as to secondary qualities, namely *that all qualities and properties are not in objects but in us*.

If we look at the sun, we see it as round, flat and yellow. Science teaches us that we are mistaken, that the sun is not flat or yellow. Thus, with the help of science, we disregard certain false properties which we assign to the sun, but not to the point of concluding that it does not exist! However, such is the conclusion at which Berkeley arrives.

Berkeley is certainly not mistaken in showing that the distinction made by the Ancients does not stand up to scientific analysis, but he commits an error in reasoning, a sophism, by drawing conclusions from these observations which the latter do not imply. He shows in fact that the qualities of things are not as our senses show them to be, i.e., that our senses fool us and deform material reality, and he concludes right away that material reality does not exist.

#### **4. Consequences of idealist arguments**

The proposition being “everything exists only in our minds,” we must conclude that the exterior does not exist.

Pushing this line of reasoning to its conclusion, we would say, “I alone exist, since I know other men only through my ideas, since other men are, like material objects, only collections of ideas.” This is what is called in philosophy “solipsism” (which means *only myself*).

Berkeley, as Lenin tells us in his book mentioned above, defends himself instinctively against the accusation of supporting such a theory.

We even find that solipsism, the extreme form of idealism, has been supported by no philosopher.

This is why, in our discussions with idealists, we should insist on bringing out the fact that arguments which deny the existence of matter, to be logical and consistent, must ultimately lead to this absurd extremity: solipsism.

### **5. Idealist arguments**

We have sought to summarize Berkeley's theory as simply as possible because it is he who has most frankly set forth what philosophical idealism is.

But it is certain that to really understand these arguments, which are new for us, it is now indispensable to take them very seriously and to make an intellectual effort. Why?

Because we shall see later on that even when idealism is presented in a more hidden way with new words and expressions, all idealist philosophies are really only restating the arguments of "old Berkeley" (Lenin).

We shall also see how much idealist philosophy, which has dominated and continues to dominate the *official* history of philosophy, bringing with it a method of thought with which we are saturated, has been able to penetrate us in spite of an entirely secular education.

Since the basis of the arguments of all idealist philosophies is found in the reasoning of Bishop Berkeley, in order to summarize this chapter we are going to try to define what these main arguments are and what they are attempting to show us.

#### **(1) Spirit creates matter**

This is, we know, the idealist answer to the fundamental question of philosophy; it is the primary form of idealism which is reflected in different religions, where it is maintained that spirit created the world.

This declaration can have two meanings:

Either God created the world, and the latter exists in reality, outside of us. This is the ordinary idealism of theology;

Or God created the illusion of the world by giving us ideas that correspond to no material reality. This is the "immaterialist idealism" of

Berkeley, who tries to show us that spirit is the sole reality, matter being a product fabricated by our minds.

This is why idealists declare that:

(2) The world does not exist outside of our thoughts

This is what Berkeley wants to show us by declaring that we are mistaken to attribute to things properties and qualities that belong to them, when these exist only in our minds.

For idealists, benches and tables exist, but only in our thoughts and not outside of us, for:

(3) It is our ideas which create things

In other words, things are the reflection of our thoughts. Indeed, since it is the mind that creates the illusions of matter; since it is the mind that gives the idea of matter to our thoughts; since the sensations that we experience in the presence of things do not originate in the things themselves, but only in our thoughts, the source of the reality of the world and of things is our thoughts—consequently, everything that surrounds us does not exist outside of our minds and can only be the reflection of our thoughts. But, for Berkeley, as our mind would be incapable of creating by itself these ideas, and since, moreover, it does not do whatever it wishes with them (as would be possible if it created them itself), we must admit that there is another, more powerful mind, which is the creator. It is therefore God who creates our minds and who imposes on us all the ideas of the world that are found there.

These are then the principal theses on which idealist doctrines are founded and the answers that they give to the fundamental question of philosophy. It is now time to see what answer materialist philosophy gives to this question and to the problems raised by these propositions.

## 3 – MATERIALISM

### *1. Why should we study materialism?*

We have seen that, for the question “What are the relations between being and thought?” there can only be two opposed and contradictory answers. In the preceding chapter we have studied the idealist answer and the arguments presented to defend idealist philosophy.

We must now study the second answer to this fundamental problem (a problem, we repeat, which is found at the base of any philosophy) and see what arguments materialism puts forth in its defense. All the more so because materialism is a very important philosophy for us, since it is the philosophy of Marxism.

Consequently, it is indispensable to know materialism well, especially because the concepts of this philosophy are very poorly known and have been distorted. It is important also because, through our education, through the instruction that we have received, we are all more or less, without realizing it, imbued with idealist concepts. (We shall see, moreover, in other chapters several examples of this and why this is so.)

### *2. Where does materialism come from?*

We have defined philosophy generally as an effort to explain the world and the universe. But we know that, along with the state of human knowledge, these explanations have changed and that two attitudes have been adopted to explain the world in the course of the history of humanity: one is antiscientific, appealing to a superior spirit or spirits, to supernatural forces; the other is scientific, being founded on facts and experience.

One of these concepts is defended by idealist philosophers, the other by materialist philosophers.

This is why, from the beginning of this book we have said that the first idea that we should entertain about materialism is that this philosophy represents the “scientific explanation of the universe.”

Whereas idealism was born from the ignorance of man—and we shall see how this ignorance has been maintained in the history of societies by cultural and political forces which shared idealist concepts—material-

ism was born from the struggle of science against ignorance or obscurantism.

This is why this philosophy was fought so hard and why, in its modern form (dialectical materialism), it is little known, if not totally ignored or misunderstood by the official academic world.

### ***3. How and why materialism has evolved***

Contrary to what those who fight this philosophy and who say that this doctrine has not evolved for twenty centuries claim, the history of materialism shows us that there is something in this philosophy that is alive and always moving.

Over the centuries, man's scientific knowledge has progressed. In the beginning of the history of thought, in Greek antiquity, scientific knowledge was practically nonexistent. The first scientists were at the same time philosophers, because during this period philosophy and the newly born sciences formed a whole, the one being the extension of the others.

Later on, when the sciences made precisions in the explanation of the phenomena of the world, precisions that interfered with and were even in contradiction with the dogmas of idealist philosophies, a conflict between philosophy and science was born.

The sciences being in contradiction with the official philosophy of this period, it became necessary for them to separate. So:

...the sciences were in a hurry to get out of the philosophical hodgepodge and to leave the sweeping hypotheses to the philosophers in order to concentrate on limited problems, those which are ripe for an early solution. At the moment the distinction between the sciences and philosophy took place (Rene Maublanc, *La Vie ouvrière*, November 25, 1935).

But materialism, born with the sciences, linked to and dependent on them, has progressed and evolved with them, so that with modern materialism, that of Marx and Engels, it has succeeded in reuniting science and philosophy in dialectical materialism.

Later we shall study this history and evolution, which are attached to the progress of civilization, but already we can note—and this is very

important to retain—that materialism and science are linked together, and that materialism is absolutely dependent on science.

It remains for us to establish and define the bases of materialism, bases that are common to all the philosophies which, in different ways, are derived from materialism.

#### ***4. What are the materialist principles and arguments?***

To answer, we must go back to the fundamental question of philosophy—that of the relations between being and thought: which of the two is the more important?

Materialists declare firstly that there is a definite relation between being and thought, between matter and spirit. For them it is being or matter that is the primary reality, the first thing, and it is spirit or mind which is the secondary and posterior reality, dependent on matter.

So, for materialists, it is not spirit or God who has created the world and matter, but rather the world, matter or nature which has created spirit: “mind itself is merely the highest product of matter” (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 25).

This is why, if we reconsider the question that we asked in the second chapter, “How is it that man thinks?” materialists answer that man thinks because he has a brain and that thought is the product of the brain. For them, there can be no thought without matter, without a body. “[...]ur consciousness and thinking, however supra-sensuous they may seem, are the product of a material, bodily, organ, the brain” (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 25).

Consequently, for materialists, matter and being are something real, existing outside of our thoughts, and do not need thought or spirit to exist. Likewise, since spirit cannot exist without matter, there is no immortal soul which is independent of the body.

Contrary to what idealists say, the things that surround us exist independently of us: they give us our thoughts; and our ideas are only the reflection of the things in our brains.

That is why, with respect to the second aspect of the question of the relations between being and thought:

...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? In philosophical language this question is called the question of the “identity of thinking and being...” (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 21).

—Materialists declare: Yes! We can know the world, and the ideas which we entertain about this world are more and more correct, since we can study it with the help of the sciences, and since the latter are continually proving to us through experience that the things that surround us have indeed a reality which is their own, independent of us, and that man can already in part reproduce these things by creating them artificially.

To summarize, we shall say then that materialists, with respect to the fundamental problem of philosophy, maintain:

(1) *That matter produces spirit* and that, scientifically, a spirit without matter has never been observed.

(2) *That matter exists outside of any spirit*, and that it does not need spirit to exist, having its own particular existence—and that, consequently, contrary to what idealists say, it is not ideas that create things, but rather it is things that give us our ideas.

(3) *That we are capable of knowing the world*, that the ideas that we have of matter and the world are becoming more and more correct, since, with the help of science, we can state precisely what we already know and discover what we do not know.

## 4 – WHO IS RIGHT, THE IDEALIST OR THE MATERIALIST?

### *1. How we should state the question*

Now that we know the arguments of idealists and materialists, we are going to try to find out who is right.

Let us recall that we must remark, on the one hand, that these arguments are absolutely opposed and contradictory, and, on the other hand, that as soon as one defends one theory or the other, this position leads to conclusions whose consequences are very important.

In order to know who is right, we must refer to the three points with which we have summarized each argument:

Idealists maintain:

1. That it is spirit which creates matter;
2. That matter does not exist outside of our thoughts and that it is thus only an illusion;
3. That it is our ideas which create things.

Materialists maintain exactly the opposite.

To facilitate our work, we must first study what seems to be common sense and what surprises us the most.

1. Is it true that the world exists only in our thoughts?
2. Is it true that it is our ideas which create things?

These are two arguments defended by Berkeley's "immaterialist" idealism and whose conclusions lead, as with all theologies, to our third question:

3. Is it true that spirit creates matter?

These are some very important questions, since they are related to the fundamental problem of philosophy. Consequently, it is by discussing them that we are going to find out who is right. These questions are particularly interesting for materialists, in the sense that the materialist answers to these questions are common to all materialist philosophies—and, consequently, to dialectical materialism.

## ***2. Is it true that the world exists only in our thoughts?***

Before studying this question we must explain two philosophical terms that we are obligated to use and which we shall often encounter in our readings:

*Subjective reality* (which means: reality, which exists only in our thoughts).

*Objective reality* (which means: reality, which exists outside of our thoughts).

Idealists say that the world is not an objective reality, but a subjective one.

Materialists say that the world is an objective reality.

To show us that the world and things exist only in our thoughts, Bishop Berkeley decomposes them into their properties (color, size, density, etc.). He shows us that these properties, which vary with individuals, are not in the things themselves, but rather in the mind of each one of us. He deduces from this that matter is an aggregate of properties which are not objective but subjective and that consequently, matter does not exist.

If we take the example of the sun again, Berkeley asks us if we believe in the objective reality of this yellow disk—and he shows us, by his method of discussing properties, that the sun is not yellow and is not a disk. Hence, the sun is not an objective reality, for it does not exist by itself; rather it is a simple subjective reality, since it exists only in our thoughts.

Materialists declare that the sun exists, nevertheless, not because we see it as a flat and yellow disk—for this is naïve realism—the realism of children, and primitive men who had only their senses to control reality. Rather, it is by invoking science that they declare that the sun exists. Science enables us in fact to rectify the errors that our senses make us commit.

But, in this example of the sun, we must state the problem clearly.

Along with Berkeley, we say that the sun is not a disk and it is not yellow; but we do not accept his conclusions: the negation of the sun as an objective reality.

We are not discussing the properties of things, but their existence.

We are not arguing in order to know if our senses fool us and deform material reality, but to know if this reality exists outside of our senses.

Well then! Materialists maintain the existence of a reality outside of us, and they furnish arguments which are science itself.

What do idealists do to show us that they are right? They argue about words, make long speeches and write numerous pages.

Let us suppose for a moment that they are right. If the world exists only in our minds, then did it not exist before men? We know that this is false, since science shows us that man appeared very late on Earth. Some idealists will say to us then that before man there were animals and that thought could have inhabited them. But we know that before animals there existed an uninhabitable earth on which no organic life was possible. Still others will say to us that even if only the solar system existed and man did not exist, thought and spirit existed in God. It is thus that we arrive at the supreme form of idealism. We must choose between God and science. Idealism cannot be supported without God, and God cannot exist without idealism.

Here is exactly how we should state the problem of idealism and materialism: Who is right, God or science?

Science will show us by practice and experience that the world is an objective reality and permit us to answer the question:

### ***3. Is It true that it is our ideas which create things?***

Let us take, for example, a bus that passes at the moment when we are crossing the street. We are accompanied by an idealist with whom we are arguing about whether things have an objective or a subjective reality, and whether it is true that our ideas create things. It is quite certain that if we do not want to get run over, we will both be very careful. Thus, in practice, the idealist is obliged to recognize the existence of the bus. For him, practically speaking, there is no difference between an objective bus and a subjective bus. This is so true that practice easily proves that, in life, idealists are materialists.

We could cite many examples on this subject, where we would see that idealist philosophers and those who support this philosophy do not disdain a certain “objective lowness” in order to obtain what is, for them, only a subjective reality.

That is why, moreover, we no longer see anyone claiming, like Berkeley, that the world does not exist. The arguments are much more subtle

and covert. (Consult, for an example of the way in which idealists argue, the chapter entitled “The Discovery of the World-Elements” in Lenin’s book, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, p. 45.)

Hence, it is, to borrow Lenin’s words, “the criterion of practice” which will allow us to confound idealists.

The latter, moreover, will not fail to point out that theory and practice are not the same, that they are two completely different things. This is not true. It is practice alone, through experience, which will show us whether a concept is right or wrong.

Hence, the example of the bus demonstrates that the world has an objective reality and is not an illusion created by our minds.

Since Berkeley’s theory of immaterialism cannot stand up against the sciences nor resist the criterion of practice, it now remains for us to see whether—as all the conclusions of idealist philosophies, religions and theologies claim—spirit creates matter.

#### ***4. Is it true that spirit creates matter?***

As we have seen above, for idealists, spirit has its supreme form in God. He is the final answer—the conclusion of their theory. That is why the problem of *spirit vs. matter*, i.e., whether it is the idealist or the materialist who is right, takes the form “God vs. science” in the final analysis.

Idealists claim that God has existed for all eternity and that, having undergone no change, he is always the same. He is pure spirit, for whom time and space do not exist. He is the creator of matter. To support their affirmation of God, again idealists present no argument. To defend the creator of matter, they have recourse to a lot of mysteries which a scientific mind cannot accept.

When we look back to the origins of science and see that it is because of their great ignorance that primitive men fabricated in their minds the idea of God, we find that the idealists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century continue, like primitive man, to ignore everything which patient and perseverant work has enabled us to know. For, in the final analysis, God for the idealists cannot be explained; he remains for them a *belief* with no proof. When idealists try to prove to us the necessity of the creation of the world by saying that matter cannot have always existed, they turn to God, who, himself, never had a beginning. In what way is this explanation any clearer?

To support their arguments, materialists, on the other hand, use the science that men have progressively developed as they have made the “borders of their ignorance” recede.

Now, does science permit us to think that spirit created matter? No. The idea of a creation by a pure spirit is incomprehensible, for we know of nothing of the sort through experience. For that to have been possible, it would have been necessary, as the idealists say, for spirit to have existed alone before matter; whereas science shows us that this is not possible, and that there is never spirit without matter. On the contrary, spirit is always linked with matter. More specifically, we find that the mind of man is linked with the brain, which is the source of our ideas and thoughts. Science does not allow us to believe that ideas exist in a void.

Hence, it would be necessary for the mind of God, in order to exist, to have a brain. This is why we can say that it is not God who created matter, and thus man as well; but rather it is matter, in the form of the human brain, that created the spirit-God.

We shall see later on whether science gives us the possibility of believing in a God, or in something for which time would be without effect and for which space, movement and change would not exist. From now on we can conclude that in their answer to the fundamental problem of philosophy:

## ***5. Materialists are right and science proves their assertions***

Materialists are right to assert:

1. Against Berkeley's idealism and against the philosophers who are hiding behind his immaterialism: on the one hand, that the world and things do exist outside of our thoughts and that they do not need our thoughts to exist; on the other hand, that it is not our ideas that create things, but rather that it is things that give us our ideas.
2. Against all idealist philosophies—because their conclusions lead to the affirmation of the creation of matter by spirit, i.e., in the final analysis, to the affirmation of the existence of God and to the support of theologies—materialists, basing themselves on the sciences, declare and prove that it is matter that creates spirit and that they do not need the “hypothesis of God” to explain the creation of matter.

## Elementary Principles of Philosophy

*Note*—We must pay attention to the way in which idealists state problems. They declare that God created man; whereas we have seen that it is man who created God. They declare also that it is spirit that created matter, while we see that it is actually just the opposite. In these examples, there is a way of confusing perspectives which we felt obligated to point out.

## 5 – IS THERE A THIRD PHILOSOPHY—AGNOSTICISM?

### 1. *Why a third philosophy?*

After these first chapters, it may seem to us that, in short, it must be rather easy to see our way through all the philosophical arguments since only two large currents share all theories: idealism and materialism. In addition, it may seem that those arguments which fight for materialism carry the decision absolutely.

It appears then that after some study we have found the way that leads to the philosophy of reason: materialism.

But things are not so simple. As we have already pointed out, modern idealists do not have the frankness of Bishop Berkeley. They present their ideas “in a much more artful form, and confused by the use of a ‘new’ terminology, so that these thoughts may be taken by naïve people for ‘recent’ philosophy!” (Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, p. 20).

We have seen that we can furnish two answers to the fundamental question of philosophy that are totally opposed, contradictory and irreconcilable. These two answers are very clear and leave no room for confusion.

And, indeed, until about 1710, the problem was stated in this fashion: on the one hand were the materialists: those who claimed the existence of matter outside of our thoughts. On the other hand, were the idealists: those who, with Berkeley, denied the existence of matter and claimed that this latter exists only in us, in our minds.

However, at this time, progress having been made in the sciences, other philosophers intervened who tried to decide between idealists and materialists by creating a philosophical current that created confusion between these two theories. This confusion has its source in the search for a *third* philosophy.

### 2. *Arguments of this third philosophy*

The basis of this philosophy, which was elaborated after Berkeley, is that it is useless to try to know the real nature of things, and that we shall never know anything but *appearances*. This is why this philosophy is called *agnosticism* (from the Greek “a,” negation, and “gnosticos,” capable of knowing; hence, “incapable of knowing”).

## Elementary Principles of Philosophy

According to agnostics, we cannot know if the world is, basically, spirit or nature. It is possible for us to know the appearance of things, but we cannot know their reality.

Let us take again the example of the sun. We have seen that it is not, as the first men thought, a flat and yellow disk. This disk was then only an illusion, an appearance (appearance is the superficial idea that we entertain about things; it is not their reality).

This is why, with regard to the argument between idealists and materialists over whether things are matter or spirit, whether they exist or not outside of our thoughts, or whether it is possible or not to know them, agnostics say that we can indeed know their appearance, but never their reality.

Our senses, they say, enable us to see and feel things, to know their exterior aspect, their appearance. These appearances then exist for us; they make up what is called, in philosophical language, the “thing for us.” But we cannot know the thing independent of us, with its own reality, which is called the “thing in itself.”

Idealists and materialists, who are constantly discussing these subjects, are comparable to two men, one of whom has blue glasses, the other red, and who are walking in the snow and arguing about its true color. Let us suppose that they can never take off their glasses. Will they be able to know the true color one day? No. Well then! The idealists and materialists who argue to find out which one is right wear blue and red glasses. Never will they know reality. They will have a knowledge of the snow “for them”; each will see it in his own way, but never will they know the snow “in itself.” Such is the reasoning of agnostics.

### ***3. Where does this philosophy come from?***

The founders of this philosophy are Hume (1711-1776), who was Scottish, and Kant (1724-1804), a German. Both tried to reconcile idealism and materialism.

Here is a passage of Hume’s arguments quoted by Lenin in his book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*:

It seems evident, that men are carried, by a natural instinct or prepossession, to repose faith in their senses; and that, without

any reasoning, or even almost before the use of reason, we always suppose an external universe which depends not on our perception, but would exist though we and every sensible creature were absent or annihilated. Even the animal creatures are governed by a like opinion, and preserve this belief of external objects, in all their thoughts, designs, and actions.... But this universal and primary opinion of all men is soon destroyed by the slightest philosophy, which teaches us, that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and that the senses are only the inlets, through which these images are conveyed, without being able to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and the object. The table, which we see, seems to diminish, as we remove farther from it: But the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration: It was therefore nothing but its image, which was present to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason... (pp. 25-26).

We see that Hume admits firstly what meets with common sense: the “existence of an external universe” which does not depend on us. But, right after that, he refuses to admit that this existence is an objective reality. For him, this existence is nothing but an image; and our senses, which perceive this existence, this image, are incapable of establishing any kind of relation between mind and object.

In a word, we live in the middle of things like at the cinema, where we perceive the image of objects existing on the screen, but where, behind the images themselves, i.e., behind the screen, there is nothing.

Now, if we want to know how our minds know objects, can this not be due to “the energy of the mind itself, or from the suggestion of some invisible and unknown spirit, or from some other cause still more unknown to us?” (Hume quoted by Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, p. 26).

#### ***4. Its consequences***

Here we have a seductive theory which is, moreover, very widespread. We find it in different forms throughout the course of history, among phil-

osophical theories and, in our times, among all those who claim “to remain neutral and maintain themselves in a scientific reserve.”

We must then examine if these reasonings are correct and what their consequences are.

If it is truly impossible, as the agnostics claim, to know the true nature of things and whether our knowledge is limited to their appearances, we cannot then declare the existence of an objective reality, and we cannot know if things exist by themselves. For us, for example, the bus is an objective reality; the agnostic, however, tells us that this is not certain—that we cannot know if this bus is thought or reality. He forbids us then to claim that our thought is the reflection of things. We see that we are right in the middle of idealist reasoning, for the difference between stating that things do not exist or simply that we cannot know if they exist is not very large!

We have seen that the agnostic makes a distinction between the “things for us” and the “things in themselves.” The study of the things for us is then possible: this is science. But the study of things in themselves is impossible, for we cannot know what exists outside of us.

The result of this reasoning is the following: the agnostic accepts science; and—as one cannot be scientific without expelling any supernatural force from nature—with regard to science, he is a materialist.

But he hastens to add that, since science gives us only appearances, nothing proves that there is not something other than matter in reality—or even that matter exists, or that God does not exist. Human reason can know nothing about this and should not be concerned with it. If there are other ways of knowing the “things in themselves,” such as religious faith, the agnostic does not want to know it and does not feel justified to discuss it.

Hence, with regard to the conduct of life and the construction of science, the agnostic is a materialist; but he is a materialist who dares not declare his materialism and who tries above all not to get into difficulty with idealists and not to enter into conflict with religion. He is a “shame-faced” materialist. (Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Paris: Foreign Languages Press, 2020, p. 18.)

The consequence is that, by doubting the profound value of science, by seeing in it only appearances, this third philosophy tells us to attribute

no truth to science and to consider it perfectly useless to try to know something or to try to contribute to progress.

Agnostics say: Formerly, men saw the sun as a flat disk and believed that such was reality; they were wrong. Today, science tells us that the sun is not as we see it, and it claims to explain everything. We know, however, that science is frequently mistaken, destroying one day what it had constructed the day before. Error yesterday, truth today, but error tomorrow. Thus, agnostics declare, we cannot know. Reason brings us no certainty. And if other means than reason, such as religious faith, claim to give us absolute certainties, not even science can prevent us from believing it. Hence, by diminishing confidence in science, agnosticism prepares the way for the return of religion.

### ***5. How can this third philosophy be refuted?***

We have seen that, in order to prove their assertions, materialists use not only science but also experience, which enables us to control science. Thanks to the “criterion of practice,” we can know, we can take cognizance of things.

Agnostics tell us that it is impossible to declare that the outside world exists or does not exist.

Yet, in practice, we know that the world and things exist. We know that the ideas that we have about things are founded, that the relations that we have established between things and us are real.

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, 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. And whenever we find ourselves face to face with a failure, then we generally are not long in making out the cause that made

us fail; we find that the perception upon which we acted was either incomplete and superficial, or combined with the result of other perceptions in a way warranted by them—what we call defective reasoning. So long as we take care to train and to use our senses properly, and to keep our action within the limits prescribed by perceptions properly made and properly used, so long we shall find that the result of our action proves the conformity of our perceptions with the objective nature of the things perceived. Not in one single instance, so far, have we been led to the conclusion that our sense perceptions, scientifically controlled, induce in our minds ideas respecting the outer world that are, by their very nature, at variance with reality, or that there is an inherent incompatibility between the outer world and our sense perceptions of it (Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, p. 19-20).

To paraphrase Engels' statement, we could say, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." If it did not exist or if it were only an idea, after having eaten it, our hunger would not be at all satisfied. Thus, it is perfectly possible for us to know things, to see if our ideas correspond to reality. It is possible for us to control the data of science by experience and industry, which translates the theoretical results of science into practical applications. If we can make synthetic rubber, then science must know the "thing in itself" that is rubber.

We see then that it is not useless to try to know who is right, since beyond the theoretical errors which science may commit, experience gives us the proof every time that it is indeed science which is correct.

## **6. Conclusion**

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the works of different thinkers who have borrowed more or less from agnosticism, we see that this philosophy has been torn between idealism and materialism. Under the disguise of new words, as Lenin says, claiming even to use the sciences to support their reasonings, they only create confusion between the two theories. Thus, they allow some people to have convenient philosophy, one which gives them the possibility of declaring that they are not idealists because they use sci-

ence, but neither are they materialists, because they do not dare to pursue their arguments to their conclusion—because they are not consistent with themselves.

What, indeed, is agnosticism [writes Engels], but... “shame-faced” materialism? The agnostic’s conception of nature is materialistic throughout. The entire natural world is governed by law, and absolutely excludes the intervention of action from without. But he adds, we have no means either of ascertaining or of disproving the existence of some Supreme Being beyond the known universe (Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, p. 18).

Hence, this philosophy is playing into the hands of idealism and, all told, because they are inconsistent in their reasonings, agnostics lead right back to idealism. “Scratch an agnostic,” says Lenin, “and you will find an idealist.”

We have seen that we can know which is right, between materialism and idealism.

We see now that the theories which claim to conciliate these two philosophies cannot, in fact, but support idealism, that they do not provide a third answer to the fundamental question of philosophy and that, consequently, *there is no third philosophy*.

## CONTROL QUESTIONS

### *Introduction*

1. What importance does the study of philosophy have for the militant worker?
2. What more specific importance does the study of dialectical materialism have for him?

### *Chapter 1*

1. What is the fundamental problem of philosophy?
2. Explain and correct the current confusion created by the words idealism and materialism.

### *Chapter 2*

1. What are the principal idealist arguments?

### *Chapter 3*

1. What are the points of opposition between idealism and materialism?

### *Chapter 4*

1. What should we say to those who claim that the world exists only in our thoughts?

### *Chapter 5*

1. Between materialism and idealism, is there room for a third philosophy?



# **Part 2**

# **Philosophical Materialism**

## 1 – MATTER AND MATERIALISTS

After having defined: first, the ideas common to all materialists; second, the arguments of all materialists against idealist philosophies; and finally, having demonstrated the error of agnosticism, we are now going to draw the conclusions from this instruction and reinforce our materialist arguments by answering the following questions:

1. What is matter?
2. What does it mean to be a materialist?

### ***1. What is matter?***

*Importance of the question.* Each time that we have a problem to solve, we should state the question very clearly. In fact, here, it is not so simple to give a satisfactory answer. In order to do so, we must construct a theory of matter.

In general, people think that matter is what you can touch, what is resistant and hard. In Greek antiquity, matter was defined in this way.

Thanks to science, we know today that this is not exact.

### ***2. Successive theories of matter***

(Our goal is to go through as simply as possible, the different theories related to matter, without entering into scientific explanations.)

In Greece it was thought that matter was a solid and impenetrable reality that could not be divided infinitely. There comes a moment, so it was said, when the pieces are no longer divisible. These particles were called atoms (*atom=indivisible*). A table is then a conglomeration of atoms. It was also thought that these atoms were different from each other: there were smooth and round atoms like those of oil; others were rough and crooked, like those of vinegar.

It was Democritus, a materialist of antiquity, who established this theory; he was the first to have tried to give a materialist explanation of the world. He thought, for example, that the human body was composed of coarse atoms; that the soul was a conglomeration of finer atoms; and—as he recognized the existence of gods but still wanted, however, to explain

everything as a materialist—he claimed that the gods themselves were composed of extra-fine atoms.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century this theory was profoundly modified.

People still thought that matter was divided into atoms and that the latter were hard and mutually attractive particles. The theory of the Greeks had been abandoned: these atoms were no longer crooked or smooth. But people still maintained that they were impenetrable, indivisible and mutually attracted to each other.

Today, it has been shown that the atom is not an impenetrable and indivisible particle of matter. Rather it is itself composed of particles called electrons which revolve at high speed around a nucleus where almost the totality of the atom's mass is found. If the atom is neutral, the electrons and nucleus have an electric charge, but the positive charge of the nucleus is equal to the sum of the negative charges carried by the electrons. Matter is a conglomeration of these atoms. It may resist penetration due to the motion of the particles which compose it.

The discovery of these electrical properties of matter, particularly that of electrons, provoked an attack by idealists in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the very existence of matter. "There is nothing material about an electron," they claimed. "It is nothing more than an electrical charge in motion. If there is no matter in the negative charge, why should there be any in the positive nucleus? Thus matter has disappeared. There is only energy!"

Lenin, in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (Chapter 5), clarifies things by showing that energy and matter are inseparable. Energy is material and motion is but the way of life of matter. In short, idealists interpreted the discoveries of science backwardly. While the latter was uncovering aspects of matter until then unknown, they concluded that matter does not exist, under the pretext that it does not conform to the idea people used to have of it, when it was believed that matter and motion were two different realities.

### **3. What matter is for materialists**

In this regard, it is indispensable to make a distinction; we must see first:

## 1. What is matter?

And then:

## 2. What is matter like?

The answer which materialists give to the first question is that matter is an external reality, independent of the mind, and which does not need the mind to exist. Lenin says about this, “matter is the objective reality given to us in sensation, and so forth” (Lenin, *Empirio-Criticism*, p. 145).

Now, to the second question, “What is matter like?” materialists answer, “It is up to science, not us, to answer.”

The first answer has been invariable from antiquity to today.

The second answer has varied and must vary because it depends on science and on the state of human knowledge. It is not a conclusive answer.

We see that it is absolutely indispensable to state the problem correctly and not to let idealists mix up these two questions. We must separate them and show that it is the first question that is primary, and that our answer to it has always been invariable.

“For the sole ‘property’ of matter with whose recognition philosophical materialism is bound up is the property of being an objective reality, of existing outside the mind” (Lenin, *Empirio-Criticism*)

## ***4. Space, time, motion and matter***

While we claim, because we find it to be so, that matter exists outside of us, we also must make it clear that:

1. Matter exists *in time and in space*.

2. Matter is *in motion*.

Idealists, on the other hand, think that space and time are ideas in our minds (it was Kant who first supported this idea). For them, space is a shape that we give to things and it originates in man’s mind. The same is true for time.

Materialists maintain, on the contrary, that space is not in us, but rather we are in space. They also contend that time is an indispensable condition for the unfolding of our lives and that, consequently, time and space are inseparable from what exists outside of us, i.e., matter. “For the

basic forms of all being are in space and time, and existence out of time is just as gross an absurdity as existence out of space" (Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, New York: International Publishers, 1939, p. 60).

Hence, we think that there is a reality independent of our consciousness. We all believe that the world existed before us and will continue to exist after us. We believe that the world does not need us in order to exist. We are convinced that Paris existed before our birth and, unless it is razed to the ground, will continue to exist after our death. We are certain that Paris exists, even when we are not thinking about it; likewise, there are tens of thousands of cities we have never visited, whose names we do not even know, but that exist nevertheless. Such is the general conviction of humanity. Science has enabled us to give a precision and solidity to this argument, thus reducing all the idealist trickeries to zero. "Natural science positively asserts that the earth once existed in such a state that no man or any other creature existed or could have existed on it. Organic matter is a later phenomenon, the fruit of a long evolution." (Lenin, *Empirio-Criticism*, p. 69).

Hence, while science provides us with the proof that matter exists in time and in space, it teaches us as well that matter is in motion. This last detail, which has been provided by modern science, is very important, for it destroys the old theory according to which matter was incapable of motion, i.e., inert. "Motion is the mode of existence of matter. Never anywhere has there been matter without motion, nor can there be" (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 68).

We know that the world in its present state is the result, in all domains, of a long evolution and, consequently, the result of a slow, but continuous, motion. We specify then, after having shown the existence of matter, that "There is nothing in the world but matter in motion, and matter in motion cannot move otherwise than in space and time" (Lenin, *Empirio-Criticism*, p. 177).

## 5. Conclusion

The result of these findings is that the idea of God, the idea of a "pure spirit" that created the universe, makes no sense, for a God outside of space and time is something that cannot exist.

We must share the idealist mystique and, consequently, we must allow no scientific control in order to believe in a God existing outside of

time, i.e., existing at no moment, and existing outside of space, i.e., existing nowhere.

Materialists, strengthened by the conclusions of science, maintain that matter exists in space and at a certain moment (in time). Consequently, the universe could not have been created, for in order to create the world, God would have needed a moment that was at no moment (since for God, time does not exist). and it would have been necessary for the world to have sprung out of nothing.

In order to acknowledge creation, we must first accept that there was a moment when the universe did not exist. Next we must admit that something came from nothing, which science cannot accept.

We see that idealist arguments, when confronted by science, cannot stand, whereas those of materialist philosophers are inseparable from science. Thus we underline once more the intimate relations that link materialism with science.

## 2 – WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MATERIALIST?

### ***1. Union of theory and practice***

The goal of the study that we are pursuing is to know what Marxism is, to see how the philosophy of materialism, by becoming dialectical, is identified with Marxism. We already know that one of the bases of this philosophy is the close connection between theory and practice.

This is why, after having seen what matter is for materialists and what matter is *like*, it is essential to state, after these two theoretical questions, what it means to be a *materialist*, i.e., how the materialist acts. This is the practical side of the question.

The basis of materialism is the acknowledgment of being as the source of thought. But is it enough to keep repeating that? In order to be a true supporter of consistent materialism we must be so: 1) in the sphere of thought, and 2) in the sphere of action.

### ***2. What does it mean to be a supporter of materialism in the sphere of thought?***

Being a supporter of materialism in the sphere of thought means knowing how to apply the fundamental formula of materialism: being produces thought.

When we say, “being produces thought,” we are expressing an abstract formula, because the words “being” and “thought” are abstract words. “Being” refers to being in general, “thought” to thought *in general*. Being, as well as thought in general, is a subjective reality (see in Part One, Chapter 4, the explanation of “subjective reality” and “objective reality”). It *does not exist*: it is what is called an *abstraction*. To say “being produces thought” is thus an abstract formula because it is composed of abstractions.

Hence, for example: we all know very well what horses are, but if we speak of *the horse*, we mean the horse *in general*; well then, the horse in general is an abstraction.

If we substitute for the horse “man” or “being” *in general*, these are also abstractions.

But if the horse in general does not exist, what does? Horses *in particular*. The veterinarian who says, “I treat the horse in general, but not the

horse in particular,” would be laughed at; so would the doctor who says the same thing about men.

Being in general, therefore, does not exist; but what does exist is particular beings, which have particular qualities. The same thing is true for thought.

We can say then that being in general is something abstract, whereas being in particular is something concrete; the same for thought in general and thought in particular.

*A materialist is someone who can recognize in every situation, who can concretize where being is and where thought is.*

Example: The brain and our ideas.

We have to know how to transform the abstract general formula into a concrete formula. Thus, a materialist will identify the brain as being and our ideas as thought. He will reason by saying, “It is the brain (being) that produces our ideas (thought).” This is a simple example, but let us take the more complex example of human society and see how a materialist will reason.

The life of society is composed (basically) of an economic life and a political life. What are the relations between economic life and political life? What is the primary factor of this abstract formula that we want to transform into a concrete formula?

For the materialist, the primary factor, i.e., being—the one that gives life to society—is economic life. The secondary factor—thought that is created by being and that can live only through it—is political life.

The materialist will say then that economic life *explains* political life, since political life is a product of economic life.

This declaration, made here only summarily, is at the root of what is called *historical materialism* and was made for the first time by Marx and Engels.

Here is another more delicate example: the poet. Certainly numerous elements come into play to “explain” the poet, but here we want to show one aspect of the question only.

It is generally said that the poet writes because he is inspired. Is this sufficient to explain why the poet writes this instead of that? No. He certainly has ideas in his head, but he is also a being who lives in society. We shall see that the primary factor, the one which gives the poet his own

life, is society, since the secondary factor is the ideas which the poet has in his brain. Consequently, one of the elements, the fundamental element that “explains” the poet, will be society, i.e., the milieu in which he lives in society. (We shall re-encounter the “poet” when we study dialectics, for then we shall have all the elements to study the problem properly.)

From these examples we see that the materialist is someone who, everywhere and always, at each moment and in every case, knows how to apply the formula of materialism.

### ***3. How is one a materialist in practice?***

#### **1) First aspect of the question.**

We have seen that there is no third philosophy and that, if one is not consistent in the application of materialism, either one is an idealist, or one obtains a mixture of idealism and materialism.

The bourgeois scientist in his studies and in his experiments is always a materialist. This is normal since, in order to advance science, one must work on matter, and if the scientist really thought that matter exists only in his mind, he would find it useless to experiment.

There are thus several varieties of scientists:

1. Scientists who are conscious and consistent materialists.
2. Scientists who are materialists without knowing it, i.e., almost all of them, for it is impossible to do scientific research without presupposing the existence of matter. But, among these, we must distinguish between:
  - a) Those who begin to follow materialism, but who stop, for they do not dare call themselves such: these are agnostics, those whom Engels calls “shamefaced materialists,” and
  - b) Those scientists who are unconscious and inconsistent materialists. These are materialists in the laboratory, but outside of their work they are idealists, religious believers.

In fact, the latter have not known how or have not wanted to organize their ideas. They are in perpetual contradiction with themselves. They separate their work, necessarily materialist, from their philosophical concepts. They are “scientists,” yet, while they may not deliberately deny the existence of matter, they think, not very scientifically, that it is useless to know the real nature of things. They are “scientists,” but they believe, without any proof, in impossible things. (See the case of Pasteur, Branly and others who were believers; whereas the scientist, if he is consistent, must abandon his religious beliefs.) Science and faith are absolutely opposed.

## 2) Second aspect of the question

*Materialism and action:* While it is true that the real materialist is one who applies the formula at the base of this philosophy everywhere and in every case, he must also be careful to apply it correctly.

As we have just seen, one must be consistent, and to be a consistent materialist, one must transpose materialism into action.

To be a materialist in practice is to act in accordance with philosophy by taking *reality* as the primary factor, and *thought* as the secondary factor.

We are going to see the attitudes of those who, without realizing it, regard thought as the primary factor, and are then at that moment idealists without knowing it.

1. What do we call someone who lives as though he were alone in the world? An *individualist*. He lives within his shell; the outside world exists only for him. For him, the important thing is *himself*, his thought. He is a pure idealist, or what is called a solipsist. (See the explanation of this word in Part One, Chapter 2.)

The individualist is *selfish* and being selfish is not a materialist attitude. A selfish person restricts the universe to his own person.

2. The person who learns for the *pleasure of learning*, as a dilettante who assimilates well, has no difficulties, but keeps it all for himself. He assigns primary importance to himself, to his thought.

The idealist is closed to the outside world—to reality. The materialist is always open to reality; this is why those who take courses in Marxism and who learn easily ought to try to transmit what they have learned.

3. The person who argues about everything in *relation to himself* undergoes an idealist distortion.

For example, with regard to a meeting in which things were said which were disagreeable for him, the idealist will say, "This is a bad meeting." This is not how things should be analyzed; the meeting should be judged in relation to its organization, to its goal, and not in relation to oneself.

4. Neither is *sectarianism* a materialist attitude. Because the sectarian has understood the problems and is in agreement with himself, he maintains that others must be like him. This is again giving primary importance to oneself.

5. The *doctrinarian* who has studied the texts and has drawn definitions from them is still an idealist when he is satisfied with quoting materialist texts, when he lives only with his texts, for then the real world disappears. He repeats these formulas without applying them to reality. He gives primary importance to the texts, to ideas. Life takes place in his consciousness in the form of texts and, in general, it is found that the doctrinarian is also a sectarian.

Believing that revolution is a question of education, saying that by explaining "once and for all" to workers the necessity of a revolution they must understand and that, if they do not understand, it is not worth it to try to make a revolution, all of this is sectarianism and not a materialist attitude.

We must observe the cases where people do not understand, find out why this is so, note the repression, the propaganda of bourgeois newspapers, radio, cinema, etc., and look for all the possible ways in which to make what we want understood, by leaflets, brochures, newspapers, schools, etc.

To lack a sense of reality, to live in the clouds, and, practically, to make plans without taking situations and realities into account, is an idealist attitude, which assigns primary importance to beautiful plans without seeing whether or not they are practicable. Those who are constantly criticizing, but who do nothing to improve the situation, who propose no remedy; those who lack a critical sense towards themselves; all of these people are inconsistent materialists.

#### ***4. Conclusion***

From these examples, we see that the faults that are found in us all, to a greater or lesser degree, are idealist faults. We are afflicted with them because we separate practice from theory and because the bourgeoisie, which has influenced us, likes us not to attach any importance to reality. For the bourgeoisie, which supports idealism, theory and practice are two completely different things having no relation. These faults are thus harmful and we should fight them, for the bourgeoisie profits from them. In short, we should observe that these faults, engendered in us by society, by the theoretical bases of our education and culture, and rooted in our childhood, are the work of the bourgeoisie—and rid ourselves of them.

## 3 – HISTORY OF MATERIALISM

Until now we have studied what materialism is in general and what ideas are common to all materialists. Now we are going to see how materialism has evolved since antiquity to become modern materialism. In short, we are going to trace the *history of materialism*.

In so few pages, we shall not attempt to explain the 2,000 years of history of materialism; we simply want to give some general information that may guide future readings.

In order to study this history well, even summarily, it is indispensable to see why, at each instant, things happened as they did. It would be better not to cite certain historical names than not to apply this method. But, while we do not wish to overload the brains of our readers, we think, nevertheless, that it is necessary to name, in chronological order, the main materialist philosophers who are more or less already known to them.

This is why, in order to simplify the work, we are going to devote the first pages to the purely historical side of the question; then, in the second part of this chapter, we shall see why the evolution of materialism had to undergo the form of development that it did.

### 1. *The need for studying this history*

The bourgeoisie does not like the history of materialism, and that is why this history—taught in bourgeois books—is altogether incomplete and always false. Several methods of falsification are used:

1. As the great materialist thinkers cannot be ignored, they are spoken of in relation to everything they have written except their materialist studies, and people *forget* to mention that they are materialist philosophers.

There are many cases of *forgetfulness* in the history of philosophy such as it is taught in the high schools and the university, but we shall cite as an example Diderot, who was the greatest materialist thinker before Marx and Engels.

2. In the course of history, there have been numerous thinkers who were either materialists without knowing it or inconsistent material-

ists. That is, those who, in some of their writings, were materialists, while in others they were idealists: Descartes, for example.

Yet history written by the bourgeoisie covers up everything which, in the case of these thinkers, not only influenced materialism but also gave birth to an entire current of this philosophy.

3. Then, if these two methods of falsification do not succeed in camouflaging certain authors, they are simply made to vanish.

This is how the history of literature and philosophy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is taught, while d'Holbach and Helvetius, who were great thinkers of this period, are “ignored.”

Why are things like this? Because the history of materialism is particularly instructive for knowing and understanding the problems of the world; and also because the development of materialism is fatal for those ideologies that uphold the privileges of the ruling classes.

These are the reasons why the bourgeoisie presents materialism as a doctrine that has not changed, which has been fixed for twenty centuries, while on the contrary, materialism has been something alive and constantly moving. “But just as idealism underwent a series of stages of development, so also did materialism. With each epoch-making discovery even in the sphere of natural science it has to change its form...” (Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 25-26).

Now we understand better the need for studying, even summarily, this history of materialism. In order to do so, we must differentiate two periods: 1) from the origin (Greek antiquity) up to Marx and Engels; 2) from the materialism of Marx and Engels up to the present day. (We shall study this second part along with dialectical materialism.)

We call the first period “pre-Marxist materialism” and the second period “Marxist materialism” or “Dialectical materialism.”

## **2. Pre-Marxist materialism**

### **(1) Greek antiquity**

Let us recall that materialism is a doctrine that has always been linked to science and which has evolved and progressed with it. When, in Greek antiquity, in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries before Christ, science begins

to appear with the “Physicists,” a materialist current is formed that attracts the best thinkers and philosophers of this period (Thales, Anaximenes, Heraclitus). These first philosophers will be, as Engels says, “naturally dialecticians.” They are struck by the fact that motion and changes are encountered everywhere and that things are not isolated, but intimately linked together.

Heraclitus, who is called the “father of dialectics,” said, “Nothing is immobile; everything flows; we do not bathe twice in the same river, for it is never, for two successive moments, the same: from one instant to another, it has changed; it has become different.”

Heraclitus was the first to try to explain motion and change and to see the reason for the evolution of things in *contradiction*.

The concepts of these first philosophers were correct; however, they were abandoned because they had been formulated *a priori*, i.e., the state of science in that period could not prove what they maintained. Moreover, those social conditions necessary for the flowering of dialectics (we shall see further on what these are) had not yet been realized.

It is only much later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that the conditions (social and intellectual) allowing science to prove the correctness of dialectics will be realized.

Other Greek thinkers had materialist concepts: Leucippus (5<sup>th</sup> century BC), who was the instructor of Democritus, had already discussed the problem of atoms, the theory of which was established by the latter.

Epicurus (341-270 BC), disciple of Democritus, was a very great thinker, whose philosophy was completely distorted by the Church in the Middle Ages. Out of hate for philosophical materialism, the latter presented the Epicurian doctrine as a deeply immoral doctrine, as a vindication of the lowest passions. In reality, Epicurus was an ascetic whose philosophy aimed at giving a scientific (and thus antireligious) foundation for human life.

All these philosophers were aware that philosophy was tied to the fate of humanity, and we already find there, on their part, an opposition to the official theory, an opposition to idealism.

But one great thinker dominates the Greece of antiquity: Aristotle, who was rather an idealist. His influence was considerable. This is why we must cite him especially. He drew up the inventory of human knowledge

of this period and filled the gaps created by the new sciences. A universal mind, he wrote numerous books on every subject. Through the universality of his knowledge—from which only the idealist tendencies were retained, while the materialist and scientific aspects were neglected—he had a considerable influence on philosophical concepts until the end of the Middle Ages, i.e., for twenty centuries.

During all this period, then, the tradition of antiquity was followed, and all thinking was done through Aristotle. A savage repression raged against all those who thought otherwise. Nevertheless, towards the end of the Middle Ages, a struggle broke out between idealists who denied the existence of matter and those who thought that there was a material reality.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, this dispute was pursued in France and especially in England.

In the beginning, it is principally in the latter country that materialism develops. Marx said, "Materialism is the true son of Great Britain."

A bit later, it is in France that materialism will flower. In any case, in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries we see two currents appear: one, English materialism; the other, French materialism, whose union will contribute to the prodigious blossoming of materialism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## (2) English materialism

The authentic father of English materialism and all modern experimental science is Bacon. The science of nature is, in his eyes, the true science and physics, based on the experience of the senses, is its most noble and fundamental part. (See Engels, "Introduction," *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, p. 14.)

Bacon is famous as the founder of the experimental method in scientific study. The important thing for him was to study science in the "great book of Nature." This was particularly interesting at a period when science was studied *in the books* that Aristotle had left several centuries before.

For example, here is how they went about studying physics: on a certain subject the passages written by Aristotle were taken up; next the books by Thomas Aquinas, who was a great theologian, were taken up, and what the latter had written about the passage by Aristotle was read. The teacher would make no personal commentary, let alone discuss what he thought about it, but rather referred to a third work, which repeated Aristotle and

Saint Thomas. That was the science of the Middle Ages, which was called scholasticism: it was a *bookish* science, because only books were studied.

It was against this scholasticism, this set and rigid instruction, that Bacon reacted by appealing for study in the “great book of Nature.”

At this period, one question was raised:

Where do our ideas come from? Where does knowledge come from? Each one of us has ideas, the idea of house, for example. This idea comes to us because there are houses, say the materialists. Idealists think that it is God who gives us the idea of houses. As for Bacon, he said that the idea exists only because we see or touch things, but he could not as yet prove it.

It was Locke (1632-1704) who undertook to show how ideas come from experience. He showed that all ideas come from experience and that only experience gives us ideas. The idea of the first table came to man before it existed because through experience, he was already using a tree trunk or a stone as a table.

With Locke's ideas, English materialism passes into France in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, for, while this philosophy was developing in a particular way in England, a materialist current had formed in France.

### (3) Materialism in France

The birth of a clearly materialist current in France can be dated from Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes had a great influence on this philosophy, but, in general, it is not mentioned.

At this time, when feudal ideology was very much alive, even in the sciences, and when people studied in the scholastic way we have seen, Descartes engaged in a struggle against this situation.

Feudal ideology is imbued with a religious mentality. It therefore considers that the Church, representing God on Earth, has a monopoly on truth. It follows from this that no man can claim to know the truth without subordinating his thought to the teachings of the Church. Descartes tears this concept apart. Of course, he does not attack the Church as such, but he strongly maintains that any man, believer or not, can attain the truth through the exercise of his reason (“natural light”).

Descartes declares from the beginning of his *Discourse on Method* that “Intelligence is the best shared thing in the world.” Consequently, everyone has the same rights with respect to science. And if, for example,

he criticizes the medicine of his time (*The Imaginary Invalid* by Molière echoes Descartes' criticisms), it is because he wants to establish a science that is a true science, based on the study of nature and rejecting the science that was taught before him, in which Aristotle and Saint Thomas were the only “arguments.”

Descartes lived in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; in the following century, the French Revolution was to explode—that is why it can be said that he comes out of a world, which is about to be born. This position makes Descartes a conciliator: he wants to create a materialist science while, at the same time, he is an idealist, for he wants to save religion.

When, during his time, it was asked, “Why are there live animals?” the response came from the ready-made answers of theology: because there is a principle which makes them live. Descartes, on the contrary, maintained that the laws of animal life are the same as those of matter. Moreover, he believed and affirmed that animals are nothing other than machines of flesh and muscle, as other machines are made of iron and wood. He even thought that both had no sensations and when, at the Abbey of Port-Royal, during the weeks of study, men who claimed they shared his philosophy pricked some dogs, they would say, “How well made Nature is, one would almost say they suffer!”

For Descartes, the materialist, animals were therefore machines. On the other hand. Descartes, the idealist, says that man is different and, defended by Descartes, give birth, on the one hand, to a clearly materialist current and, on the other hand, to an idealist current.

Among those who continue the materialist Cartesian branch, we may recall La Mettrie (1709-1751). Adopting the thesis of the “animal-machine,” he extends it even to man. Why shouldn’t the latter be a machine? He sees even the human soul as a mechanism in which ideas are mechanical movements.

It is at this period that English materialism, with Locke’s ideas, penetrates into France. From the juncture of these two currents a more evolved materialism will be born. This will be:

#### (4) The materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century

This materialism was defended by philosophers who were also fighters and admirable writers. Continually criticizing social institutions and

religion, applying theory to practice and always in battle with the established authorities, they were sometimes imprisoned at the Bastille or Vincennes.

It is they who united their works in the great *Encyclopédie*, in which they established the new orientation of materialism. They had, moreover, a large influence since this philosophy was, as Engels says, “the conviction of all cultivated youths.”

In all the history of philosophy in France, this was the only period in which a philosophy with a French character became truly popular.

Diderot, who was born in Langres in 1713 and died in Paris in 1784, dominates the entire movement. What should be said firstly, and which bourgeois history does not say, is that he was the greatest materialist thinker before Marx and Engels. Diderot, Lenin said, almost arrived at the conclusions of contemporary (dialectics) materialism.

He was a real militant: always struggling against the Church and the social order, he saw jail cells from the inside. History written by the contemporary bourgeoisie has hushed this up. But one must read the *Conversations between d'Alembert and Diderot, Rameau's Nephew and Jacques the Fatalist* in order to understand the enormous influence of Diderot on materialism.

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to historical events, we witness a retreat of materialism. The bourgeoisie of every country makes propaganda in favor of idealism and religion, for not only does it not wish to see progressive (materialist) ideas propagated, but also it must put both thinkers and the masses asleep in order to stay in power.

It is then that we see Feuerbach in Germany proclaiming his materialist convictions, in the midst of all the idealist philosophers, and “... placed materialism on the throne again” (Engels, *Feuerbach*).

Developing essentially a critique of religion, he reverts, in a healthy and relevant way, to the bases of materialism that had been forgotten and thus influenced the philosophers of his time.

We come to that period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where one notes an enormous progress in science, due in particular to the following three great discoveries: the living cell, the transformation of energy, and the theory of evolution (See Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 46.), which will enable Marx and

Engels—who were influenced by Feuerbach—to evolve materialism to give us modern materialism, or dialectical materialism.

We have just traced, quite briefly, the history of materialism before Marx and Engels. We know that the latter, though they may have agreed with the materialists who preceded them on a number of common points, also found that the work of their predecessors included numerous faults and gaps.

In order to understand how they transformed pre-Marxist materialism, it is therefore absolutely necessary to find out what these faults and gaps were and why this was so.

In other words, our study of the history of materialism would be incomplete if, after having listed the different thinkers who contributed to the progress of materialism, we did not try to find out how and in what direction this progress was made and why it underwent this or that type of evolution.

We are particularly interested in the materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, since it was the culmination of different currents of this philosophy.

Hence, we are going to study what the errors of this materialism were and what gaps it left. However, since we should never look at only one side of things, but rather see them in their entirety, we shall also point out its merits.

Materialism, at first dialectical, was not able to continue on this basis. Dialectical reasoning, because of a deficiency in scientific knowledge, had to be abandoned. It was first necessary to create and develop the sciences. “It was necessary first to examine things before it was possible to examine processes” (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 45).

Hence, it is the very intimate union of materialism and science which will enable this philosophy to become again, on more solid and scientific bases, the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels.

We shall find, then, the birth certificate of materialism next to that of science. But, while we can always find where materialism comes from, we should always establish as well where idealism comes from.

### ***3. Where does idealism come from?***

If, in the course of history, idealism has been able to exist alongside religion—tolerated and approved by it—this is in reality because it was born and derives from religion.

Lenin wrote a formula about this which we should study. “Idealism is nothing other than a polished and refined form of religion.” What does this mean? Just this: idealism is able to present its concepts much more supplely than religion. To claim that the universe was created by a spirit floating above the darkness, that God is immaterial, then, abruptly to declare, as does religion, that he speaks (by the Word), and that he has a son (Jesus)—these are a series of brutally presented ideas. By affirming that the world exists only in our thoughts, in our minds, idealism presents itself in a more covert fashion. In fact, we know that it is all the same in meaning, but the form is less brutal and more elegant. This is why idealism is a refined form of religion.

It is also refined because idealist philosophers know how to predict questions and lay traps in discussions, as Philonous did to poor Hylas in Berkeley’s dialogues.

But saying that idealism stems from religion is only putting off the problem. We should ask ourselves immediately:

### ***4. Where does religion come from?***

Engels has given us a very clear answer on this subject: “Religion arose from primitive conceptions of men.”

For the first men, this ignorance is double: ignorance of nature and ignorance of themselves. We must keep this double ignorance in mind when we study the history of primitive man.

In Greek antiquity, which we regard, however, as an already advanced civilization, this ignorance seems infantile to us; for example, when we see that Aristotle thought that the Earth was immobile and that it was the center of the universe around which the planets revolved. (The latter, which he thought numbered forty-six, were attached, like nails on a ceiling, and the whole thing turned around the earth.)

The Greeks also thought that there were four elements: water, earth, air and fire, and that it was not possible to decompose them. We know that

all that is false, because now we decompose water, earth and air, and we do not consider fire as a body of the same order.

The Greeks were also very ignorant about man, since they did not know the functions of the organs and considered the heart, for example, to be the source of courage!

If the ignorance of the Greek scholars, whom we regard as already very advanced, was so great, what must have been that of the men who lived thousands of years before us? The concepts which primitive men had of nature and of themselves were limited by ignorance. Nevertheless, these men tried to explain things. All the documents which we possess on primitive men tell us that these men were worried by dreams. We have seen, in the first chapter (See Chapter 1, Part IV.), how they had resolved this question of dreams by the belief in the existence of a “double” of man. In the beginning, they attribute a sort of transparent and light body, still having a material consistence, to this double. It is not much later that their minds give birth to the concept that man has an immaterial principle in himself, which survives after death, a spiritual principle (the word comes from “spiritus,” which in Latin means “breath,” the breath which departs with the last sigh, as the moment when the “ghost is given up” and only the “double” subsists). Hence, it is the soul that explains thought and dreams.

In the Middle Ages, there were strange ideas regarding the soul. It was thought that in a fat body there was a thin soul and in a thin body, a big soul; this is why, during this period, ascetics underwent long and numerous fasts in order to have a big soul, in order to make a lot of room for the soul.

Having acknowledged the survival of man after death, first in the form of a transparent double, then in the form of the soul, the spiritual principle, primitive men created gods.

At first believing in beings who were stronger than men but still existing in a material form, they gradually came to believe in gods who existed in the form of a soul superior to ours. And this is how, after having created a multitude of gods, each with his defined function, as in Greek antiquity, they arrived at the conception of a single God. Contemporary monotheistic religion was then created. So we can see that ignorance was at the origin of religion, even in its contemporary form.

Hence, idealism arose from primitive concepts of man, from his ignorance; whereas materialism, on the contrary, arose from the retreat of these limitations.

In the course of the history of philosophy, we shall witness the continual struggle between idealism and materialism. The latter seeks to draw back the limits of ignorance, and this will be one of its glories and one of its merits. Idealism, on the contrary, and the religion that nourishes it, make every effort to sustain ignorance and to take advantage of this ignorance of the masses in order to make them tolerate their oppression, their social and economic exploitation.

### ***5. The merits of pre-Marxist materialism***

We have seen materialism being born with the Greeks as soon as an embryo of science existed. Following the principle that when science develops, so does materialism, we find in the course of history;

1. In the Middle Ages, a weak development of the sciences and a halt of materialism.
2. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, a very big development of the sciences parallel with a big development of materialism. The French materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is the direct consequence of the development of the sciences.
3. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we witness many discoveries, and materialism undergoes a very great transformation with Marx and Engels.
4. Today the sciences are making enormous progress and so is materialism. We see the best scientists applying dialectical materialism in their research and studies.

Idealism and materialism, then, have completely opposed origins. Throughout the centuries, we find a battle raging between these two philosophies, one that is still going on in our time, and which has not only been academic.

This struggle, which spans the history of humanity, is a conflict between science and ignorance, between two currents. One draws humanity towards ignorance and maintains it in this ignorance. The other, on the

contrary, tends towards the emancipation of man by replacing ignorance with science.

This conflict has sometimes taken serious forms, as at the time of the Inquisition, when we can cite the example of Galileo, among others. The latter declared that the Earth revolves. This was a new piece of knowledge, which was in contradiction with the Bible and Aristotle: if the Earth revolves, this means that it is not the center of the universe, but simply a point in the universe—so then the frontiers of our thoughts must be widened. What then is done in view of Galileo's discovery?

In order to keep humanity in ignorance, a religious court is set up and Galileo is ordered to apologize. Here is an example of the struggle between ignorance and science.

We ought then to judge the philosophers and scientists of this period by placing them within the context of this struggle of ignorance against science, and we shall find that by defending science, they were defending materialism without knowing so themselves. Thus Descartes, through his arguments, furnished ideas that have enabled materialism to progress.

We should also see that this conflict throughout history is not simply a theoretical conflict, but also a social and political one. The ruling classes are always on the side of ignorance in this battle. Science is revolutionary and contributes to the emancipation of humanity.

The case of the bourgeoisie is typical. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the bourgeoisie is dominated by the feudal class; at that moment, the former is for science; it leads a struggle against ignorance and gives us *l'Encyclopédie*. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the bourgeoisie is the ruling class and, in the struggle between ignorance and science, *it is for ignorance* in a much more savage way than ever before (e.g., Hitlerism).

We see then that pre-Marxist materialism played a considerable role and had a very great historical importance. Throughout the conflict between ignorance and science, it was able to develop a general concept of the world, which was able to stand in opposition to religion and thus to ignorance. Also, thanks to the evolution of materialism, to the progress of its research, the conditions necessary for the birth of dialectical materialism were realized.

## 6. *The faults of pre-Marxist materialism*

In order to understand the evolution of materialism, to see clearly its faults and its gaps, we must never forget that science and materialism are linked together.

In the beginning, materialism was ahead of science, and this is why this philosophy was not able to assert its authority right away. It was necessary to create and develop science in order to prove that dialectical materialism was right, but that took more than twenty centuries. During this long period, materialism came under the influence of science, particularly that of the spirit of the sciences, as well as that of the most developed specific sciences.

This is why:

The materialism of the last century [i.e., the 18<sup>th</sup> century] was predominantly mechanical, because at that time, of all natural sciences, mechanics and indeed only the mechanics of solid bodies—celestial and terrestrial—in short, the mechanics of gravity, had come to any definite close. Chemistry at that time existed only in its infantile, phlogistic form. Biology still lay in swaddling clothes; vegetable and animal organism had been only roughly examined and were explained as the result of purely mechanical causes. As the animal was to Descartes so was man a machine to the materialists of the eighteenth century (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 26).

So, here we see what materialism was coming out of a long and slow evolution of the sciences after the “hibernation period of the Christian Middle Ages.”

The big mistake of this period was to see the world as a big mechanism, to judge everything according to the laws of the science called mechanics. Regarding motion as being merely mechanical, it was thought that the same events would continually reproduce themselves. The machinelike aspect of things was seen, but not the living aspect. For this reason this materialism is called mechanical materialism.

Let us look at an example: how did these materialists explain thought? In this way: “The brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile!”

This is a bit simplistic! Marx's materialism, on the contrary, gives a series of precisions. Our thoughts do not come only from the brain. We must see why we have certain thoughts and ideas rather than others, and then we realize that society, surroundings, etc., make our ideas. Mechanical materialism considers thought to be a simple mechanical phenomenon. But it is much more!

This exclusive application of the standards of mechanics to processes of a chemical and organic nature—in which processes, it is true, the laws of mechanics are also valid, but are pushed into the background by other and higher laws—constitutes a specific but at that time inevitable limitation of classical French materialism (Engels, *Feuerbach*, pp. 26-27).

This is the first big fault of 18<sup>th</sup> century materialism.

The consequences of this error were that history in general, i.e., the point of view of historical development, of evolution, was ignored. This materialism believed that the world does not evolve and that it returns at regular intervals to similar states; neither did it conceive of an evolution of man and animals.

The second specific limitation of this materialism lay in its inability to comprehend the universe as a process—as matter developing in an historical process. This was in accordance with the level of the natural science of that time, and with the metaphysical, i.e., anti-dialectical manner of philosophizing connected with it. Nature, it was known, was in constant motion. But according to the ideas of that time, this motion turned eternally in a circle and therefore never moved from the spot; it produced the same results over and over again (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 27).

This is the second fault of this materialism.

Its third mistake was that it was too contemplative; it did not sufficiently see the role of human action in the world and in society. Marx's materialism teaches that we must not only explain the world but also transform it. Man is an active element in history who can bring about changes in the world.

The action of Russian Communists is a living example of an action capable not only of preparing, making and bringing off a revolution but also, since 1918, of establishing socialism in the midst of enormous difficulties.

Pre-Marxist materialism was not conscious of this concept of human action. At that time it was thought that man was a product of his milieu, whereas Marx teaches us that the milieu is a product of man, and that man is therefore a product of his own activity in certain pre-established conditions. While man may be influenced by his milieu, he can also transform it and society; consequently, he can transform himself.

Hence, 18<sup>th</sup> century materialism was too contemplative, because it ignored the historical development of all things. This was inevitable at that time since scientific knowledge was not advanced enough to conceive of the world and things otherwise, than through the old method of thinking: "metaphysics."

## CONTROL QUESTIONS

### *Chapter 1*

1. How could Pasteur be a scientist and a believer at the same time?

### *Chapter 2*

1. Show how book learning is both necessary and insufficient.

### *Chapter 3*

1. Why was dialectical materialism not born in antiquity?
2. Indicate the principal materialist currents from Greek antiquity to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
3. What are the errors and the merits of 18<sup>th</sup> century materialism?

### *Written Assignment*

Create a dialogue about God between an idealist and a materialist.

# **Part 3**

# **The Study of Metaphysics**

# 1 – OF WHAT DOES THE “METAPHYSICAL METHOD” CONSIST?

We know that the faults of the 18<sup>th</sup> century materialists stem from their form of reasoning, from their particular method of research which we have called the “metaphysical method.” The metaphysical method thus conveys a certain concept of the world. We should notice that pre-Marxist materialism differs from Marxist materialism in the same way that metaphysical materialism differs from dialectical materialism.

This is why we must now learn what this “metaphysical” method is in order to examine what, on the other hand, the dialectical method is.

## *1. The characteristics of this method*

What we are going to study here is the “old method of investigation and thought which Hegel calls ‘metaphysical’...” (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 45).

Let us begin straight away with a simple remark. What seems most natural to the majority of people: motion or immobility? What is the normal state of things for them: rest or mobility?

In general, it is thought that rest existed before motion and that in order for a thing to be in motion, it must have first been in a state of rest.

The Bible also tells us that before the universe, which was created by God, there existed an immobile eternity, i.e., rest.

Here are some words which we shall often use: rest and immobility; motion and change. But these two last words are not synonymous.

Motion, in the strict sense of the word, means displacement. Example: a falling stone and a moving train are both in motion.

Change, in the correct sense of the word, is the passage from one form to another. Example: The tree which has lost its leaves has changed form. But it also signifies the passage from one state to another. Example: The air has become unbreathable: this is a change.

Hence, motion signifies changing place and change signifies changing form or state. In order to avoid confusion, we shall try to respect this distinction (when we study dialectics, we shall be obliged to reexamine the meaning of these words).

We have just seen that, generally speaking, it is thought that motion and change are less *normal* than rest; it is certain that we have a kind of preference for considering things to be at rest and unchanging.

Example: We have bought a pair of yellow shoes and after a period of time and numerous repairs (new heels, new soles, patching) we still say, "I'm going to put on my yellow shoes," without realizing that they are no longer the same. For us they are still the same yellow shoes which we bought at a certain time and for a certain price. We do not consider the changes which have occurred to our shoes: they are still the same, they are identical. We disregard change and see only the sameness (identity) as if nothing important had happened. This is the:

1) First characteristic of the metaphysical method: The principle of identity

It consists in preferring immobility to motion and identity to change when confronted with events.

From this preference, which constitutes the first characteristic of this method, is derived a whole way of looking at the world. The world is considered to be ossified, says Engels. The same is true for nature, society and man. So it is often claimed that "there is nothing new under the sun," which means that there has never been any change, that the universe has remained immobile and identical. This phrase can equally signify a periodical return to the same events. God created the world by producing fishes, birds, mammals, etc., and since then nothing has changed, the world has not budged. It is also said, "Men are always the same," as if men had never changed.

These common expressions are the reflection of this concept which is deeply rooted in us, in our minds, and the bourgeoisie exploits this misconception to the utmost.

When socialism is criticized, one of the arguments that is most readily given is that man is selfish and it is necessary for some force to intervene to restrain him—otherwise disorder would rule the day. This is the result of the metaphysical idea that man has a permanent nature that cannot change.

It is quite certain that if suddenly we had the possibility of living under a Communist regime, that is to say, if goods could be immediately

distributed to each according to his needs and not according to his work, there would be a rush to satisfy everyone's whims, and such a society could not last. Nevertheless, that is what Communist society is and that is what is rational. But it is because we have a metaphysical outlook rooted in us that we imagine future man, living in a relatively distant future, as being the same as contemporary man.

Consequently, when it is maintained that a socialist or Communist society is not viable because man is selfish, it is forgotten that, like society, man also will *change*.

We hear critical remarks every day about the Soviet Union, which reveal to us the difficulties in understanding encountered by those who formulate them. This is because they have a metaphysical concept of the world and things.

From the numerous examples that we could cite, let us take only this one. We are told, "A worker in the Soviet Union earns a salary that does not correspond to the total value of what he produces; there is therefore a surplus value, i.e., a levy imposed on his salary. Hence, he is robbed. In France, it is the same: workers are exploited. So there is no difference between a Soviet worker and a French worker."

In this example, where is the metaphysical concept? It consists in not considering that there are two types of societies here and in not taking into account the differences between these two societies. It consists in believing that, from the moment that there is surplus value both here and there, that it is the same thing, without considering the changes that have occurred in the USSR, where man and the machine no longer have the same economic and social meaning as in France. Now, in France, the machine exists in order to produce (for the boss) and man exists in order to be exploited. In the USSR, the machine exists in order to produce (for man), and man exists in order to enjoy the fruit of his labor. The surplus value in France goes to the boss; in the USSR, it goes to the socialist State, i.e., to the collectivity in which there are no exploiters. Things have changed.

We see then from this example, that errors in judgment stem, in the case of sincere persons, from a metaphysical method of thought—especially from the application of the first characteristic of this method: a fundamental characteristic, which consists in underestimating change

and preferring immobility. Or, in other words, which tends to perpetuate identity in the midst of change.

But what is this identity? We have seen a house built that was finished on January 1, 1935. On January 1, 1936, as in all succeeding years, we say that it is identical, because it still has two floors, twenty windows, two front doors, etc., because it always remains itself; it does not change and is not different. Hence, being identical means remaining the same—not becoming different. Yet this house *has changed!* It is only at first sight—superficially—that it has stayed the same. The architect or the mason, who sees things more closely, knows very well that the house already is not the same one week after its construction: here, a small crack has appeared, there, a stone is loose, over there, the paint has come off, etc. Thus, it is only when we consider things “roughly” that they seem to be identical. Under detailed analysis, they are constantly changing.

But what are the *practical consequences* of the first characteristic of the metaphysical method?

Since we prefer to see identity in things, i.e., to see them remaining themselves, we say for example, “Life is life, and death is death.” We maintain that life remains life, that death remains itself—death—and that that is all there is to it.

Becoming used to considering things in their identity, we separate them from each other. To say “a chair is a chair” is a natural statement, but it puts the emphasis on identity. This means at the same time that which is not a chair is something else.

It is so natural to say this that to underline it seems childish. In this connection, we might say, “A horse is a horse, and what is not a horse is something else.” Hence, we carefully separate chairs and horses, as we do for everything else. Hence, we make distinctions, rigorously separating things from each other; this is how we have been brought to transform the world into a collection of separate things. This is the:

2) Second characteristic of the metaphysical method: the isolation of things

What we have just said seems so natural that one may wonder why we said it at all. We are going to see that, nonetheless, it was necessary to

do so, for this system of reasoning leads us to see things from a certain angle.

Again it is by its practical consequences that we are going to judge the second characteristic of this method.

In daily life, if we think about animals by separating them, we do not see what there is in common between animals of different species and kinds. A horse is a horse; a cow is a cow. There is no relation between them.

This is the point of view of the old zoology, which classified animals by separating them clearly from each other and saw no relation between them. This is one of the results of the application of the metaphysical method.

As another example, we could cite the fact that the bourgeoisie wants science to be science and philosophy to remain philosophy; the same for politics. And, of course, there is nothing in common, absolutely no relation between them.

The practical conclusions of such reasoning are that a scientist should remain such and not mix his science with philosophy and politics. The same thing holds for the philosopher and the politician.

When a sincere man reasons in this way, it can be said that he reasons as a metaphysician. The English writer Wells went to the Soviet Union a few years ago and visited Maxim Gorky, a great writer who is gone today. He proposed the creation of a literary club from which politics would be excluded, for, to his mind, literature is literature and politics is politics. Gorky and his friends, it seems, began to laugh and Wells was annoyed. The fact is, Wells saw the writer as being *outside of society*, while Gorky and his friends knew full well that it just is not so in life, where, in truth, all things are linked together—whether we like it or not.

In common practice, we try to classify and isolate things, to see and study them for themselves. Those who are not Marxists see the State in general by isolating it from society, as if it were independent from the form of society. To reason in this way, by isolating the State from society, is to isolate it from its relations with reality.

The same mistake occurs when we speak of man while isolating him from other men, from his environment, from society. If we also consider the machine by itself, while isolating it from the society in which it produces, we make the mistake of thinking, "Machine in Paris, machine in

Moscow; surplus value here and there, there is no difference; it is absolutely the same thing.”

This is, however, a type of reasoning that we can constantly read, and those who do so accept it because the general and usual point of view is to isolate and divide things. This is a characteristic habit of the metaphysical method.

### (3) Third characteristic: Eternal and impassable divisions

Having preferred to consider things as immobile and unchanging, we have classified and catalogued them, thus creating divisions between them, which make us forget the relations there may be between them.

This way of seeing and judging leads us to believe that these divisions exist once and for all (a horse is a horse) and that they are absolute, impassable and eternal. This is the third characteristic of the metaphysical method.

But we must be careful when we speak of this method, for when we Marxists say that there are two classes in capitalist society—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—we are also making divisions that may seem to belong to the metaphysical point of view. Only, it is not simply by introducing divisions that one is a metaphysician; rather it is by the way in which one establishes the differences and relations that exist between these divisions.

When we say, for example, that there are two classes in society, the bourgeoisie immediately thinks that there are rich and poor. And, of course, it will tell us, “There have always been rich and poor.”

“There have always been” and “There will always be”: this is a metaphysical way of reasoning. Things are forever classified independently of each other, and impassable partitions and walls are put up between them.

The metaphysician divides society into rich and poor, instead of noting the existence of a bourgeoisie and a proletariat. Even if this last division is recognized, the latter are considered independently of their mutual relations, i.e., the class struggle. What are the practical consequences of this third characteristic, which establishes absolute barriers between things? For example, there can be no relationship between a horse and a cow. The same holds true for all the sciences and for everything which surrounds us. We shall see later if this is correct, but it now remains for us to examine the

consequences of these three characteristics which we have just described, namely the:

4) Fourth characteristic: opposites are mutually exclusive

It follows from everything that we have just seen that when we say, "Life is life" and "Death is death," we are stating that there is nothing in common between life and death. We see life and death separately and classify them apart from one another, without seeing the relations that may exist between them. Under these conditions, a man who has just lost his life must be considered a dead thing, for it is impossible for him to be both alive and dead at the same time, since life and death are mutually exclusive.

By considering things to be isolated and completely different from each other, we end up setting them against each other.

Here we arrive at the fourth characteristic of the metaphysical method, which says that opposites *mutually exclude* each other and which maintains that two *opposite things cannot exist at the same time*.

Indeed, in the example of life and death, there can be no third possibility. We have to choose one or the other of the possibilities that we have singled out. We regard a third possibility as a *contradiction*, and we consider this contradiction to be absurd and, hence impossible.

The fourth characteristic of the metaphysical method is, therefore, the abhorrence of *contradiction*.

The practical consequences of this line of reasoning can be seen, for example, when one speaks of democracy and dictatorship. The metaphysical point of view requires that society choose between the two, because democracy is democracy and dictatorship is dictatorship. Democracy is not a dictatorship and dictatorship is not a democracy. We have to choose, otherwise we are confronted with a contradiction: an absurdity, an impossibility.

*The Marxist attitude is completely different.*

We, on the other hand, think that the dictatorship of the proletariat, for example, is both dictatorship by the masses and democracy for the exploited masses.

We believe that the life of living beings is only possible because there is a perpetual struggle between cells and because there are some that continuously die, only to be replaced by others. Thus, life contains death within

it. We think that death is not as total and separate from life as metaphysics believes, for on a corpse all life has not disappeared; certain cells continue to live for some time and from this corpse other lives will be born.

## ***2. Summary and evaluation***

Hence, we see that the different characteristics of the metaphysical method oblige us to look at things from a certain angle and lead us to reason in a certain way. We note that this way of analyzing possesses a certain “logic” which we shall study later on and also that this logic corresponds to a great extent to the way of seeing, thinking, studying and analyzing that is prevalent in our society.

One begins—and this list will allow us to summarize—by:

1. Seeing things in their immobility and identity;
2. Separating things from each other and detaching them from their mutual relations;
3. Establishing eternal divisions, impassable walls, between things;
4. Maintaining that two opposite things cannot exist at the same time because they are mutually exclusive.

We have seen, when we examined the practical consequences of each characteristic, that none of this corresponds to reality.

Is the world consistent with this concept? Are objects in nature immobile and unchanging? No. We find that everything changes and we see its motion. Hence, this concept does not agree with the things themselves. It is obviously nature that is right and this concept that is erroneous.

From the beginning, we have defined philosophy as wanting to explain the universe, man and nature, etc. Specific problems being studied by science, philosophy is, we said, the study of the most general problems that join and extend the sciences.

Now, the old “metaphysical” way of thinking, which is applicable to all problems, is also a philosophical concept that considers the universe, man and nature in a very particular way.

To the metaphysician, things and their mental images, ideas, are isolated, to be considered one after the other apart from

each other, rigid, fixed objects of investigation given once for all. He thinks in absolutely discontinuous antitheses. His communication is: "Yea, yea, Nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." For him a thing either exists, or it does not exist; it is equally impossible for a thing to be itself and at the same time something else. Positive and negative absolutely exclude one another; cause and effect stand in an equally rigid antithesis one to the other (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 27-28).

The metaphysical point of view, then, regards "the universe as a complex of fixed things." In order to clearly grasp this way of thinking, we are going to study how it conceives of nature, society and thought.

### ***3. The metaphysical concept of nature***

Metaphysics regards nature as a complex of permanently "fixed" things.

But there are two ways of considering things in this fashion.

*The first way esteems* that the world is absolutely immobile, motion being only an illusion of our senses. If we remove this appearance of motion, nature does not budge.

This theory was defended by a school of Greek philosophers called the Eleatic School. This simplistic concept is in such contradiction with reality that it is no longer supported today.

*The second way* of regarding nature as a complex of fixed things is much more subtle. It is not said that nature is immobile; that it moves is recognized. Rather, it is maintained that nature is animated by a mechanical motion. Here, the first way of regarding nature disappears; motion is no longer denied and this does not at first seem to be a metaphysical concept. It is called a "mechanistic" concept (or "Mechanicalism").

This constitutes an error that is often made and which we observe in the materialists of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. We have seen that they did not consider nature to be immobile, but rather in motion. Only, for them, this motion was merely a mechanical change, a displacement.

They recognized the entirety of the solar system (the earth revolves around the sun), but they thought that motion was purely mechanical;

that is to say, a mere change of place—and they thought of this motion only in this aspect.

But things are not so simple. The revolution of the earth around the sun is certainly a mechanical movement, but while turning, the earth can undergo influences, becoming colder, for example. Hence, there is not only a displacement but also other changes which occur.

Therefore, what characterizes this so-called mechanistic point of view is that *only the mechanical movement is taken into consideration*.

If the earth revolves incessantly and nothing more happens to it, the earth changes *place*, but the earth itself does not change: it remains identical to itself. It only continues, before us as it does after us, to revolve again and again. Thus everything happens as if nothing had happened. Hence, we see that to concede motion, only to make of it a purely mechanical motion, is a metaphysical point of view, for this motion is without history.

A watch with perfect parts and constructed with unbreakable materials would work eternally without changing in the least, and this watch would have no history. It is such a concept of the universe which we constantly find with Descartes. He tries to reduce all the physical and physiological laws to mechanics. He has no idea of chemistry (see his explanation of the circulation of blood), and his mechanical concept of things was adopted by the materialists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (with the exception of Diderot, who is less purely mechanistic, and who, in certain writings, foreshadows the dialectical conception).

What is characteristic of the 18<sup>th</sup> century materialists is that they turn nature into a clockwork mechanism.

If this were really true, things would continually return to the same point without leaving any trace and nature would remain identical to itself, which is the first characteristic of the metaphysical method.

#### ***4. The metaphysical concept of society***

The metaphysical concept maintains that nothing changes in society. But, in general, this idea is not presented exactly like this. It is recognized that changes occur, as, for example, in production, when finished products are produced from raw materials; or in politics, when governments succeed each other. People acknowledge all that, but they consider

the capitalist regime to be permanent and eternal, and even compare it at times to a machine.

In this way, one speaks of the economic machine, which sometimes gets out of order, but which one wishes to repair in order to maintain it. It is hoped that this economic machine might continue to distribute dividends to some and misery to others like an automatic apparatus.

One speaks also of the political machine, which is the bourgeois parliamentary regime, and only one thing is asked of it: that is to function, sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right, in order to preserve the privileges of capitalism.

We observe a mechanistic, metaphysical concept in this way of looking at society.

If it were possible for this society, in which all these cogs turn, to pursue its course continuously, it would leave no traces and, consequently, no historical successor.

There is another very important mechanistic concept that is valid for the entire universe, but especially for society, and which consists in spreading the idea of a regular course and a periodical return of the same events, in the formula: "History continually repeats itself."

We should note that these ideas are very widespread. Motion and change, which exist and which one finds in society, are not really denied, but motion itself is distorted by being transformed into a mere mechanism.

## *5. The metaphysical concept of thought*

What kind of idea about thought do we observe in those around us?

We believe that human thought is and was eternal. We believe that, while things may have changed, our way of reasoning is the same as that of men who lived a century ago. We consider our feelings to be the same as those of the Greeks, kindness and love to have always existed; in this way one speaks of "eternal love." It is very common to believe that human feelings have not changed.

This is why it is said and written, for example, that a society cannot exist without another basis than individual and selfish enrichment. This is also why we often hear people say that the "desires of men have always been the same."

We often think this way. Much too often. We allow the metaphysical point of view to penetrate the motion of thought, as we do with all the other types of motion.

This is because this method, “this mode of thought seems to us extremely plausible, because it is the mode of thought of so-called sound common sense,” found at the base of our education. (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 28.)

It follows that this metaphysical way of seeing and thinking is not only a concept of the world but also *a manner of proceeding in order to think*.

Now, while it may be relatively easy to reject metaphysical arguments, it is, on the other hand, more difficult to rid oneself of the metaphysical way of thinking. In this connection, we must make one thing clear. We call the way in which we seek explanations a “method.”

Examples:

a) The changes which we see in society are only apparent; they renew what has already been. This is a “concept.”

b) When one looks for what has already happened in the history of society in order to conclude that “there is nothing new under the sun,” this is a “method.”

And we find that the concept inspires and determines the method. Of course, having once been inspired by the concept, the method reacts in turn on the former, directing and guiding it.

We have seen what the metaphysical concept is; we are now going to see what its method of research is. It is called logic.

## 6. *What is logic?*

It is said that “logic” is the art of thinking well. To think in accordance with truth is to think according to the rules of logic.

What are these rules? The three principal ones are:

1. *The principle of identity*: this, we have already seen, is the rule which states that a thing is identical to itself and does not change (a horse is a horse).

2. *The principle of noncontradiction*: a thing cannot be at the same time itself and its opposite. You must choose (life cannot be both life and death).

3. *The principle of the excluded third*—or exclusion of the third case, which means: between two contradictory possibilities, there is no room for a third. You must choose between life and death, there is no third possibility.

Hence, to be logical means to think well. To think well means not to forget to apply these three rules.

In the above, we recognize principles that we have studied and which derive from the metaphysical concept.

Logic and metaphysics are, consequently, intimately linked; logic is an instrument, a method of reasoning that proceeds by *classing* each thing in a very defined way; that consequently compels us to see things as being *identical* to themselves; that then, obliges us to choose, to say yes or no; and, in conclusion, that excludes a third possibility between two cases, such as life and death.

When it is said, “All men are mortal; this comrade is a man; this comrade is mortal,” we have what is called a *syllogism* (this is the typical form of logical reasoning). By reasoning in this manner, we have determined the place of the comrade; we have made a classification.

Our mental tendency, when we encounter a man or a thing, is to say to ourselves, “Where should we class him?” Our mind asks only this question. We see things like circles or boxes of different dimensions and our concern is to insert these circles or boxes into each other, in a certain order.

In our example, we first determine a large circle that contains all mortals; next, a smaller circle that contains all men; and the next that contains only this comrade.

If we want to classify them we shall then, according to a certain “logic,” insert the circles into each other.

The metaphysical concept is thus constructed with logic and the syllogism. A syllogism is a group of three propositions: the first two are called premises, which means “sent before”; the third is the *conclusion*. Another example: “In the Soviet Union, before the last constitution, a dictatorship of the proletariat existed. Dictatorship is dictatorship. The USSR is a dic-

tatorship. Hence, there was no difference between the USSR, Italy and Germany, all countries of dictatorship.”

Here, for whom and on whom the dictatorship is exercised is not taken into consideration; the same as when one boasts of bourgeois democracy—it is not mentioned for whose profit this democracy is exercised.

In this way problems are stated, things and the social world are seen as belonging to separate circles and these circles are inserted into each other.

These are certainly theoretical questions, but they entail a certain way of acting in practice. We can cite the unfortunate example of the Germany of 1919, where social-democracy, in order to maintain democracy, destroyed the dictatorship of the proletariat without seeing that by so doing it allowed capitalism to subsist and gave rise to Nazism.

Seeing and studying things separately were what zoology and biology did up until the moment when it was seen and understood that there existed an evolution of animals and plants. Before that, all beings were classified because it was thought that things had always been what they were. “And in fact, while natural science up to the end of the last century was predominantly a collecting science, a science of finished things...” (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 45).

But to finish we must give:

## ***7. The explanation of the word “metaphysics”***

There is an important part of philosophy that is called metaphysics. But it is important only in bourgeois philosophy, since it is concerned with God and the soul. Everything in it is eternal. God is eternal and unchanging, remaining identical to himself; the soul as well. The same is true for good, evil, etc., all of this being clearly defined, permanent and eternal. In this part of philosophy called metaphysics, things are seen, therefore, as a fixed conglomeration and reasoning takes place through oppositions: spirit vs. matter, good vs. evil, etc. That is to say, opposites are taken to be mutually exclusive.

This manner of reasoning and thinking, this concept, is called “metaphysics” because it deals with things and ideas which are found outside of physics, like God, goodness, the soul, evil, etc. “Metaphysics” comes from the Greek “meta,” which means “beyond,” and from “physics,” the science

of worldly phenomena. Hence, metaphysics is that which is concerned with things situated beyond the world.

It is also due to a historical accident that this philosophical concept is called “metaphysics.” Aristotle, who wrote the first treatise on logic (the one that is still being used), wrote quite a bit. After his death, his disciples classified his writings; they made a catalogue, and, after a writing entitled *Physics*, they found a work without a title which dealt with the things of the mind. They classified it by calling it *After Physics*, in Greek, *Metaphysics*.

In conclusion, let us insist on the relation that exists between the three terms that we have studied: metaphysics, mechanicalism, logic. These three disciplines always occur *together* and are called by each other's names. They form a *system* and can only be understood in relation to each other.

## CONTROL QUESTIONS

1. With the help of examples, show that we are in the habit of considering things in their immobility.
2. Give examples of the metaphysical concept of the world.
3. What is mechanicalism and why is it metaphysical?
4. What are the characteristics of the metaphysical concept and method?

### *Written Assignment*

Can one be both a metaphysician and a revolutionary?



# **Part 4**

# **The Study of Dialectics**

# 1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF DIALECTICS

## *1. Preliminary precautions*

When dialectics is spoken of, it is often couched in mystery and presented as if it were something complicated. Knowing poorly what it is, people speak of it without rhyme or reason. This is all regrettable and leads to errors which must be avoided.

In its etymological sense, the term dialectics simply means the art of disputation. In this sense, we often hear it said of a man who argues at length—and even, by extension, of someone who speaks well—that he is a dialectician!

It is not in this sense that we are going to study dialectics. From the philosophical point of view, this word has assumed a special significance. In its philosophical sense, dialectics, contrary to what is thought, is within the reach of everyone, for it is a very clear and unmysterious thing.

But, while dialectics may be understood by everyone, it still has its difficulties. Here is how we ought to understand them.

Among different types of manual labor, some are simple and others are more complex. Making packing cases, for example, is an easy task. Assembling a radio set, on the other hand, represents a task that demands much skill, precision and manual dexterity.

Hands and fingers are working tools for us. But thought is also a working tool. And, while our fingers do not always do detailed work, the same is true for our brain.

In the history of human labor, at first man knew only how to perform crude tasks. Scientific progress has enabled man to accomplish more exacting tasks.

This is equally the case in the history of thought. Metaphysics is that method of thought that is capable, like our fingers, only of crude motion (such as nailing down the cases or pulling out the drawers of metaphysics). Dialectics differs from this method because it allows for a greater precision. It is nothing other than a method of thought of great precision.

The evolution of thought has been the same as that of manual labor. It is the same history and there is no mystery; everything in this evolution is clear.

The difficulties that we encounter stem from the fact that, for twenty-five years we nail down cases, and then, suddenly, we are placed in front of radio sets to be assembled. Without a doubt we shall have enormous difficulties; our hands will be clumsy and our fingers awkward. Only gradually shall we succeed in becoming more supple and accomplishing this task. What was very difficult at the beginning will later seem simpler to us.

The same thing is true in the case of dialectics. We are awkward and clumsy due to the old metaphysical method of thinking, and we must acquire the flexibility and precision of the dialectical method. But we see that there is nothing mysterious or very complicated about this.

## ***2. Where did the dialectic method come from?***

We know that metaphysics considers the world to be a complex of fixed things and that, if we look at nature, we see that, on the contrary, everything moves and changes. We find that the same holds true for thought. The result of these findings is a disagreement between metaphysics and reality. In order to give a simple definition of the main idea conveyed by these words, we might say that “metaphysics” implies “immobility” and that “dialectics” implies “motion.”

Motion and change, which exist in everything that surrounds us, form the basis of dialectics.

When we reflect on Nature, or the history of mankind, or our own intellectual activity, the first picture presented to us is of an endless maze of relations and interactions, in which nothing remains what, where and as it was, but everything moves, changes, comes into being and passes out of existence (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 26).

According to this text by Engels, we see that from the dialectical point of view, everything changes; nothing remains where it is; nothing stays what it is and that, consequently, this point of view is in perfect agreement with reality. Nothing remains in the place that it occupies, since even that which seems immobile to us moves; it moves with the revolution of the earth around the sun and the rotation of the earth on its axis. In metaphysics, the principle of identity maintains that a thing must remain itself. We see that, on the contrary, nothing remains what it is.

We have the impression that we always remain the same, and yet Engels tells us that “the same are different.” We think that we are identical but we have already changed. From the child that we were, we have become an adult and this adult, physically, never remains the same, but gets older every day.

Hence, the misleading appearance is not motion, as the Eleatic philosophers claimed, but immobility, since, in fact, everything moves and changes.

History also proves to us that things do not remain as they are. At no moment is society immobile. There was first, in antiquity, a slave society; this was then succeeded by a feudal society and then capitalist society. The study of these societies shows us that the factors permitting the birth of a new society continually and imperceptibly developed within them. In this way, capitalist society changes every day and has ceased to exist in the USSR. Because no society remains immobile, the socialist society erected in the Soviet Union is also destined to disappear. It is already visibly transforming, and this is why metaphysicians do not understand what is taking place there. They continue to judge a completely transformed society with the feelings of a man who is still under capitalist oppression.

Our feelings themselves change, which we hardly notice. We see what was only an attraction turn into love, then sometimes degenerate into hatred.

What we see everywhere, in nature, history and thought, is change and motion. It is with this observation that dialectics begins.

The Greeks were startled by the fact that change and motion are encountered everywhere. We have seen that Heraclitus, who is called the “father of dialectics,” was the first to give us a dialectical concept of the world, i.e., he described the world in motion and not fixed. Heraclitus’ way of seeing can become a *method*.

But this dialectical method was able to assert its authority only a long time after that, and we must see why dialectics was dominated by the metaphysical concept for such a long time.

### ***3. Why was dialectics dominated for a long time by the metaphysical concept?***

We have seen that the dialectical point of view was born very early in history, but that man's insufficient knowledge enabled the metaphysical concept to develop and take precedence over dialectics.

We can draw a parallel here between idealism, which arose from the great ignorance of men, and the metaphysical concept, which derived from the insufficient knowledge of dialectics.

How and why was this possible?

Men began the study of nature in a state of complete ignorance. In order to study the phenomena which they found, they began by classifying them. But a mental habit resulted from this way of classifying. By making categories and separating them from each other, our minds get used to making such separations and we find in this the first characteristic of the metaphysical method. Hence, it was really from the insufficient development of science that metaphysics emerged. Only 150 years ago, people studied the sciences by separating them from each other. For example, chemistry, physics, and biology were studied separately and no relation was seen between them. This method was further applied within the sciences: physics was concerned with sound, heat, magnetism, electricity, etc., but it was thought that these different phenomena were totally unrelated; each was studied in separate chapters.

We easily recognize in this practice the second characteristic of metaphysics, which requires that one disregard the relations between things and that there be nothing in common between them.

Likewise, it is easier to conceive of things in a state of rest than in motion. Let us take photography as an example. We see that, firstly, pictures are taken of things in their immobility (this is photography), then, only later, in motion (this is cinematics). So, this example of the development of photography and cinematics mirrors that of the sciences and the human mind. We study things at rest before studying them in motion.

Why is this so? Because *people were ignorant*. In order to learn, people took the easiest point of view. Now, immobile things are easier to grasp and study. Certainly the study of things at rest is a necessary stage of dia-

lectical thought—but only an insufficient, fragmentary *stage*, which must be integrated into the study of things which are becoming.

We run across this state of mind in biology, for example, in the study of zoology and botany. Because they were not well known, animals were first classified into breeds and species, since it was thought that there was nothing in common between them and that it *had always been this way* (third characteristic of metaphysics). From this was derived the theory called “fixism” (which maintains, contrary to “evolutionism,” that animal species have always been what they are, that they have never *evolved*), which is, consequently, a metaphysical theory that stems from man’s ignorance.

#### **4. Why was the materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century metaphysical?**

We know that mechanics played a large role in the materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and that this materialism is often called “mechanistic materialism.” Why was this so? Because the materialist concept is linked to the development of all the sciences and among them, it was mechanics that developed first. In common speech, mechanics is the study of machines; in scientific language, it is the study of motion as displacement. Mechanics was the science that developed first because mechanical motion is the simplest kind of motion. It is much easier to study the motion of an apple on a tree that is blowing in the wind than to study the change produced in a ripening apple. The effect of the wind on the apple can be more easily studied than the ripening of the apple. But the former study is “partial” and thus opens the door to metaphysics.

Although they do indeed notice that everything is in motion, the ancient Greeks cannot make use of this observation, for their knowledge is insufficient. So, things and phenomena are observed and classified, and people are satisfied with studying their displacement, from which mechanics is derived; and the inadequacy of scientific knowledge gives rise to the metaphysical concept.

We know that materialism is always based on science and that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century science was dominated by the metaphysical spirit. Of all the sciences, the most developed during this period was mechanics. “This is why it was inevitable,” says Engels, “that the materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century be a metaphysical and mechanistic materialism, because the sciences were like that.”

We shall say, then, that this mechanistic and metaphysical materialism was materialist because it answered the fundamental question of philosophy by saying that the primary factor is matter; but it was metaphysical because it considered the universe to be a complex of fixed and mechanical things, and because it studied and saw everything from the point of view of mechanics.

There comes a day when, through the accumulation of research, one finds that the sciences are not immobile; one notices that they have been transformed. After having separated chemistry from biology and physics, one comes to the realization that it has become impossible to deal with one of the sciences without having recourse to the others. For example, the study of digestion, which belongs to the domain of biology, becomes impossible without chemistry. Towards the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the interconnection of the sciences is clearly seen and a retreat of the metaphysical spirit in the sciences ensues due to a more profound knowledge of nature. Up to then, the phenomena of physics had been studied separately; now, no one could deny that all these phenomena were of the same nature. This is how electricity and magnetism, which used to be studied separately, have come to be united in a single science: electromagnetism.

Likewise, by studying the phenomena of sound and heat, scientists have realized that both derive from phenomena of a similar nature.

By banging with a hammer, one obtains a sound and produces heat. It is motion that produces heat. And we know that sound consists of vibrations in the air; vibrations are also motion. Hence, these two phenomena are similar in nature.

In biology, by classifying more and more minutely, scientists have succeeded in discovering species that are incapable of being classified as either plant or animal. Hence, there was no abrupt separation of plants and animals. After further study, they arrived at the conclusion that animals have not always been what they are. The facts condemned fixism and the metaphysical spirit.

It was during the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the transformation we have just seen, and which enabled materialism to become dialectical, occurred. Dialectics is the spirit of science, which, in the course of its development, abandoned the metaphysical concept. Materialism was able to be transformed because the sciences changed. Metaphysical sciences were in harmony with

metaphysical materialism, just as the new sciences are in harmony with a new materialism, i.e., dialectical materialism.

### **5. How dialectical materialism was born: Hegel and Marx**

If we ask how this transformation of metaphysical materialism into dialectical materialism was brought about, the answer we generally get is:

1. There was the metaphysical materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century;
2. The sciences changed;
3. Marx and Engels stepped in; they cut metaphysical materialism in two; abandoning the metaphysics, they kept the materialism and added dialectics to it.

If we have a tendency to present things in this way, it is due to the metaphysical method, which demands that we simplify things in order to make a schema. We must, however, always keep in mind that *the facts of reality should never be schematized*. Facts are more complicated than they seem or than we think. It follows that there was not such a simple transformation of metaphysical materialism into dialectical materialism.

Dialectics was, in fact, developed by a German idealist philosopher, Hegel (1770-1831), who was able to understand the change that had taken place in the sciences. Reverting to the old idea of Heraclitus, he found, with the help of scientific progress, that everything in the universe is motion and change, that nothing is isolated, but rather everything is dependent on everything else—and this is how he created dialectics. It is due to Hegel that we speak today of the dialectical motion of the world. What Hegel first grasped was the motion of thought, and he called it naturally dialectics.

But Hegel is an idealist, i.e., he gives primary importance to spirit and, consequently, he entertains a particular idea about motion and change. He thinks that it is spiritual changes that provoke changes in matter. For Hegel, the universe is idea become matter and, before the universe, there was first spirit, which discovered the universe. In short, he finds that both spirit and the universe are in perpetual change but concludes that changes in spirit determine changes in matter.

Example: The inventor has an idea; he realized this idea, and it is this materialized idea that creates changes in matter.

Hence, Hegel is certainly a dialectician, but he subordinates dialectics to idealism.

It is then that Marx (1818-1883) and Engels (1820-1895)—followers of Hegel, but materialist followers, and therefore giving primary importance to matter—think that his dialectics makes assertions that are correct but upside down. Engels says in this regard that Hegel dialectics was standing on its head and it had to be put back on its feet. Hence, Marx and Engels transfer the initial cause of this motion of thought defined by Hegel to material reality and call it naturally dialectics, borrowing the same term from him.

They think that Hegel is right to say that thought and the universe are perpetually changing, but that he is mistaken to declare that it is changes in ideas that determine changes in things. It is, rather, things that give us ideas, and ideas have been altered because things have been altered.

Therefore, we ought to avoid saying, “Marx and Engels possess, on the one hand, materialism, inherited from the French materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and, on the other hand, Hegel’s dialectics; consequently, it remained for them only to join the two together.”

This is a simplistic, schematic concept, which forgets that phenomena are more complicated; it is a metaphysical concept.

Marx and Engels certainly take dialectics from Hegel, but they transform it. They do the same with materialism in order to give us dialectical materialism.

## 2 – THE LAWS OF DIALECTICS. FIRST LAW: DIALECTICAL CHANGE

### 1. *What is meant by dialectical motion?*

The first law of dialectics begins by remarking that “nothing stays where it is; nothing remains what it is.” Dialectics implies motion and change. Consequently, when one speaks of seeing things from a dialectical viewpoint, this means seeing them from the point of view of motion and change. When we want to study things according to dialectics, we shall study them *in* their motion and *in* their change.

Here is an apple. We have two ways of studying this apple: either from the metaphysical or from the dialectical point of view.

In the first case, we shall give a description of this fruit: its shape and color. We shall list its properties; we shall speak of its taste, etc. Then we can compare the apple with the pear, see their similarities and differences and finally conclude that an apple is an apple and a pear is a pear. This is how things were formerly studied, as numerous books will attest.

If we want to study the apple from the dialectical point of view, we shall place ourselves within the framework of motion; not the motion of the apple when it rolls and moves from place to place, but rather the *motion of its evolution*. Then we shall find that the ripe apple has not always been what it is. Before that, it was a green apple; before being a flower, it was a bud. In this way, we shall go back to the condition of the apple tree in spring. The apple has not always been an apple: it has a history. Likewise, it will not remain what it is. If it falls, it will rot, decompose and scatter its seeds, which will, if all goes well, produce a shoot and then a tree. Hence, neither has the apple always been what it is nor will it remain what it is.

This is what is called studying things from the point of view of motion. It is study from the point of view of the past and the future. By studying in this way, the present apple is seen only as a *transition* between what it was, the past, and what it will be, the future.

In order to clearly explain this way of seeing things, we are going to take two more examples: the Earth and society.

From a metaphysical point of view, we shall describe the shape of the Earth in all its details. We shall find that on its surface there are seas, land

and mountains; we shall study the nature of the soil. Then we can compare the Earth to other planets or to the moon, and we shall finally conclude that the Earth is the Earth.

Whereas by studying the history of the Earth from the dialectical point of view, we shall see that it has undergone transformations and that, consequently, the Earth will undergo in the future even more transformations. We must then take into account today that the present state of the Earth is but a transition between past changes and changes to come. This transition is such that the changes that take place are imperceptible, although they are on a much larger scale than those which occur during the ripening of an apple.

Let us now look at the example of society, which is of particular interest to Marxists.

Let us still apply our two methods. From the metaphysical point of view, we will be told that there have always been rich and poor. We shall find that there are large banks and enormous factories. We will be given a detailed description of capitalist society, which will be compared with past societies (feudal, slave-owning) by looking for similarities and differences, and we will be told that capitalist society is what it is.

From the dialectical point of view, we shall learn that capitalist society has not always been what it is. When we find that in the past, other societies lived for a while, we shall deduce from this that capitalist society, like all societies, is not permanent and has no intangible basis, but rather it is only a provisional reality for us, a transition between the past and the future.

From these few examples, we see that to consider things from the dialectical point of view means to consider them to be provisional, having a history in the past and about to have a history in the future; having a beginning and going to have an end.

## ***2. For dialectics, there is nothing final, absolute, sacred***

“For it [dialectics], nothing is final, absolute, sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything; nothing can endure before it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away...” (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 12).

Here is a definition that underlines what we have just seen and what we are going to study:

*“For dialectics, there is nothing final.”*

This means that, for dialectics, everything has a past and will have a future; consequently, it is not here once and for all and what it is today is not final. (Examples of the apple, Earth, society.)

For dialectics, there is no power in the world, nor beyond the world, that can hold things in a permanent state; hence there is “nothing absolute.” (*Absolute* means not subject to any condition—hence, universal, eternal, perfect.)

*“Nothing sacred”*: this does not mean that dialectics despises everything. No! A sacred thing is a thing that is regarded as immutable, which must neither be touched nor be discussed but only venerated. Capitalist society, for example, is “sacred.” Well, dialectics tells us that *nothing* can escape from motion, change or the transformations of history.

*“Transitory”* comes from “transire,” which means to pass; a transitory thing is one which grows old and must disappear. Dialectics shows us that anything that is transitory eventually no longer has any reason for being—that everything is destined to disappear. What is young grows old; what is living today dies tomorrow, and nothing exists for dialectics, “except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away.”

Hence, to assume the dialectical point of view means to consider nothing to be eternal, except change. It means understanding that no particular thing can be eternal except “becoming.”

But what is this “becoming” that Engels speaks of in his definition?

We have seen that the apple has a history. Let us now take the example of a pencil, which has its own history, too.

This pencil, which is worn down today, was once new. The wood from which it is made came from a board, and this board came from a tree. We see then that the apple and the pencil both have a history and that neither one has always been what it is. But is there a difference between these two histories? Certainly!

The green apple became ripe. When it was green, could it, if all went well, and not become ripe? No, it *had* to ripen, just as, if it falls to the ground, it has to rot, decompose and scatter its seeds.

However, the tree from which the pencil comes may not become a board, and this board may not become a pencil. The pencil itself can always remain whole and not be sharpened.

Hence, we notice a difference between these two histories. In the case of the apple, if nothing abnormal occurs, the flower becomes an apple and the green apple *becomes* ripe. Thus, given one stage, the other stage *necessarily* and inevitably follows (if nothing stops the evolution).

In the history of the pencil, on the other hand, the tree may not become a board, the board may not become a pencil, and the pencil may not be sharpened. Hence, given one stage, the second stage *may not follow*. If the history of the pencil proceeds through all its stages, it is due to foreign intervention—that of man.

In the history of the apple, we find stages that succeed one another, the second stage deriving from the first, etc. This history follows the “becoming” that Engels speaks of. In the history of the pencil, the stages are placed side by side, without deriving from each other. This is because the apple is following a natural process.

### **3. Process**

(Word coming from Latin and meaning: forward motion, or the act of advancing, of progressing.)

Why does the green apple become ripe? Because of what it contains. It is due to internal sequences that stimulate the apple to ripen; *it is because it was an apple even before it was ripe; it is because it could not help but ripen*.

When one examines the flower that will become an apple, then the green apple that will ripen, one finds that these internal sequences, stimulating the apple in its evolution, act under the pressure of internal forces. This latter is called *autodynamism*, which means a force that comes from the being itself.

When the pencil was still a board, the intervention of man was necessary in order to make it become a pencil, for never would a board transform itself into a pencil. There were not internal forces at work, thus no autodynamism and no process. Hence, dialectics implies not only motion but also autodynamism.

We see then that dialectical motion contains within itself processes or autodynamism, which is its essential feature. For not every motion or

change is dialectical. If we approach the study of a flea from the dialectical viewpoint, we shall say that it has not always been what it is and that it will not always be what it is. If we crush it, this certainly represents a change for it, but will this change be dialectical? No. Without us, it would not have been crushed. Hence, this change is not dialectical, but *mechanical*.

Therefore, we must be careful when we speak of dialectical change. We think that if the Earth continues to exist, capitalist society will be replaced by a socialist and then a Communist society. This will be a dialectical change. But, if the Earth explodes, capitalist society will disappear not through an autodynamic change, but through a mechanical change.

In another context, we say that there is a mechanical discipline when this discipline is not natural. But it is autodynamic when it is freely consented to, i.e., when it comes from its natural milieu. A mechanical discipline is imposed from the outside; it is a discipline coming from leaders who are different from those they command. (We understand then to what extent nonmechanical discipline, autodynamic discipline, is not within the reach of every organization!)

Therefore, we must avoid using dialectics in a mechanical fashion. This is a tendency that we derive from our metaphysical habits of thinking. We mustn't repeat like a parrot that things have not always been what they are. When a dialectician says that, he must look for how things were before. For saying that is not the end of an argument, but the beginning of scrupulous research into what things were like *before*.

Marx, Engels and Lenin studied at length and in detail what capitalist society was like before them. They observed the smallest details in order to take note of dialectical changes. Lenin, in order to describe and criticize the changes in capitalist society, and to study the imperialist period, made very detailed studies and consulted numerous statistics.

When we speak of autodynamism, we should never turn it into a literary phrase either; we should only use this word knowingly and for those who understand it totally.

Finally, when studying something, after having seen what its autodynamic changes are and stated what change one has found, one must look for the reason why this change is autodynamic.

This is why dialectics, research and science are closely linked.

## Elementary Principles of Philosophy

Dialectics is not a way of explaining and knowing things without having studied them, but rather a way of studying well and making good observations; by looking for the beginning and the end of things, where they come from and where they are going.

## 3 – SECOND LAW: RECIPROCAL ACTION

### *1. The sequence of processes*

We have just seen, in connection with the history of the apple, what a process is. Let's have another look at this example. We have looked for where the apple came from and we were obliged to push our research as far back as the tree. But this problem of research also arises in regard to the tree. The study of the apple leads us to the study of the origins and destiny of the tree. Where does the tree come from? From an apple. It comes from an apple that has fallen and rotted in the earth, giving birth to a shoot. This leads us to study the ground, the conditions in which the seeds of the apple were able to sprout, the influences of the air, sun, etc. In this way, starting with the study of the apple, we are led to study the soil, proceeding from the process of the apple to that of the tree. The latter process has its sequence, in turn, in that of the soil. We have here what is called a “sequence of processes.” This will enable us to express and study the second law of dialectics: the law of reciprocal action. Let us take another example of the sequence of processes—that of the Workers’ University in Paris.

If we study this school from the dialectical point of view, we shall look for where it came from and find at first this answer: in the autumn of 1932, some comrades meeting together decided to found a Workers’ University in Paris in order to study Marxism.

But where did this committee get this idea of teaching Marxism? Obviously because Marxism exists. But then, where does Marxism come from?

We see that research into the sequence of processes involves us in detailed and complete studies. Much more: by looking for the source of Marxism, we shall find that this doctrine is the very conscience of the proletariat. We see (whether we are for or against Marxism) that the proletariat then does exist; and so again we ask the question: where does the proletariat come from?

We know that it derives from an economic system, viz., capitalism. We know that the division of society into classes, that class struggle, was not caused, as our adversaries claim, by Marxism. On the contrary, we

know that Marxism observes the existence of this class struggle and draws its force from the already existing proletariat.

Hence, from process to process, we arrive at the examination of the conditions of existence of capitalism. We have, in this way, a sequence of processes that shows us that everything influences everything else. This is the law of reciprocal action.

As a conclusion to these two examples of the apple and of the Workers' University in Paris, let us see how a metaphysician would have proceeded.

In the example of the apple, he could only have thought, "Where does the apple come from?" And he would have been satisfied with the answer, "The apple comes from the tree." He would not have looked any further.

For the Workers' University he would have been satisfied with saying, about its origin, that it was founded by a group of men who wished "to corrupt the French people" or some such nonsense.

But the dialectician sees the entire sequence of processes which end, on the one hand, with the apple, and, on the other, with the Workers' University. The dialectician connects the particular fact, the detail, to the whole.

He connects the apple to the tree, and he goes back further, all the way to nature in its entirety. The apple is not only the fruit of the apple tree but also that of all of nature.

The Workers' University is not only the "fruit" of the proletariat but also the "fruit" of capitalist society.

Hence, we see that, contrary to the metaphysician who conceives of the world as a complex of fixed things, the dialectician will see the world as a complex of processes. And, if the dialectical point of view is true for nature and for the sciences, if is also true for society. "The old method of investigation and thought which Hegel calls 'metaphysical,' which preferred to investigate things as given, as fixed and stable, a method the relics of which still strongly haunt people's minds, had a good deal of historical justification in its day" (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 45).

Consequently, things and society were studied during this period as a complex of "ready-made, fixed objects," which not only do not change, but, particularly in the case of society, are not destined to disappear.

Engels points out the great importance of dialectics, this:

...great basic thought that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which the things apparently stable no less than their mind-images in our heads, the concepts, go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away, in which, in spite of all seeming accidents and of all temporary retrogression, a progressive development asserts itself in the end... (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 44).

Hence, neither should capitalist society be regarded as a “complex of ready-made things”; rather, it should be studied as a complex of processes.

Metaphysicians realize that capitalist society has not always existed, and they say that it has a history; but they think that, with its appearance, society has stopped evolving and will remain “fixed” from now on. They regard all things as finished and not as the beginning of a new process. The story of the creation of the world by God is an explanation of the world as a complex of completed things. God accomplished a completed task each day. He made plants and animals and man once and for all; whence the theory of fixism.

Dialectics judges things in a different way. It does not regard things as “fixed” objects, but rather as objects “in motion.” Nothing is complete; it is always the end of one process and the beginning of another process, always changing and developing. This is why we are so sure of the transformation of capitalist society into a socialist society. Since nothing is permanently finished, capitalist society is the end of a process to which socialist society and then Communist society and so forth will succeed. There is, and there will continually be, a development.

But we must be careful here not to look upon dialectics as something inevitable, from which one might conclude, “Since you are so sure of the change which you desire, why do you struggle?” For, as Marx says, “in order to deliver socialist society, a midwife is necessary;” whence the necessity of revolution, of action.

The fact is, things are not so simple. One mustn’t forget the role of men who may advance or slow down this transformation (we shall take up

this question again in Chapter 5 of this part, when we speak of historical materialism).

For the moment, all we wish to point out is the existence of a sequence of processes in everything which is produced through the internal force of things (autodynamism). We repeat: for dialectics, *nothing is complete*. We must understand the development of things as having no final act. At the end of one theatrical production of the world the first act of another play begins. More precisely, this first act had already begun in the last act of the preceding play.

## **2. The great discoveries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

What determined the abandonment of the metaphysical spirit and obliged first scientists, then Marx and Engels, to consider things in their dialectical movement, is, as we know, the discoveries made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Engels points out in *Ludwig Feuerbach*, there were three especially great discoveries of this period which caused dialectics to advance (p. 46).

### **(1) The discovery of the living cell and its development**

Before this discovery, “fixism” had been adopted as the basis of all reasoning. Species were considered to be foreign to each other. Moreover, two kingdoms were categorically differentiated: the animal kingdom and the plant kingdom.

Then this discovery takes place, enabling the idea of “evolution,” which thinkers and scientists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century had already started to spread, to become more precise. This discovery leads to the understanding that life is made up of a succession of births and deaths and that every living being is an association of cells. This finding then leaves no boundary remaining between animals and plants and thus dispels the metaphysical concept.

### **(2) The discovery of the transformation of energy**

Formerly, science believed that sound, heat and light, for example, were completely alien to each other. Yet now it is discovered that all these phenomena can be transformed into each other, that there are sequences of processes in *inert* matter as well as in living nature. This revelation brings still another blow to metaphysical thinking.

### (3) The discovery of evolution of man and animals

Darwin, says Engels, reveals that all the products of nature are the result of a long process of development of originally single-celled micro-organisms: everything is the product of a long process having the cell for its origin.

Engels concludes that, thanks to these three great discoveries, we can follow the sequence of all these natural phenomena not only within the different domains but also *between* the different domains.

It is, therefore, the sciences that made the elaboration of the second law of reciprocal action possible.

Between the plant, animal and mineral kingdoms there is no sharp break, but rather only processes; everything is connected. And this is true for society as well. The different societies that have spanned the history of mankind should be regarded as a series of sequences of processes in which one society has necessarily come from the one which preceded it.

Hence, we should remember that science, nature and society must be seen as a sequence of processes, and that the motor working to develop this sequence is *autodynamism*.

### ***3. Historical or spiral development***

If we examine the process that we are beginning to know a little more closely, we see that the apple is the result of a sequence of processes. Where does the apple come from? The apple comes from the tree. Where does the tree come from? From the apple. We may then think that we have here a vicious circle in which we always return to the same point. Tree, apple. Apple, tree. Likewise, if we take the example of the egg and the hen. Where does the egg come from? From the hen. Where does the hen come from? From the egg.

If we regarded things in this way, this would not be a process, but a circle. This appearance, moreover, has created the idea of the “eternal return.” That is to say, we always come back to the same point, the point of departure.

But let us see exactly how the problem is stated.

1. Here is an apple.

2. When it decomposes, it engenders a tree or some trees.
3. Each tree does not produce one apple, but several apples.

Hence, we do not return to the same point of departure; we come back to the apple, but on another level.

Similarly, if we begin with the tree, we have:

1. A tree which produces;
2. Some apples, which in turn produce;
3. Some trees.

Here again we return to the tree, but on another level. The scope has widened.

Hence, we do not have a circle, as appearances might make us think, but a process of development, which we shall call a historical development. History shows us that time does not go by without leaving any traces. Time passes, but the same developments do not return. The world, nature and society constitute a development that is historical, a development that, in philosophical language, is called “spiral.”

We use this image in order to make our ideas clear; it is a comparison to illustrate the fact that things evolve according to a circular process, but do not return to the point of departure; they come back a bit above, on another level, and so on, which produces an ascending spiral.

Hence, the world, nature and society have a historical (spiral) development, and what stimulates this development, let us not forget, is autodynamism.

#### ***4. Conclusion***

We have just studied, in these first chapters on dialectics, the first two laws: that of change and that of reciprocal action. This was indispensable in order to approach the study of the law of contradiction, for it is this law which will enable us to understand the force which stimulates dialectical change, viz., autodynamism.

In the first chapter, relative to the study of dialectics, we saw why this theory had been dominated for so long by the metaphysical concept and why the materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was metaphysical. After

having rapidly seen the three great discoveries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which enabled materialism to develop in order to become dialectical, we understand better now why it was necessary for the history of this philosophy to go through the three great periods which we have seen: 1) materialism of antiquity (theory of atoms); 2) materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (mechanistic and metaphysical); finally culminating in 3) dialectical materialism.

We have maintained throughout that materialism derives from the sciences and is linked to them. We can see, after these three chapters, how true this is. We have seen in this study of dialectical motion and change and of the law of reciprocal action that *all our arguments are based on science.*

Today, when scientific studies are specialized to the extreme, and when scientists (generally ignorant of dialectical materialism) sometimes cannot understand the importance of their discoveries in relation to the *totality* of the sciences, it is the role of philosophy, whose mission, we have said, is to provide an explanation of the world and of the most general problems—and, in particular, it is the mission of dialectical materialism, to unite all the particular discoveries of each science into a synthesis, thereby establishing a theory which makes us more and more, as Descartes said, “masters and possessors of nature.”

## 4 – THIRD LAW: CONTRADICTION

We have seen that dialectics regards things as being in perpetual change, continually evolving, in a word, undergoing a dialectical motion (first law).

This dialectical motion is possible because everything at the moment when we are studying it is but the result of a sequence of processes, i.e., a sequence of stages come from each other. And continuing our study further, we have seen that this sequence of processes necessarily develops in time into a progressive motion, “in spite of any momentary backsliding.”

We have called this development “historical” or “spiral,” and we know that it generates itself through autodynamism.

But what are the laws of autodynamism? What are the laws which enable the stages to proceed from each other? They are called the “laws of dialectical motion.”

Dialectics teaches us that things are not eternal: they have a beginning, a maturity, and an old age, which has an end, a death.

All things pass through these stages: birth, maturity, old age, end. Why is this so? Why are things not eternal?

This is an old question which has always interested humanity. Why must we die? We do not understand this necessity; throughout history, men have dreamed of eternal life, of the ways of changing this state of affairs. For example, in the Middle Ages, they invented magic potions for eternal youth or life.

Why then is everything that is born obliged to die? This is a great law of dialectics, which we should compare with metaphysics in order to really understand it.

### ***1. Life and death***

From the metaphysical point of view, things are considered in an isolated fashion, taken by themselves, and—because metaphysics studies things in this way—it considers them unilaterally, i.e., from one side. This is why it can be said that those who see things one-sidedly are metaphysicians. Briefly, when a metaphysician studies the phenomenon called life, he does so without relating this phenomenon to any other. He sees life for itself and by itself, unilaterally. He sees it from one side only. If he exam-

ines death, he will do the same thing; he will apply his unilateral point of view and conclude by saying: life is life and death is death. Between the two there is nothing in common; one cannot be both alive and dead, for the two are opposite things and completely contrary to each other.

To see things in this way is to view them superficially. Upon closer examination, it will be seen firstly that they cannot be opposed, nor even can they be so brutally separated, since experience and reality show us that death continues life and that it derives from the living.

As for life—can it derive from death? Yes. The transformation of the elements of the dead corpse will give birth to other lives and be used as fertilizer for the earth, making it more fertile, for example. Death, in many cases, will help life; death will enable life to be born; and, in living bodies themselves, life is only possible because there is a continual replacement of dead cells by those which are newly born.

Hence, life and death are constantly being transformed into each other, and in everything we observe the invariability of this great law: *everywhere, things are transformed into their opposites.*

## ***2. Things change into their opposites***

Metaphysicians set opposites against each other, but reality shows us that opposites are *transformed* into each other, that things do not remain themselves, but are transformed into their opposites.

If we examine truth and error, we tend to think that there is nothing in common between them. Truth is truth and error is error. This the unilateral point of view, which sets the two opposites at loggerheads, as one might do with life and death.

And yet, sometimes when we exclaim, “Hey, it’s raining!” no sooner have we finished saying so than the rain has stopped. The sentence was correct when we began it, but it was transformed into an error. (The Greeks had already observed this fact, so they said that in order not to be mistaken it was best to keep silent!)

In the same vein, let us go back to the example of the apple. We see a ripe apple on the ground and we say, “There is a ripe apple.” However, it has been on the ground for some time and already it is beginning to decompose, so that truth becomes error.

Science also provides us with numerous examples of laws, considered for many years to be “truths,” and which scientific progress has proven to be “errors” at a certain moment.

Hence, we see that truth changes into error. But does error ever change into truth?

In the beginning of civilization, notably in Egypt, men imagined fights between the gods in order to explain the rising and setting of the sun. This is an error to the extent that it was said that the gods push or pull the sun to make it move. But science says that this theory is partially justified in that there are in fact forces which make the sun move. So we see that error is not diametrically opposed to truth.

If, then, things do change into their opposites, how is this possible? How does life change into death?

If there were only life, 100 percent pure life, it could never be death, and if death were totally itself, 100 percent pure death, it would be impossible for the one to change into the other. But there is already some death in life and thus some life in death.

By looking closely, we see that a living being is composed of cells, that these cells are renewed, that they disappear and reappear in the same place. They live and die continually in a living being, in which there is therefore both life and death.

We also know that the beard of a dead man continues to grow. The same is true for his nails and hair. These are clear-cut phenomena that prove that life continues after death.

In the Soviet Union, the blood of the dead is preserved under special conditions for blood transfusions: thus, with the blood of a dead person a living person is remade. Consequently, we can say that in the midst of death there is life. “Life is therefore also a contradiction which is present in things and processes themselves, and which constantly asserts and solves itself; and as soon as the contradiction ceases, life too comes to an end, and death steps in” (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 133).

Hence, things not only change into each other but also a thing is not only itself, but another thing which is its opposite, for everything contains its opposite.

If we represent a thing by a circle, we have force which pushes this thing toward life, pushing from the center outwards, for example (expres-

sion), but we also have forces which push this thing in the opposite direction, forces of death, pushing from the exterior inwards (compression).

Thus, within everything, opposed forces—antagonisms—exist.

What happens between these forces? They struggle with each other. Consequently, a thing is not only moved by a force acting in a single direction, but everything is really moved by two forces acting in opposing directions: one towards the affirmation and one towards the negation of things, one towards life and one towards death. What does the affirmation and negation of things mean?

In life, there are forces which maintain life, which tend toward the affirmation of life. Then there are also forces in living organisms, which tend towards negation. In everything, some forces tend towards affirmation and others towards negation, and between affirmation and negation there is a contradiction.

Hence, dialectics observes change, but why do things change? Because they are not in agreement with themselves, because there is a struggle between forces, between internal antagonisms, because there is contradiction. Here is the third law of dialectics: *Things change because they contain contradictions within themselves.*

(If we are obliged, at times, to use more or less complicated words—like dialectics, autodynamism, etc.—or terms which seem contrary to traditional logic and difficult to understand, it is not because we like to complicate things at whim as the bourgeoisie does. No. But this study, although elementary, seeks to be as complete as possible and to facilitate the later reading of the philosophical works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, who use these terms. In any case, since we must utilize something other than everyday language, we are determined to make it comprehensible to everyone in the framework of this study.)

### ***3. Affirmation, negation and negation of the negation***

Here we must make a distinction between what is called a verbal contradiction—which means that, when someone tells you “yes,” you answer “no”—and the contradiction which we have just seen and which is called a dialectical contradiction, i.e., a contradiction *in facts*, in things themselves.

When we speak of the contradiction that exists in the heart of capitalist society, this does not mean that some people say yes and others say no about certain theories. This means that there is a contradiction in factual reality, that there are real forces that are fighting each other: first, a force which tends to *affirm* itself, viz., the bourgeois class which tends to maintain itself; then, a second social force which tends toward the negation of the bourgeois class, viz., the proletariat. Hence the contradiction does exist in reality, because the bourgeoisie cannot exist without creating its opposite, the proletariat. As Marx says, “What the bourgeoisie, therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers” (Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party and Principles of Communism*, Paris: Foreign Languages Press, 2020, p. 46).

In order to prevent this, the bourgeoisie would have to stop being itself, which would be absurd. Consequently, by affirming itself, it creates its own negation.

Let us take the example of an egg that is laid and sat on by a hen: we find that in the egg there is a seed which develops at a certain temperature and under certain conditions. This seed, while developing, will produce a chick; hence, the seed is already the negation of the egg. We see then that in the egg there are two forces: one which tends to make it remain an egg and one which tends to make it become a chick. Therefore, the egg is in disagreement with itself and all things are in disagreement with themselves.

This may seem difficult to understand, because we are used to the metaphysical way of reasoning, but this is why we should make an effort to become accustomed to seeing *things in their reality*.

A thing begins by being an *affirmation* which comes from *negation*. The chick is an affirmation born from the negation of the egg. It is one stage of the process. But the chick, in turn, will be transformed into a hen. During this transformation, there will be a contradiction between the forces which fight to make the chick become a hen and those which fight to make the chick remain a chick. The hen will thus be the negation of the chick, the latter having derived from the negation of the egg.

The hen will therefore be the negation of the negation. And this is the general course of the stages of dialectics.

## 1. **Affirmation** also called **Thesis**

## 2. Negation or Antithesis

## 3. Negation of the Negation or Synthesis

These words summarize dialectical development. They are used to represent the sequence of stages, to indicate that each stage is the destruction of the preceding one.

Destruction is a negation. The chick is the negation of the egg, since by being born it destroys the egg. Similarly, the ear of wheat is the negation of the grain of wheat. The grain will germinate in the soil; this germination is the germination of the grain of wheat and will produce a plant. This plant, in turn, will flower and produce an ear; the latter will be the negation of the plant or the negation of the negation.

Hence, we see that the negation which dialectics speaks of is another way of speaking of destruction. There is a negation of what disappears, of what is destroyed.

1. Feudalism was the negation of the slave state.
2. Capitalism is the negation of feudalism.
3. Socialism is the negation of capitalism.

Just as when we made a distinction between verbal contradiction and dialectical contradiction, here we must clearly understand what verbal negation—which says “no”—is and what dialectical negation—which means “destruction”—is.

But while negation means destruction, it does not mean just any kind of destruction, but dialectical destruction. Thus, when we crush a flea, it does not die from internal destruction, from dialectical negation. Its destruction is not the result of autodynamic stages; it is the result of a purely mechanical change.

Destruction is a negation only if it is a product of affirmation, if it comes from it. Thus, the egg which is sat on, being the affirmation of what an egg is, engenders its own negation: it becomes a chick, and the latter symbolizes the destruction or the negation of the egg, by piercing and destroying the shell.

In the chick we observe two adverse forces; “chick” and “hen.” In the course of this development of the process, the hen will lay eggs, whence a

new negation of the negation arises. From these eggs, then, a new sequence of the process will begin.

In the case of wheat, we also see an affirmation, then a negation and negation of the negation.

Let us take materialist philosophy as another example.

In the beginning, we find a primitive, spontaneous materialism, which, due to its ignorance, creates its own negation: idealism. But the idealism that negates the old materialism will itself be repudiated in turn by modern or dialectical materialism, because philosophy, along with the sciences, develops and provokes the destruction of idealism. Hence, here also, we have affirmation, negation and negation of the negation.

We may also observe this cycle in the evolution of society.

In the beginning of history we find the existence of a primitive Communist society, a society without classes, based on the common ownership of the land. But this form of ownership becomes a hindrance to the development of production and, in this way, creates its own negation: a class society, based on private ownership and the exploitation of man by man. But this society carries its own negation within itself as well, because a superior development of the means of production brings about the necessity of negating the division of society into classes, of negating private ownership. So we return to the point of departure: the necessity for a Communist society, *but on another level*. In the beginning, there was a lack of commodities; today, we have a very high capacity of production.

Notice that for all the examples we have given we return to the point of departure, but on another level (spiral development), *a higher level*.

We see then that contradiction is the great law of dialectics. That evolution is a fight between antagonistic forces. That, not only do things change into each other, but also everything is transformed into its opposite. That things do not agree with themselves because there are struggles inside them between opposed forces, because there are internal contradictions within them.

*Note*—The expressions “affirmation,” “negation,” and “negation of the negation” are only verbal shorthand for the moments of dialectical evolution. Therefore, we should be careful not to run about trying to find these three stages everywhere. Sometimes we shall not find all of them because

the evolution is not complete. So we mustn't mechanically try to see these changes as such in everything. Let us especially remember that contradiction is the great law of dialectics. That is the essential point.

#### **4. Summary**

We already know that dialectics is a method of thinking, of reasoning and of analyzing that enables us to make good observations and to study well, for it obliges us to look for the source of everything and to describe its history.

We have seen that the former method of thinking certainly had its necessity in its time. But to study with the dialectical method is to observe—let us repeat—that all things, apparently immobile, are but a sequence of processes in which everything has a beginning and an end, where in everything, “in spite of all seeming accidents and of all temporary retrogression, a progressive development asserts itself in the end...” (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 44).

Only dialectics enables us to understand the development and the evolution of things; it alone permits us to understand the destruction of ancient things and the birth of new ones. Only dialectics lets us understand all developments in their transformations by letting us know them as entities made up of opposites. For, as far as the dialectical concept is concerned, the natural development of things, evolution, is a continual struggle between antagonistic forces and principles.

Hence, while for dialectics the first law is the observation of motion and change—“Nothing remains what, where and as it was” (Engels)—we now know that the explanation of this law resides in the fact that things change not only by transforming themselves into each other, but also by transforming themselves into their opposites. Contradiction is therefore a great law of dialectics.

We have studied what contradiction is from the dialectical point of view, but we must again lay stress on this in order to add certain details and to point out certain errors that we should not commit.

It is quite certain that we must first familiarize ourselves with this assertion, which is in harmony with reality: the transformation of things into their opposites. Certainly, this shocks our understanding and surprises us, because we are accustomed to thinking with the old metaphysi-

cal method. But we have seen why this is so. We have seen in detail, with examples, that this *exists* in reality and why things are changed into their opposites.

This is why it can be maintained that, if things are transformed, if they change and evolve, it is because they are in contradiction with themselves; because they carry their opposites within themselves; because they contain within themselves *an interpenetration, a unity and struggle of opposites*.

### **5. The unity and struggle of opposites**

Each thing is an interpenetration of opposites.

To declare such a thing at first appears absurd. "A thing and its opposite have nothing in common." This is what is generally thought. For dialectics, however, each thing is at the same time itself and its opposite; each thing is an interpenetration of opposites, and we must explain this.

For a metaphysician, the unity and struggle of opposites is an impossible thing. For him, things are made up of a single piece, in harmony with themselves. Here we are declaring just the opposite, namely that things are made up of two pieces—themselves and their opposites—and that there are two forces in them that fight each other, because things are not in harmony with themselves; because they contradict themselves.

If we take the example of ignorance and science, i.e., knowledge, we know that from the metaphysical point of view these are two totally opposed and contrary things. Someone who is ignorant is not a scientist and someone who is a scientist is not ignorant.

However, if we look at the facts, we see that they do not give rise to such a rigid opposition. We see that at first ignorance prevailed, then science appeared; and we thereby ascertain that one thing is transformed into its opposite: ignorance is transformed into science.

There is no ignorance without science or knowledge. There is no 100 percent pure ignorance. An individual, no matter how ignorant he may be, can at least recognize objects and his food. *There is never absolute ignorance:* there is always some knowledge in ignorance. The seeds of knowledge have already been planted in ignorance. Therefore, we are correct in maintaining that the opposite of a thing is found in the thing itself.

Let us look at knowledge now. Can there be 100 percent pure knowledge? No. One is always ignorant of something. Lenin says, “The object of knowledge is inexhaustible,” which means that there is always something to be learned. *There is no absolute knowledge.* All knowledge and every science contains some ignorance.

What exists in reality is *relative* knowledge and ignorance, a mixture of knowledge and ignorance.

Hence, in this example it is not the *transformation* of things into their opposites which we observe, but rather the existence of opposites *in the same thing*, or, in other words, the *interpenetration of opposites*.

We could go back to the examples which we have already seen: life and death, truth and error, and we would find that, in both cases, as in everything, an interpenetration of opposites exists, i.e., each thing contains at the same time itself and its opposite. This is why Engels says:

If, however, investigation always proceeds from this standpoint, the demand for final solutions and eternal truths ceases once for all; one is always conscious of the necessary limitation of all acquired knowledge, of the fact that it is conditioned by the circumstances in which it was acquired. On the other hand, one no longer permits oneself to be imposed upon by the antitheses, insuperable for the still common old metaphysics, between true and false, good and bad, identical and different, necessary and accidental. One knows that these antitheses have only a relative validity; that that which is recognized now as true has also its latent false side which will later manifest itself, just as that which is now regarded as false has also its true side by virtue of which it could previously have been regarded as true (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 45).

This text by Engels clearly shows us how dialectics should be understood and the true meaning of the interpenetration of opposites.

## **6. Errors to be avoided**

This great law of dialectics, contradiction, must be clearly explained in order not to create any misunderstandings.

First, it should not be interpreted in a mechanical way. We mustn't think that in all knowledge there is truth *plus* error, or *both* something true and something false.

If this law were applied in this way, it would justify those who say that there is something true plus something false in all opinions, so "let's remove what is false, and what is true and good will remain." This is said in certain so-called Marxist circles, where it is thought that Marxism is right to point out that, in capitalism there are factories, trusts and banks which hold economic life in their hands, it is correct to say that this economic life is going badly; but what is false in Marxism, they add, is class struggle: let's leave out the theory of class struggle and we shall have a good doctrine. It is also said that Marxism applied to the study of society is correct and true, "but why mix in dialectics? This is the false side, let's remove dialectics and keep the rest of Marxism as true!"

These are mechanical interpretations of the interpenetration of opposites.

Here is another example: Proudhon, after having learned of this theory of opposites, thought that there was a good and a bad side in everything. So, observing that there is a bourgeoisie and a proletariat in society, he said, "Let's remove what is bad: the proletariat!" That is how he constructed his system of credits, which was to create "parcelled out property," i.e., to allow the proletarians to become owners. In this way, there would only be the bourgeoisie and society would be good.

However, we know very well that there can be no proletariat *without* the bourgeoisie and that the bourgeoisie exists only *through* the proletariat: these are two opposites which are inseparable. This unity and struggle of opposites is internal and real: it is an inseparable union. Hence, in order to get rid of the opposites it is not sufficient to cut one from the other. In a society based on the exploitation of man by man, there necessarily exists two antagonistic classes: masters and slaves in antiquity, lords and serfs in the Middle Ages, bourgeoisie and proletariat today.

In order to abolish capitalist society—to create a society without classes—both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat must be eliminated—in order to enable free men to create a materially and intellectually more advanced society, to go towards communism in its superior form and not

to create, as our adversaries claim, a communism which is “egalitarian in poverty.”

Hence, we must be very careful when we explain or when we apply the interpenetration of opposites to an example or to a study. We should avoid trying to find everywhere and to apply mechanically, for example, the negation of the negation, or to find the interpenetration of opposites everywhere, for our knowledge in general is limited and this can lead us down blind alleys.

What counts is this principle: dialectics and its laws oblige us to study things in order to discover their evolution and the forces—the opposites—that determine this evolution. We must therefore study the interpenetration of opposites contained in things, and this interpenetration of opposites is tantamount to saying that *an affirmation is never an absolute affirmation*, since it contains within itself a negative portion. And this is the essential point: *It is because things contain their own negation that they are transformed*. Negation is the “solvent”: if it did not exist, things would not change. As, in fact, things do change, they must then contain a solvent principle. We can declare beforehand that it exists since we see things evolving, but we cannot discover this principle without a detailed study of the thing itself—for this principle does not have the same appearance in everything.

## ***7. Practical consequences of dialectics***

Hence, in practice, dialectics obliges us always to consider both, not one, sides of things: never to consider truth without ignorance. The big mistake of metaphysics is precisely to consider only one side of things, to judge unilaterally. If we make many mistakes, it is always to the extent that we see but one side of things, because we often reason unilaterally.

While idealist philosophy maintains that the world exists only in the ideas of men, we must recognize that, in truth, there are some things which exist only in our thoughts. This is true. But idealism is unilateral: it sees only this aspect. It sees only man who invents things that are not found in reality and it then concludes that nothing exists outside of our ideas. Idealism is correct to point out this faculty in man, but, by not applying the criterion of practice, it sees only that.

Metaphysical materialism is also mistaken because it sees but one side of problems. It sees the universe as a mechanism. Does mechanics exist? Yes! Does it play an important role? Yes! Metaphysical materialism is thus correct to say this, but it is a mistake to see only mechanical motion.

Naturally, we are prone to seeing only one side of things and people. If we judge a comrade, almost always we see only his good or his bad side. We must see *both*, without which it would not be possible to have cadres in organizations. In political practice, the unilateral method of judgment leads to sectarianism. If we encounter an adversary belonging to a reactionary organization, we judge him by his bosses. Yet, he is perhaps only an embittered, discontent employee, and we should not judge him like a fascist boss. Likewise, we can apply this reasoning to bosses and understand that, while they may seem bad to us, it is often because they themselves are dominated by the structure of society and, *under different social conditions*, they would perhaps be different.

If we keep the interpenetration, the unity and struggle of opposites in mind, we look at things in their multiple aspects. We see then that this reactionary is, on the one hand, reactionary, but, on the other, he is a worker and in his case there is a contradiction. We should look and find out why he has joined this organization and, at the same time, why he should not have joined. In this way we can judge and discuss his case in a less sectarian manner.

In accordance with dialectics then, we must consider things from all the angles that we can differentiate.

To summarize, and as a theoretical conclusion, we shall say: Things change because they include an internal contradiction (themselves and their opposites). The opposites are in conflict, and changes arise from these conflicts. Thus change is the *solution* of the conflict.

Capitalism contains an internal contradiction, the conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Change is explained by this conflict, and the transformation of capitalist society into a socialist society is the end of this conflict.

There is change and motion wherever there is contradiction. Contradiction is the negation of the affirmation. When the third term, negation of the negation, is achieved, the solution appears, for, at that moment, the reason for the contradiction is eliminated: *obsolete*.

Hence, it can be said that, while the sciences—chemistry, physics, biology, etc.—study the laws of change particular to them, dialectics studies the most general laws of change. Engels says, “Dialectics is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of Nature, human society and thought” (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 155).

## 5 – FOURTH LAW: TRANSFORMATION OF QUANTITY INTO QUALITY OR LAW OF PROGRESS BY LEAPS

Before tackling the problem of the application of dialectics to history, it remains for us to study one last law of dialectics.

This will be facilitated by the studies that we have just made wherein we have seen what negation of the negation is and what is meant by the interpenetration, the unity and struggle of opposites.

As always, let us proceed by examples.

### ***1. Reforms or revolution?***

When speaking of society, people ask, “Should we instigate reforms or make a revolution?” They debate whether, in order to transform capitalist society into a socialist society, successive reforms or an abrupt transformation—revolution—is needed.

With respect to this problem, let us recall what we have already studied. Every transformation is the result of a struggle between opposing forces. When something evolves, it is because it contains its opposite; everything being an interpenetration of opposites. We can observe the struggle of opposites and the transformation of the thing into its opposite. *How does this transformation take place?* This is the new problem that confronts us.

One may believe that this transformation occurs little by little, through a series of small transformations—that the green apple changes into a ripe apple through a series of progressive changes.

Many people think in this way that society is transformed little by little and that the result of a series of these small transformations will be the transformation of capitalist society into a socialist society. These small transformations are reforms and it will be their total, the sum of the small, gradual changes, that will give us a new society.

This theory is called *reformism*. The supporters of this theory are called reformists, not because they demand reforms, but because they think that reforms are *sufficient*—that their accumulation will *imperceptibly* transform society.

Let us see if this is true:

### 1) Political argumentation

If we look at the facts, i.e., what has happened in other countries, we shall see that, where this system has been tried, it has not been successful. The transformation of capitalist society—its destruction—has succeeded in a single country: the USSR, and we find that it was not through a series of reforms, but through revolution.

### 2) Historical argumentation

Generally speaking, is it true that things are transformed by small changes, by reforms?

Let us still look at the facts. If we examine historical changes, we see that they do not occur *indefinitely*, that they are not continuous. There comes a moment when, instead of *small* changes, change takes place with an abrupt leap.

In the history of societies, the outstanding events that we find are abrupt changes: revolutions.

Even those who are not familiar with dialectics know, nowadays, that violent changes have occurred in history. However, until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was believed that “nature does not jump,” that it makes no leaps. People refused to see any abrupt changes in the continuity of change. But science stepped in and revealed, with facts, that changes did occur abruptly. The revolution of 1789 opened people’s eyes even better; it was in itself an obvious example of a clean break with the past. It came to be seen that all the decisive stages of history had been important, abrupt and sudden upheavals. For example, as friendly as they may have been, the relations between two states grew colder, more strained and bitter, then took on a hostile character—and, all of a sudden, it was war: an abrupt rupture with the continuity of events. Another example: in Germany after the war of 1914-1918, there was a gradual rise of fascism, and then one day Hitler took power: Germany entered a new historical stage.

Today, those who do not deny these abrupt changes maintain that they are accidents, an accident being something that happens but that might not have happened.

In this way, people explain revolutions in the history of societies by saying, “They were accidents.”

With regard to the history of France, for example, it is maintained that the fall of Louis XVI and the French Revolution occurred because Louis XVI was a weak and soft man. “If he had been an energetic man, we would not have had a revolution.” We even read that, if he had not prolonged his meal at Varennes, he would not have been arrested and the course of history would have been changed. Hence, the French Revolution was just an accident, it is said.

Dialectics, on the contrary, recognized that revolutions are necessities. There are, indeed, gradual changes, but their accumulation ends up producing abrupt changes.

### 3) Scientific argumentation

Let us take the example of water, if we start at 0° Centigrade, and raise the temperature of the water from 1°, 2°, 3° up to 98°, the change is continuous. But can it continue indefinitely? We can go again up to 99°, but, at 100° Centigrade, we have an abrupt change: the water is *transformed* into steam.

If, inversely, from 99° we go down to 1°, again we have a continuous change; but we cannot lower the temperature like this indefinitely, for, at 0° Centigrade, the water is *transformed* into ice.

From 1° to 99° the water still remains water; only its temperature changes. This is what is called a *quantitative* change, which answers the question “How much?” i.e., “How much heat is there in the water?” When the water changes into ice or steam, we have a *qualitative change*, a change in quality. It is no longer water: it has become ice or steam.

When a thing does not change its nature, we have a quantitative change (in the example of water, we have a change in the degree of heat, but not in nature). When it changes in nature—when a thing becomes *another* thing—this change is qualitative.

Hence, we see that the evolution of things cannot be quantitative indefinitely: things that change finally undergo a qualitative change. *Quantity changes into quality.* This is a general law. But, as always, we mustn’t be satisfied with only this abstract formula.

In Engels’ book *Anti-Dühring*, in the chapter entitled “Dialectics, Quantity and Quality,” we can find a large number of examples illustrating how exact this law is, not only in the natural sciences, but in everything

else; a law according to which “quantitative change suddenly produces, at certain points, a qualitative difference...” (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 138).

Here is another example, cited by H. Wallon in Volume VIII of the *French Encyclopédie* (in which he refers to Engels): nervous energy which accumulates in a child provokes laughter; but, if it continues to grow, laughter changes into a fit of tears; in this way, children who become excited and laugh too hard end up crying.

We shall give one last well-known example: that of someone running for an elected office. If 4,500 votes are needed for an absolute majority, the candidate is not elected with 4,499 votes; he remains what he is: a candidate. With one more vote, this quantitative change determines a qualitative change, since the candidate becomes an elected official.

This law provides us with the solution to the problem: reform or revolution.

Reformists tell us: “You want the impossible which happens only by accident; you are utopians.” But with this law we can see who really is the one who is dreaming the impossible! The study of the phenomena of nature and science shows us that changes are not gradual indefinitely, but that at a certain moment change becomes abrupt. We are not declaring this arbitrarily; rather it is science, nature and reality which declare this to be true.

We might then ask, “What role do we play in these abrupt changes?”

We are going to answer this question and develop this problem by applying dialectics to history. Here we have come to a very famous part of dialectical materialism: historical materialism.

## **2. Historical materialism**

What is historical materialism? It is simply—now that we know what dialectics is—the application of this method to the history of human societies.

In order to clearly understand this, we must clarify what history is. History implies change, change in society. Society has a history throughout, which it is constantly changing; we see great events taking place in it. So, the following question is raised: since, in history, societies change, what explains these changes?

1) How can history be explained?

In this regard it is often asked, "For what reason must there always be war? Men ought to be able to live in peace!"

To these questions we are going to provide materialist answers.

A cardinal might explain that war is a punishment from God; this is an idealist answer, for it uses God to explain events. This is explaining history by spirit. It is spirit that creates and makes history.

Speaking of Providence is also an idealist answer. Hitler, in *Mein Kampf*, tells us that history is the work of Providence, and he thanks the latter for having placed his place of birth on the Austrian border.

To make God or Providence responsible for history is a convenient theory; men can do nothing and, consequently, we can do nothing to stop war; we must let it happen.

From a scientific point of view, can we support such a theory? Can we find its justification in facts? No.

The first materialist affirmation in this discussion is that history is not the work of God, but the *work of men*. So then, men can act on history and prevent the war.

(2) History is the work of man

Men make their own history, whatever its outcome may be, in that each person follows his own consciously desired end, and it is precisely the resultant of these many wills operating in different directions and of their manifold effects upon the outer world that constitutes history. Thus it is also a question of what the many individuals desire. The will is determined by passion or deliberation. But the levers which immediately determine passion or deliberation are of very different kinds. Partly they may be external objects, partly ideal motives, ambition, enthusiasm for whims of all kinds. But, on the one hand, we have seen that the many individual wills active in history for the most part produce results quite other than those they intended—often quite the opposite; their motives therefore in relation to the total result are likewise of only secondary significance. On the other hand, the further question arises:

What driving forces in turn stand behind these motives? What are the historical causes which transform themselves into these motives in the brains of the actors? (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 49).

This text of Engels tells us then that it is men who act according to their will (desires), but that these desires do not always go in the same direction! What is it then that *determines*, that decides the actions of men? Why do their desires not go in the same direction?

Some idealists will agree that it is the actions of men that make history and that these actions result from their will: it is will that determines action, and it is our thoughts and our feelings that determine our will. We would then have the following sequence: idea-will-action. In order to explain action, we must revert back to find the determining idea-cause.

Now we make it immediately clear that the action of great men and of doctrine is undeniable, but that it needs to be explained. It is not the sequence “idea-will-action” that explains it. In this way some people claim that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Diderot and the Encyclopedists, by spreading the ideas of the Rights of Man to the public, seduced and won by these ideas, the will of those men who, consequently, made the revolution. Similarly, in the USSR the ideas of Lenin were spread and people acted in conformity with these ideas. People then conclude from this that, if there were no revolutionary ideas, there would be no revolution. This point of view leads to the conclusion that the motor forces of history are the ideas of great leaders, that it is these leaders who make history. You know the formula of *Action Française*: “Forty kings made France”; we might add, kings who did not have many “ideas”!

What is the materialist point of view on this question?

We have seen that there were many points in common between 18<sup>th</sup> century materialism and modern materialism, but that the former materialism had an idealist theory of history.

Hence, whether frankly idealist or disguised behind an inconsistent materialism, this idealist theory that we have just seen and which seems to explain history explains nothing. For *what provokes action?* Engels says:

The old materialism never put this question to itself. Its conception of history, in so far as it has one at all, is therefore

essentially pragmatic; it judges everything according to the motives of the action; it divides men in their historical activity into noble and ignoble and then finds that as a rule the noble are defrauded and the ignoble are victorious. Hence it follows for the old materialism that nothing very edifying is to be got from the study of history, and for us, that in the realm of history the old materialism becomes untrue to itself because it takes the ideal driving forces which operate there as ultimate causes, instead of investigating what is behind them... (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 49).

Will, ideas, it is claimed. But why did the philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century have *precisely* these ideas? If they had tried to propound Marxism, no one would have listened to them, for, at this time, people would not have understood. It is not only the fact that ideas are conveyed which counts; they must also be understood. Consequently, there are *definite times* for accepting ideas as well as for forging them.

We have always said that ideas are of great importance, but we must see where they come from.

We must then search for the causes which give us these ideas, and for what are, in the final analysis, *the motor forces of history*.

## CONTROL QUESTIONS

### *Chapter 1*

1. Where does the metaphysical method come from?
2. Where does the dialectical method come from?
3. How and why did metaphysical materialism change into dialectical materialism?
4. What is the philosophical relationship between Hegel and Marx?

### *Chapter 2*

1. What is a mechanical change?
2. How does dialectics conceive of change?

### *Chapter 3*

1. How does dialectics conceive of change? (Compare the answer from the preceding course with that of this one.)
2. What is a historical development?
3. How and why do things change?

### *Chapter 4*

1. How should we not understand dialectics?

### *Chapter 5*

1. What is dialectics?
2. What are its laws?

# Part 5

# Historical Materialism

# 1 – THE MOTOR FORCES OF HISTORY

As soon as the question, “Where do our ideas come from?” is raised, the need for pursuing our research further becomes apparent. If we reasoned in the manner of the 18<sup>th</sup> century materialists, who thought that “the mind secretes thought as the liver secretes bile,” we could answer this question by saying that it is nature that produces the mind and that, consequently, our ideas are the product of nature and the product of our minds.

It could then be said that *history* is made by the *action* of men driven by their will, the latter being the expression of their *ideas* which are themselves derived from their brains. But watch out!

## ***1. An error to avoid***

If we explained the French Revolution by saying that it was the result of the application of the ideas that arose in the minds of philosophers, this would be a narrow and insufficient explanation, and a poor application of materialism.

What must be seen is *why* the ideas launched by the thinkers of this period were adopted by the masses. Why was Diderot not alone in conceiving of them and for what reason were the great majority of minds since the 16<sup>th</sup> century developing the same ideas? Is it because these minds suddenly had the same weight, the same convolution? No. There were changes in ideas, but no change took place inside the skull.

This explanation of ideas by the brain seems like a materialist explanation. But to speak of Diderot’s brain is really to speak of the ideas in Diderot’s brain. Hence, this is a falsified and improper materialist theory, in which we witness the revival of the idealist tendency to give primary importance to ideas.

Let us go back to the sequence: history-action-will-ideas. Ideas have a meaning, a content. The working class, for example, struggles for the elimination of capitalism. This is an idea held by the struggling workers. They think because they have brains, certainly, and the brain is therefore a *necessary condition* for thinking; but it is not a *sufficient* condition. The brain explains the material act of having ideas, but it does not explain why one has certain ideas rather than others. “Everything which sets men in motion must go through their minds; but what form it will take in the

mind will depend very much upon the circumstances" (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 50).

How can we then explain the content of our ideas, that is, how does the idea of overthrowing capitalism come to us?

## 2. “Social being” and consciousness

We know that our ideas are the reflection of things. The goals that our ideas contain are also the reflection of things, but which things?

In order to answer this question, we must see where men live and where their ideas appear. We find that men live in a capitalist society and that their ideas appear in this society and are derived from it. “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (Karl Marx, “Preface,” *Critique of Political Economy*, New York: International Publishers, 1970, p. 21).

In this definition, what Marx calls “their being” signifies what we are; “consciousness” is what we think, what we desire.

We are struggling for an ideal profoundly rooted in us, it is generally said, and as a result of this, it is our *consciousness* that determines our being. We act in a certain way because we think in a certain way; because we want to.

It is a grave error to speak this way, for in reality it is our social being that determines our consciousness.

A proletarian *thinks* like a proletarian, and a bourgeois *thinks* like a bourgeois (we shall see later why this is not always the case). But, generally speaking, “A man thinks differently in a palace and in a hut” (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 38).

## 3. Idealist theories

Idealists say that a proletarian or a bourgeois is one or the other because he thinks like one or the other.

We say, on the contrary, that, while one may think like a proletarian or a bourgeois, this is because one is one or the other. A proletarian has a proletarian class consciousness because *he is* a proletarian.

We should pay close attention to the practical consequences of this idealist theory. Accordingly, if one is a bourgeois, it is because one thinks

like a bourgeois. Hence, in order to stop being one, it is sufficient to change the way of thinking in question; and in order to halt bourgeois exploitation, it is sufficient to make the bosses change their *convictions*. This is a theory defended by Christian socialists; it was also shared by the founders of utopian socialism.

Moreover, it is also held by the fascists who fight against capitalism, not to eliminate it, but to make it more “rational!” As soon as management understands that it exploits workers, they say, it will no longer do so. Here we have a completely idealist theory whose dangers are obvious to us.

#### **4. “Social being” and the conditions of existence**

Marx speaks of “social being.” What does he mean by this?

“Social being” is determined by the material conditions of existence in which men live in society.

It is not the consciousness of men that determines their material conditions of existence, but these material conditions that determine their consciousness.

What are the material conditions of existence? In society, there are rich people and poor people and their way of thinking is different; their ideas on the same subject are different. Taking the subway for someone poor and unemployed is a luxury, but it is a disgrace for someone rich who has a car.

Does a poor person entertain these ideas about the subway because he is poor, or because he takes the subway? Because he is poor. Being poor is his condition of existence.

So, we must see *why* there are rich people and poor people in order to be able to explain men’s conditions of existence.

In the economic process of production, a group of people occupying an analogous place (i.e., in the present capitalist system, possessing the means of production—or, on the contrary, working on the means of production that do not belong to them), and consequently having to a certain extent the same material conditions of existence, form a *class*. However, the notion of class is not simply that of wealth or poverty. A proletarian may earn more than a bourgeois. He is, nonetheless, a proletarian because he is dependent on a boss and because his life is neither *secure* nor *independent*.

The material conditions of existence consist not only of money earned but also of *social function*. Therefore, we have the following sequence:

People make their *history* through their *actions* according to their *will*, which is the expression of their *ideas*. The latter are derived from their material conditions of existence, i.e., their membership in a *class*.

### **5. Class struggle, the motor of history**

People act because they have certain ideas. They owe these ideas to their material conditions of existence, because they belong to one class or another. This does not mean that there are only two classes in society. There are a number of classes, of which two are principally in conflict: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Hence, *beneath ideas there are classes*.

Society is divided into classes that struggle against each other. Thus, if we examine the ideas that man has, we see that these ideas are in conflict, and that, beneath these ideas, we find classes that are themselves in conflict as well.

Consequently, the motor forces of history, i.e., *the explanation of history, is class struggle*.

If we take the permanent deficit of the budget, for example, we see that there are two solutions: one consists of continuing what is called financial orthodoxy: savings, loans, new taxes, etc.; the other solution consists of making the rich pay.

We observe a political struggle around these ideas. Generally, one is “sorry” that one cannot reach an agreement on this matter. The Marxist, however, wants to understand and looks for what is underneath the political struggle. He then discovers the social struggle, i.e., class struggle. Struggle between those who favor the first solution (capitalists) and those who favor making the rich pay (middle classes and proletariat). Engels says:

In modern history at least, it is therefore proved that all political struggles are class struggles, and all class struggles for emancipation in the last resort, despite their necessarily political form—for every class struggle is a political struggle—turn ultimately on the question of economic emancipation (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 52).

Thus we have another link to add to the sequence we have used to explain history. We now have: action-will-ideas, beneath which are found classes and, behind classes, is the economy. *Hence, it is indeed class struggles that explain history, but it is the economy that determines classes.*

If we wish to explain a historical fact, we must examine which ideas are in conflict, look for the classes beneath these ideas and, finally, define the economic mode which characterizes these classes.

One may still wonder where classes and the economic mode come from (and dialecticians are not afraid of asking all these successive questions because they know that we must find the source of everything). This is what we shall study in detail in the next chapter, but we can already say:

In order to know where classes come from, one must study the history of society, and then one will see that the existing classes have not always been the same. In Greece: slaves and masters; in the Middle Ages: serfs and lords; next, to simplify the enumeration, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

In the above description, we find that classes change, and, if we look for the reason why they change, we shall see that it is because the *economic conditions* have changed (by economic conditions we mean: the structure of production, of distribution, of exchange, of the consumption of goods, and, as the ultimate condition of all the rest, the way of producing, or technology).

Here follows a text by Engels:

Bourgeoisie and proletariat both arose in consequence of a transformation of the economic conditions, more precisely, of the mode of production. The transition, first from guild handicrafts to manufacture, and then from manufacture to large-scale industry, with steam and mechanical power, had caused the development of these two classes (Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 51).

Hence, in the last analysis, we see that we may represent the motor forces of history by the following sequence:

- a) History is the work of *men*.
- b) Action, which creates history, is determined by their *will*.

- c) This will is the expression of their *ideas*.
- d) These ideas are the reflection of the *social conditions* in which they live.
- e) It is these social conditions which determine *classes* and their struggles.
- f) Classes are themselves determined by *economic conditions*.

To clarify in what forms and under what conditions this sequence takes place, let us say that:

1. *Ideas* find their expression in life in the *political sphere*.
2. *Class struggles*, which are behind the struggles of ideas, are manifested in the *social sphere*.
3. *Economic conditions* (which are determined by the state of *technology*) find their expression in the *economic sphere*.

## 2 – WHERE DO CLASSES AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS COME FROM?

We have seen that in the last analysis, the motor forces of history are classes and their struggles determined by *economic conditions*.

This may be expressed by the following sequence: people have ideas in their heads which make them act. These ideas are derived from the material conditions of existence in which they live. These material conditions of existence are determined by the social place they occupy in society, i.e., by the class to which they belong, and classes are themselves determined by the economic conditions in which society evolves.

But it remains for us to see what it is that determines economic conditions and the classes they create. This is what we propose to study below.

### 1. *The first great division of labor*

By studying the evolution of society and taking into account the events of the past, the first observation one makes is that the division of society into classes has not always existed. Dialectics demands that we search for the origin of things. Now we find that in a far-distant past, there were no classes. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels tells us:

Production at all former stages of society was essentially collective: there was not one class, one category, then another. Likewise, consumption of the products created by men was collective. This is primitive communism.

All men participate in production; the individual instruments of labor are private property, but those which are used in common belong to the community. The division of labor exists at this lower stage only between the sexes. Man hunts, fishes, etc.; woman takes care of the house. There are no “private” interests at stake.

But men did not remain in this period; the first change in the life of men will be the division of labor in society. “But the division of labor slowly insinuates itself into this process of

production" (Frederick Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Paris: Foreign Languages Press, 2021, p. 156).

This first event occurs where men:

...found animals which could be tamed and, when once tamed, bred. The wild buffalo cow had to be hunted; the tame buffalo cow gave a calf yearly and milk as well. A number of the most advanced tribes—the Aryans, Semites, perhaps already also the Turanians—now made their chief work first the taming of cattle, later their breeding and tending only. Pastoral tribes separated themselves from the mass of the rest of the barbarians—the first great social division of labor (Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 144).

Hence we have, as the first mode of production: hunting and fishing; as the second mode of production: cattle raising, which gives rise to pastoral tribes.

This first division of labor is the basis for:

## **2. *The first division of society into classes***

The increase of production in all branches—cattle raising, agriculture, domestic handicrafts—gave human labor power the capacity to produce a larger product than was necessary for its maintenance. At the same time it increased the daily amount of work to be done by each member of the gens, household community or single family. It was now desirable to bring in new labor forces. War provided them; prisoners of war were turned into slaves. With its increase of the productivity of labor and therefore of wealth, and its extension of the field of production, the first great social division of labor was bound, in the general historical conditions prevailing, to bring slavery in its train. From the first great social division of labor arose the first great cleavage of society into two classes: masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited (Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 145).

We have now reached the threshold of civilization. Civilization opens with a new advance in the division of labor. At the lowest stage of barbarism men produced only directly for their own needs; any acts of exchange were isolated occurrences, the object of exchange merely some fortuitous surplus. In the middle stage of barbarism we already find among the pastoral peoples a possession in the form of cattle which, once the herd has attained a certain size, regularly produces a surplus over and above the tribe's own requirements, leading to a division of labor between pastoral peoples and backward tribes without herds, and hence to the existence of two different levels of production side by side with one another and to the conditions necessary for regular exchange (Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 148-149).

Thus, at this moment, we have two classes in society: masters and slaves. Thereafter, society will continue to live and to undergo new developments. A new class will appear and grow.

### ***3. The second great division of labor***

Wealth increased rapidly, but as the wealth of individuals. The products of weaving, metalwork and the other handicrafts, which were becoming more and more differentiated, displayed growing variety and skill. In addition to corn, leguminous plants and fruits, agriculture now provided wine and oil, the preparation of which had been learned. Such manifold activities were no longer within the scope of one and the same individual; the second great division of labor took place—handicraft separated from agriculture. The continuous increase of production and simultaneously of the productivity of labor heightened the value of human labor power. Slavery... now becomes an essential constituent part of the social system; slaves... are driven by dozens to work in the fields and the workshops. With the splitting up of production into the two great main branches, agriculture and handicrafts, arises production directly for exchange, commodity production;

with it came commerce... (Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 147).

#### **4. The second division of society into classes**

In this way, the first great division of labor increases the value of human labor and creates a growth of wealth, which again increases the value of labor and makes a second division of labor necessary: handicrafts and agriculture. At this moment, the constant increase of production, and with it, of the value of the human labor power makes slaves “indispensable” and creates commercial production, and with it, a third class: merchants.

Hence, at this moment in society, we have a triple division of labor and three classes: farmers, artisans, merchants. For the first time we see a class appear which *does not participate in production*, and this class, the merchant class, will dominate the other two.

The upper stage of barbarism brings us the further division of labor between agriculture and handicrafts, hence the production of a constantly increasing portion of the products of labor directly for exchange, so that exchange between individual producers assumes the importance of a vital social function. Civilization consolidates and intensifies all these existing divisions of labor, particularly by sharpening the opposition between town and country (the town may economically dominate the country, as in antiquity, or the country the town, as in the middle ages), and it adds a third division of labor peculiar to itself and of decisive importance. It creates a class which no longer concerns itself with production, but only with the exchange of the products—the merchants.... [This class] makes itself into an indispensable middleman between any two producers and exploits them both. Under the pretext... [of becoming] the most useful class of the population, a class of parasites... who, as a reward for their actually very insignificant services, skim all the cream off production at home and abroad, rapidly amass enormous wealth and a corresponding social influence, and for that reason receive under civilization ever higher honors and ever greater control of pro-

duction until at last they also bring forth a product of their own—the periodical commercial crises (Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 149).

Hence, we see the sequence which, beginning with primitive communism, leads us to capitalism.

1. Primitive communism;
2. Division between barbarians and pastoral tribes (first division of labor: masters and slaves);
3. Division between farmers and artisans (second division of labor);
4. Birth of a merchant class (third division of labor); which
5. Engenders periodic commercial crises (capitalism).

Now we know where classes come from; it remains for us to study:

## **5. What determines economic conditions?**

We should first review very briefly the different societies that have preceded us.

We lack documents with which to study in detail the history of societies that preceded those of antiquity. But we know, for example, that with the Greeks, masters and slaves existed and that the merchant class was already beginning to develop. Then, in the Middle Ages, feudal society, with its lords and serfs, enabled the merchants to gain more and more importance. They clustered near the castles, in the heart of the *bourgs* (whence the name “bourgeois”). Moreover, in the Middle Ages, before capitalist production, there were only small enterprises, whose primary condition was that the producer be the owner of his instruments of labor. The means of production belonged to the individual and were adapted only to individual use. Consequently, they were paltry, small, and limited. The historical role of capitalist production and the bourgeoisie was to concentrate and enlarge these means of production, transforming them into the powerful levers of modern production.

...[S]ince the fifteenth century this has been historically worked out through the three phases of simple co-operation,

manufacture and modern industry. But the bourgeoisie, as is also shown there, could not transform these limited means of production into mighty productive forces, without transforming them, at the same time, from means of production of the individual into social means of production only workable by a collectivity of men (F. Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, p. 66-67).

Hence, we see that, parallel with the evolution of classes (masters and slaves; lords and serfs), there is an evolution of the conditions of production, of distribution and of exchange of wealth, i.e., of economic conditions, and that this economic evolution follows step-by-step and coincides with the evolution of the modes of production. It is therefore the:

### **6. Modes of production**

...that is, the condition of instruments and tools, their utilization, labor methods, in a word, the state of technology, which determines economic conditions.

The spinning-wheel, the hand-loom, the blacksmith's hammer were replaced by the spinning machine, the power-loom, the steam-hammer; the individual workshop, by the factory, implying the cooperation of hundreds of thousands of workmen. In like manner, production itself changed from a series of individual into a series of social acts, and the products from individual to social products (F. Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, p. 67).

Here we see that the evolution of modes of production totally transformed the productive forces. Now, while the tools of labor have become collective, the ownership of property has remained individual! Machines which can function only through collective implementation have remained the property of a single man. For this reason we see that

(The productive forces) press forward to... the practical recognition of their character as social productive forces.... [They command] the socialization of great masses of means of production, which we meet with in the different kinds of joint-

stock companies... this form also becomes insufficient... the official representative of capitalist society—the state—will ultimately have to undertake the direction of production.... [This] shows how unnecessary the bourgeoisie are for that purpose. All the social functions of the capitalist are now performed by salaried employees (F. Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 77).

Thus the contradictions of the capitalist system become clear to us:

On the one hand, perfecting of machinery, made by competition compulsory for each individual manufacturer, and complemented by a constantly growing displacement of laborers.... On the other hand, unlimited extension of production, also compulsory under competition, for every manufacturer. On both sides, unheard of development of productive forces, excess of supply over demand, overproduction, glutting of the markets, crises every ten years, the vicious circle: excess here, of means of production and products—excess there, of laborers, without employment and without means of existence (F. Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, p. 84).

There is a contradiction between work, which has become social, and collective and property, which has remained private. And so, with Marx, we shall say:

From the forms of development of productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins a period of social revolution (Marx, “Preface,” *Critique of Political Economy*, p. 21).

## 7. *Comments*

Before ending this chapter, we must make a few comments and underline the fact that, in this study, we find all the characteristics and laws of dialectics that we have just studied.

Indeed, we have just very quickly traced the history of societies, of classes and of modes of production. We see how dependent each part of this study is on the others. We find that this history is essentially in

motion, and that the changes that occur at each stage of the evolution of society are provoked by an internal struggle between the different conservative and progressive elements, a struggle that ends in the destruction of one society and in the birth of a new one. Each society has a character and a structure quite different from the society that preceded it. These radical transformations occur after an accumulation of events which, in themselves, seem insignificant, but which, at a certain moment, create by their accumulation a situation which provokes an abrupt, revolutionary change.

Hence, here we recognize the characteristics and the great general laws of dialectics namely:

The interdependence of things and events.

Dialectical motion and change.

Autodynamism.

Contradiction.

Reciprocal action.

And evolution by leaps (transformation of quantity into quality).

## CONTROL QUESTIONS

### *Chapter 1*

1. What explanation of history do idealists give us?
2. What is historical materialism?
3. What was the position of 18<sup>th</sup> century materialists with regard to the explanation of history?

### *Chapter 2*

1. Where do classes come from?
2. What are the motor forces of history?

### *Written Assignment*

How does Marxism (historical materialism) apply dialectics to history?

# **Part 6**

## **Dialectical Materialism**

## **& Ideologies**

# 1 – THE APPLICATION OF THE DIALECTICAL METHOD TO IDEOLOGIES

## *1. Of what importance are ideologies for Marxism?*

We are accustomed to hearing that Marxism is a materialist philosophy that denies the role of ideas in history. Denying the role of the ideological factor, it only considers economic influences.

*This is false.* Marxism does not deny the important role of the mind, of art or of ideas in life. Quite to the contrary, it attaches a particular importance to these ideological forms. We are going to end this study of the elementary principles of Marxism by examining how the method of dialectical materialism may be applied to ideologies. We shall see what the role of ideologies in history, i.e., the influence of the ideological *factor*, is and what ideological *forms* are.

This part of Marxism that we are about to study is the least known part of this philosophy. The reason for this is that, for a long time, attention has been centered on the part of Marxism that deals with political economy. As a result, this subject has been arbitrarily separated, not only from the great “whole” which Marxism forms, but from its very foundation. For what enabled political economy to become a true science was historical materialism, which is, as we have seen, an application of dialectical materialism.

We might point out, parenthetically, that this manner of proceeding derives from the metaphysical spirit which we have so much trouble ridding ourselves of. It is, let us repeat, to the extent that we isolate things and study them unilaterally, that we commit mistakes.

Incorrect interpretations of Marxism derive, therefore, from the fact that the role of ideologies in history and in life has not been sufficiently underlined. Ideologies have been separated from Marxism. As a result, Marxism has been separated from dialectical materialism—that is to say, from itself!

We are happy to see that, in recent years, thanks in part to the work of the Workers’ University in Paris, through which several thousands of students have come to know Marxism, and thanks also to the work of our intellectual comrades who have contributed to the cause through their

work and their books, Marxism has regained its true character and the place which belongs to it.

## **2. What is an ideology? The ideological factor and ideological forms**

We shall open this chapter, which is dedicated to the role of ideologies, with a few definitions.

What do we call an *ideology*? Ideology implies, above all, *ideas*. Ideology is a collection of ideas that form a whole, a theory, a system or even at times simply a state of mind.

Marxism is an ideology that forms a whole and that offers a method of resolving all problems. A republican ideology is the collection of ideas that we find in the mind of a republican.<sup>1</sup>

But an ideology is not only a collection of pure ideas, supposedly void of any feeling (this is a metaphysical concept); an ideology necessarily includes feelings, likes, dislikes, hopes, fears, etc. In the proletarian ideology, we find the ideal elements of class struggle, but we also find feelings of solidarity with those who are exploited by the capitalist system, with the “imprisoned,” as well as feelings of revolt, of enthusiasm, etc. All of these elements make up an ideology.

Now let us see what is meant by the *ideological factor*: this is ideology considered as a cause or a force that acts, which is capable of exerting influence. This is why one speaks of the *influence of the ideological factor*. Religions, for example, are an ideological factor of which we must take account; they have a moral force of considerable influence.

What is an *ideological form*? This term designates a collection of particular ideas which form an ideology in a specialized field. Religion and ethics are forms of ideology, as are science, philosophy, literature, art and poetry.

Hence, if we want to examine the role of the history of ideology in general, and of all its forms in particular, we must conduct our study, not by separating ideology from history, i.e., from the life of society, but by determining the role of ideology, its factors and forms, *in* and beginning with society.

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<sup>1</sup> By “republican” is understood someone who supports a republic, rather than a monarchy.—*Ed.*

### ***3. Economic structure and ideological structure***

In our study of historical materialism, we saw that the history of societies may be explained in the following sequence: men make history by their actions, the expression of their will. The latter is determined by their ideas. We have seen that what explains men's ideas, i.e., their ideology, is the social milieu in which we find classes, themselves determined by the economic factor, i.e., in the last analysis, by the mode of production.

We have also seen that between the ideological factor and the social factor there is the political factor, which appears in the ideological struggle as the expression of the social struggle.

If, then, we examine the structure of society in the light of historical materialism, we see that its foundation is the economic structure, then, above it, there is the social structure, which supports the political structure, and finally the ideological structure.

We see that, for materialists, the ideological structure is at the top of the social edifice, while, for idealists, the ideological structure is at its base.

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 (Marx, "Preface," *Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 20-21).

Consequently, we see that it is the economic structure that forms the foundation of society. We might also say that it is the infrastructure (which means inferior, or lower, structure).

Ideology, including all its forms: ethics, religion, science, poetry, art and literature, constitutes the supra—or superstructure (which means structure at the top).

Since we know, as materialist theory shows, that ideas are the reflection of things, that it is our social existence that determines our consciousness, we may say that the superstructure is the reflection of the infrastructure.

Here is an example by Engels, which clearly shows this to be so:

Calvin's creed was one fit for the boldest of the bourgeoisie of his time. His predestination doctrine was the religious expression of the fact that in the commercial world of competition success or failure does not depend upon a man's activity or cleverness, but upon circumstances uncontrollable by him. It is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but of the mercy of unknown superior economic powers; and this was especially true at a period of economic revolution, when all old commercial routes and centers were replaced by new ones, when India and America were opened to the world, and when even the most sacred economic articles of faith—the value of gold and silver—began to totter and to break down (Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, p. 23).

What happens in the economic life of merchants? They compete with each other. Merchants and bourgeois alike have experienced this competition, in which there are victors and vanquished. Quite often, the most resourceful and intelligent are defeated by competition, by a crisis that crops up and downs them. For them, this crisis is unpredictable, a blow of fate. It is this idea, that, for no apparent reason, the least clever sometimes survive crises, which is transposed in the Protestant religion. It is this observation, that some accidentally "make it," which creates the idea of *predestination* according to which men must submit to a fate which is fixed, for all eternity, by God.

From this example of the reflection of economic conditions, we see how the superstructure is the reflection of the infrastructure.

Here is another example: let us take the mentality of two non-union, i.e., politically undeveloped, workers. One works in a big factory, where the work is rationalized; the other for a small craftsman. It is certain that both of them will have a different conception of their boss. For one, the boss will be the ferocious exploiter, characteristic of capitalism. The other

will see the boss as a worker, certainly well-off, but a worker and not a tyrant.

It is surely the reflection of their conditions of work which will determine their conception of management.

This important example causes us, in order to be precise, to make certain observations.

#### ***4. True consciousness and false consciousness***

We have just said that ideologies are the reflection of the material conditions of society—that social being determines social consciousness. One might conclude from this that the proletariat must automatically have a proletarian ideology.

But such a supposition does not correspond to reality, for there are workers who do not have a worker's consciousness.

Hence, we must make a distinction: people may live in certain conditions, but their consciousness of it may not correspond to reality. This is what Engels terms “having a false consciousness.”

Example: some workers are influenced by the doctrine of corporatism, which is a return towards the Middle Ages and handicrafts. In this case, there is a consciousness of the misery of workers, but it is not a true and correct consciousness. Ideology certainly is, in this case, a reflection of the conditions of social life, but it is not a loyal or exact reflection.

In people's consciousness, this reflection is often “upside down.” To observe the existence of misery is a reflection of social conditions, but this reflection becomes false when one thinks that a return to handicrafts would be the solution to the problem. Hence, here we see a consciousness that is partly true and partly false.

The worker who is a royalist also has a consciousness that is both true and false. True because he wants to eliminate the misery that he observes; false because he thinks a king can do that. And, simply because he has reasoned badly, because he has poorly chosen his ideology, this worker can become a class enemy for us, even though he belongs to our class. Thus, to have a false consciousness is to be mistaken or deceived about one's true condition.

We can say, then, that ideology is the reflection of the conditions of existence, but that it is not an *inevitable* reflection.

Moreover, we must point out that everything possible is done to give us a false consciousness and to develop the influence of the ideology of the ruling classes on the exploited classes. The first elements of a life conception that we receive—our education and instruction—give us a false consciousness. Our connections in life, a peasant background for some of us, propaganda, the press, the radio, also falsify our consciousness at times.

Consequently, ideological work is of extreme importance for us as Marxists. False consciousness must be *destroyed* in order for us to attain a true consciousness. Without ideological work, this transformation cannot be realized.

Those who consider Marxism to be a fatalistic doctrine are therefore, wrong, since in reality, we believe that ideologies play a large role in society and that one must teach and learn the philosophy of Marxism so that it may become an efficient tool and weapon.

### ***5. Action and reaction of ideological factors***

From the examples of true and false consciousness above, we have seen that we mustn't always try to explain ideas only by the economy, thereby denying that ideas exert any influence. To proceed in this way would be to interpret Marxism incorrectly.

Ideas can be explained, certainly, in the *last analysis*, by the economy, but they also have an activity of their own.

...According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure... also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (that is, of things and events whose inner interconnection is so remote or so impossible of proof

that we can regard it as nonexistent, as negligible), the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, New York: International Publishers, 1968, p. 692).

Hence, we see that we must examine *everything* before looking for the economic factor and that, while the latter is the cause in the last analysis, we must always remember that it is not the *only* cause.

Ideologies are *reflections* and the *effects* of economic conditions, but the relation between the two is not simple, for we also observe a *reciprocal action of ideologies* on the infrastructure.

If we want to study the mass movement that developed in France after February 6, 1934,<sup>2</sup> we shall do so from two angles, in order to demonstrate what we have just discussed.

1. Some explain this movement by saying that its cause was the economic crisis. This is a materialist, but unilateral, explanation. This explanation takes only one factor into consideration: the economic one—in this case, the crisis.

2. This reasoning is, therefore, partly correct, but on the condition that another explanatory factor be added: what people were thinking: their ideology. Now, in this mass movement, people were “anti-Fascist.” These feelings were due to the propaganda that gave rise to the Popular Front. But, in order for this propaganda to be effective, a favorable terrain was necessary. What one was able to do in 1936 was not possible in 1932. Finally, we know how, afterwards, this mass movement and its ideology in turn influenced the economy by the social struggle which they inspired.

Hence, in this example we see that ideology, which is the reflection of social conditions, becomes in turn, a cause of events.

<sup>2</sup> Politzer is referring to the Popular Front, a coalition of left-wing parties (Socialists, Communists and Radicals) that came to power in France in 1936. The riot of February 6, 1934, was crucial to this movement, for it led first to a spontaneous grouping of the masses with the leaders of the left-wing parties and, later in the year, to an agreement “against fascism and war,” signed between Communists and Socialists. After the success of the Popular Front in the elections of May 1936, Leon Blum constituted a left-wing government, which remained in power until June 1937.—*Ed.*

Political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic basis. It is not that the economic situation is cause, solely active, while everything else is only passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of economic necessity, which ultimately asserts itself (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1955, p. 467).

Accordingly,

The basis of the right of inheritance—assuming that the stages reached in the development of the family are the same—is an economic one. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to prove, for instance, that the absolute liberty of the testator in England and the severe restrictions in every detail imposed upon him in France are due to economic causes alone. Both react back, however, on the economic sphere to a very considerable extent, because they influence the distribution of property (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, p. 696).

To cite a more contemporary example, we shall take that of taxes. We all have an idea about taxes. The rich want theirs reduced and so favor indirect taxes; workers and the middle classes want, on the contrary, a fiscality based on direct and progressive taxation. So then, the idea that we have about taxes, and which is an ideological factor, has its origin in our economic situation, which is created and imposed by capitalism. The rich wish to keep their privileges and fight to preserve the present mode of taxation and to reinforce the laws in this direction. Now, these laws, which derive from ideas, react on the economy, for they destroy small commerce and the handicrafts and accelerate capitalist concentration.

Consequently, we see that economic conditions give rise to modifications in economic conditions, and that is by taking into account this *reciprocity of relations* that we should examine ideologies, all ideologies. It is only in the last analysis that we see economic necessities always prevail.

We know that it is the mission of writers and thinkers to propagate, if not defend, ideologies. Their thoughts and writings are not always very

typical or straightforward, but, in fact, even in simple tales or stories, upon analysis we can always find an ideology. To make this type of analysis is a very delicate operation, and we must be very prudent. We are going to indicate a dialectical method of analysis, which will be of great assistance, but we must be careful not to be mechanical and try to explain the unexplainable.

### ***6. A method of dialectical analysis***

In order to apply the dialectical method properly, one must know many things. If you do not know your subject, it must be studied carefully, otherwise, your judgment will amount to only a caricature of the truth.

In order to make an analysis of a literary work, a book or story, we are going to indicate a method which may be applied to other subjects as well.

a) You must first pay attention to the content of the book or story you wish to analyze. Examine it independently of any social question, for not everything is derived from class struggle or economic conditions.

There are literary influences that we must take into consideration. Try to see to which “literary school” the work belongs. Take into account the internal development of ideologies. Practically speaking, it would be good to make a summary of the subject under analysis and to note down anything you found remarkable.

b) Next observe the social types the heroes of the intrigue belong to. Look for the class to which they belong. Examine the action of the characters and see if what takes place in the novel can be linked in some way to a social viewpoint.

If this is not possible, if it cannot reasonably be done, it is better to abandon the analysis rather than invent. You must never invent an explanation.

c) After you have discovered what class or classes are involved, you must determine the economic foundation, i.e., the means of production and the way of producing at the moment when the action of the novel takes place.

If, for example, the action is contemporary, the economic system is capitalism. At present we see numerous stories and novels that criticize and fight capitalism. But there are two ways to fight capitalism:

1. As a revolutionary, seeking to go forward.
  2. As a reactionary, who wants to return to the past. It is often this form which we encounter in modern novels, in which one longs for the “good old days.”
- d) Once we have obtained all this, we can then look for the ideology, i.e., see what the ideas and feelings, the way of thinking, of the author is.

While searching for the ideology, we shall keep in mind the role it plays, its influence on the minds of those who read the book.

- e) We can then conclude our analysis, by saying why such a story or novel was written at *such a moment*—and criticize or praise, according to the case, the author’s intentions (often unconscious).

This method of analysis can be effective only if one remembers, while applying it, everything that has been said previously. We must remember that dialectics, while it provides us with a new way of conceiving things, also demands that we know them well in order to discuss and analyze them.

Consequently, now that we have seen what our method consists of, we must try, in our studies and in our personal and militant lives, to see things in their motion, in their changes, in their contradictions and in their historical significance and not in a static, immobile state. We must try to study them as well in all their aspects and not unilaterally. In short, we must always try to apply the dialectical spirit everywhere.

## ***7. The necessity of ideological struggle***

We know better now what dialectical materialism is—the modern form of materialism founded by Marx and Engels and developed by Lenin. In the present work we have made particular use of texts by Marx and Engels, but we cannot end this course without pointing out that the phil-

osophical work of Lenin is also considerable. That is why today we speak of Marxism-Leninism.

*Marxism-Leninism and dialectical materialism are inseparably united.* Only through the knowledge of dialectical materialism can one measure the entire scope and wealth of Marxism-Leninism. This leads us to the conclusion that *the militant is not truly armed ideologically unless he is familiar with the entirety of this doctrine.* Having understood this, the bourgeoisie attempts to introduce, by any means, its own ideology into the consciousness of workers. Knowing perfectly well that, of all the aspects of Marxism-Leninism, it is dialectical materialism that is, at present, least known, the bourgeoisie has organized a campaign of silence against it. It is painful to note that the official instruction is oblivious to this method, and that teaching methodology in schools and universities has not changed in the last hundred years.

If, formerly, the metaphysical method dominated the dialectical method, this was due, as we have seen, to the ignorance of people. Today, science has provided us with the means to demonstrate that the dialectical method is most suitable to scientific research. It is scandalous that our children continue to be taught how to think and study with a method born of ignorance.

While in their scientific research scientists can no longer study in their specializations without taking into account the interpenetration of the sciences—in this way unconsciously utilizing a part of dialectics—too often they apply the intellectual training given to them and which is infused with the metaphysical spirit. How much progress would have been realized by those great scientists who have already contributed to humanity—for example, Pasteur and Branly, who were idealists and believers—if they had had a dialectical training!

But there is a form of struggle against Marxism-Leninism that is even more dangerous than this campaign of silence—namely, those distortions that the bourgeoisie tries to organize even within the workers' movement. At this moment, we witness the blossoming of numerous “ theoreticians,” who claim to be “ Marxists” and who pretend to be “ renewing” or “ rejuvenating” Marxism. *Campaigns of this nature often choose for their foundation those aspects of Marxism that are least known—in particular, materialist philosophy.*

Thus, for example, there are people who claim to accept Marxism as a concept of revolutionary action, but not as a general conception of the world. They maintain that one can be perfectly Marxist without accepting materialist philosophy. In conformity with this general attitude, diverse attempts at adulteration occur. People who still call themselves Marxists try to introduce into Marxism concepts that are incompatible with its very foundation—namely, materialist philosophy. We have seen such attempts in the past. It was against them that Lenin wrote *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. At the present time, in a period of large diffusion of Marxism, we are witnessing the rebirth and multiplication of these attempts. How can we expect to recognize and uncover those who attack Marxism in its philosophical aspect, if we do not know the true philosophy of Marxism?

## **8. Conclusion**

Fortunately, for several years now, and in the working class in particular, we have observed a tremendous thrust towards the study of the whole of Marxism and a growing interest precisely in the study of materialist philosophy. This is clearly an indication that, in the present situation, the working class has perfectly understood the justice of the reasons that we gave in the beginning for studying materialist philosophy. Through their own experience, workers have learned the necessity of linking practice to theory and, at the same time, the necessity of extending theoretical study as far as possible. The role of every militant must be to reinforce this tendency and to give it a proper direction and content. We are happy to see that, thanks to the Workers' University in Paris, (Today "Université Nouvelle" [New University] 8, Avenue Mathurin-Moreau, Paris, France), several thousand have learned what dialectical materialism is. While this illustrates in a striking manner our struggle against the bourgeoisie and shows us *which side* science is on, it also shows us our duty. *We must* study. We must know and make Marxism known in all circles. Parallel with the struggle in the streets and at work, militants must lead an *ideological* struggle. Their duty is to defend our ideology against all forms of attack and, at the same time, to lead the *counter-offensive* for the destruction of bourgeois ideology in the consciousness of workers. But, in order to dominate all

## Part 6: 1—The Application of the Dialectical Method to Ideologies

aspects of this struggle, we must be armed. The militant can truly be armed only through the knowledge of dialectical materialism.

Until we have constructed a classless society in which nothing will thwart the development of science, such is the essential part of our duty.

## CONTROL QUESTIONS

1. Is it true that Marxism denies the role of ideas?
2. What are the different factors which condition and constitute the structure of society?
3. Using the method of dialectical materialism, analyze a story published in a newspaper.

### *Assignment for General Review*

How has dialectical materialism benefited you in the domains of thought and action?



# **Definitions and Biographical Notes**

**AGNOSTICS.** Name in philosophy given to those who claim that the truth is inaccessible to the human mind.

**ALCHEMY.** Name given to the chemistry of the Middle Ages. It was an art akin to magic more than a science, and consisted in the search for a remedy to cure all ills (a panacea) and in the transmutation of metals into gold by means of the “philosopher’s stone.”

**ANALYSIS.** Mental process, which consists in splitting up a thing or an idea into its elements.

**ANATOMY.** Science which studies the structure of living beings and the relations between the different organs of which they are composed.

**ANAXIMENES OF MILETUS (6<sup>th</sup> century BC).** Philosopher of the Ionian School. He succeeded his teacher Anaximander and had Anaxagoras and Diogenes of Apollonia as followers. He held that air is the basic principle of all things.

**ARISTOTLE (384-322 BC).** Along with Plato, the greatest philosopher of antiquity. Taught in Athens, from where he had to flee a year before his death in order to escape being persecuted for impiety. As both Plato’s follower and rival, Aristotle tries to give a realistic basis to the idealistic philosophy of the former, through the systematic observation of the perceptible world, but, like Plato, takes as his starting point the concept of “Idea.” Every being—or substance—consists of two principles: matter and form. Matter is a crude, inert and amorphous mass; in order for it to become such-and-such a thing, “this” or “that,” a form must be applied to it. Form equals idea and is active and specific. It is what gives matter its qualities. The supreme form, comprising all others, is God. In this way Aristotle, by rejecting Democritus’ mechanical concept, introduces finalism: it is God who organized the universe. Aristotle was the founder of logic as the theory of correct reasoning. The idea of development is the central idea of his system. Cosmic development, organic development, the development of forms of the State are all conceived of as the evolution from the imperfect to the perfect, from the general to the specific. Engels calls him the most universal mind of all the Greek philosophers, the one who had already analyzed the most essential forms of dialectical thought.

In the Middle Ages, the followers of this great scholar and logician preserved only the formal and abstract aspect of his teachings. Since they were unable to rethink Aristotelianism in the light of scientific progress, they converted it into a hardened and sterile system, which became the foundation of scholasticism.

**ATOM.** In chemistry and physics, the name for one of the smallest material particles of an element that can enter into combination.

In ancient materialist philosophy, this word designated the smallest element of matter which was absolutely indivisible, the primary element which, by combination and agglomeration, comprised all of nature.

**BACON, Francis of Verulam (1561-1626).** Famous English philosopher. Member of the House of Commons in 1593, Bacon was appointed learned counsel in 1604; in 1613, attorney general; in 1617, lord keeper and in 1618 lord chancellor. Sentenced in 1624 by the Parliament to prison and to disqualification from office for corruption, he was released within two days and returned to private life.

Francis Bacon is the author of a large number of scientific and philosophical works, among which special mention should be made of *Novum Organum* (1620), in which he advocated a logic based on experience in contrast to the old metaphysics based on a priori ideas.

Francis Bacon is one of the founders of modern philosophy and scientific method.

**BERKELEY, George (1685-1753).** English philosopher, bishop, and for a while, unlucky missionary in America. His clerical activities (as Protestant minister in Catholic Ireland, annexed and colonized by force in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century), on behalf of the victorious English nation, were of a quite reactionary nature. Along with speculations of a spiritual order, he indulged as well in more material speculations (for example, regarding the utility of the famous workers' houses and child-labor), as witnessed by his work, *An Essay Towards Preventing the Ruin of Great Britain* (1720), composed on the occasion of the collapse of the South Sea Company, which had been a speculative adventure. Lenin described his philosophy in depth. A discussion of the same can be found in Part One, Chapter 2 of the present book. His economic concepts (in *The Querist*), in particular those on money, were examined in depth by Marx in his *Contribution to*

*the Critique of Political Economy.* Works: *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (1707), *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge* (1710), and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1712), a popular exposé of the preceding work.

**BRANLY, Edouard (1846-1940).** French physicist. In 1873 discovered the properties of copper oxides in “rectifying” alternative currents. In 1888, he established the first radio communications by discovering the properties of a tube filled with iron filings. Thanks to his “coherer” the radio was created. In 1898, he explained before the Academy of Science the application of his discovery to ships in distress.

**CARTESIANISM.** Name given to the philosophy of Descartes.

**COPERNICUS (1473-1543).** Famous Polish astronomer. Author of the work entitled *Six Books on the Revolutions of the Celestial Orbs*, in which he proves the rotation of the earth on its axis and its revolution around the sun.

**D'ALEMBERT, Jean le Rond (1717-1783).** One of the most typical representatives of the Enlightenment in France and a great mathematician, d'Alembert made considerable efforts to establish the principles of mechanics. With Diderot he published the *Encyclopedia* or *Classified Dictionary of Sciences, Arts and Trades*. This great work, which was fiercely fought by the Monarchy and widely distributed, and finally forbidden by the reactionary Conseil d'Etat, is the major achievement of the French Enlightenment (33 volumes, 1751-1777). He wrote the introduction, the “Discours préliminaire” to this *Encyclopedia*. From a philosophical point of view he was a skeptic, believing that neither matter nor spirit is knowable in its essence, and the world may be entirely different from how it appears to our senses. Principal works: *Sketches on Literature, History and Philosophy* (1753) and *Elements of Philosophy* (1758).

**DARWIN, Charles Robert (1809-1882).** Famous English naturalist, the most important theoretician of evolution in the natural sciences in the last century. He gave a decisive formulation of the theory of transformism, which had previously been foreseen by Lamarck, Goethe, etc., thus opening up new paths to science. Darwin founded his theory of evolution on the hypothesis of natural selection, i.e., the selection in the struggle

for existence, which causes the best adapted to survive. He began with experiments on artificial animal breeding. But where is the hand of the breeder in blind nature? To answer this question, Darwin utilized Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) to the extent that the latter took the disproportion between population growth and the possibility of increasing the means of subsistence as his starting point. Although modern biology has examined a great many new phenomena and has thereby modified and completed those factors too generally used by Darwin, the fundamental concept of the theory of evolution is nevertheless still firmly grounded in modern thought. On this Engels writes in the *Evolution of Socialism*, "Darwin dealt the greatest blow to the metaphysical concept of nature by proving that all existing organic nature: plants, animals as well as man, is the product of a process of evolution which has been going on for millions of years." In his speech over Marx's grave, Engels (1883) pointed out the relations between Marx and Darwin in the following terms: "Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history" (P.S. Foner, ed., *When Karl Marx Died*, Comments in 1883, New York: International Publishers, 1973, p. 39). In 1860, Marx had already written in a letter to Engels with regard to Darwin's principal work, *On the Origin of the Species* (1859), which had just been published: "Although developed clumsily in the English manner, this book contains, from the point of view of natural science, the foundation which conforms to our point of view." He makes similar remarks in a letter to Lassalle, "Darwin's work is considerable and suits me as a foundation, from the point of view of natural science, for class struggle in history.... Despite all his faults, not only is he the first to strike a fatal blow to 'theology' in natural science, but he empirically establishes the rational meaning of the latter...."

**DEDUCTION.** Reasoning, which begins with a proposition or a fact and proceeds to state the consequences which follow from it—or which concludes from the general to the specific.

**DEMOCRITUS (ca. 460-370 BC).** Greek philosopher, and the greatest materialist of antiquity. According to him, only Atoms and Void exist. Atoms are extremely small, indivisible primitive elements which differ in shape, magnitude and position, and which are in perpetual motion.

Objects are derived from the organization of atoms. Democritus holds that the soul is material and is composed, like anything else, of atoms (albeit finer). Moreover, for him, the qualities of things (their color, odor, etc.) are purely subjective and derive from illusions of the senses. The real, objective world does not contain such qualities, and the task of reason must be to abstract these qualities in order to discover the atoms themselves.

The contradiction that can be observed in Democritus' thought regarding the subjective character of "qualities" provided by the senses, raises the problem of knowledge in dialectical materialism in its primary and elementary form. His theory of atoms is a brilliant prediction of modern atomic theory.

**DESCARTES, René (1596-1650).** French dualistic philosopher (i.e., one who contrasts spirit and matter metaphysically). He fought scholasticism and created analytic geometry. His dualism commits the material and perceptible world to physics or, more exactly, to mathematical mechanics, and the spiritual and rational soul to metaphysics. For this reason he is a materialist in practice and an idealist in theory. This dualism has made him the father of all bourgeois philosophy of modern times, both in his mechano-materialist tendency as well as in his metaphysical-spiritual tendency. Resolving—in order to demolish scholasticism and to discover truth—to begin by "methodically" doubting everything, rejecting, as a rationalist, sensual experience as misleading, and proclaiming the mathematical method as a model for all of science, Descartes finds in the proposition: "I think, therefore I am," the ideal for all obvious truths. Through a series of deductions, he concludes the existence of a soul as spiritual substance and of God. And it is upon the existence of God that he bases the existence of the material world. But, at the same time, for Descartes, matter is identical to extension. He thus proclaims the liberation of natural science from any transcendental theology. Essentially, what is progressive in his philosophy is that he advocates a scientific method whereby all objects are broken down into their simplest constituent parts. Although he isolates objects, as Engels says, on the basis of this mathematical-mechanistic analysis, and dislocates their relations metaphysically, Descartes nonetheless provides the necessary premises for their dialectical synthesis. He attributed the greatest importance to his "new method" for the technical and industrial

development of his time. In reality, this method, like his entire philosophical thought in general (in which animals are considered to be robots!) is the characteristic philosophy of the manufacturing period. Nevertheless, it represents an extremely precious and valuable rationalistic legacy. Among his works: *Discourse on Method* (1637), *Meditations* (1641), *Principles of Philosophy* (1644), *Treatise on Passions* (1649), and *Treatise on Man* (posthumous).

**DIALECTICS.** The word “dialectics” originally meant the art or science of debate. For Plato, dialectics is, firstly, the art of extracting all the positive and negative consequences contained in an idea or principle. Secondly, it is the rational movement of the mind, which ascends by successive stages, from perceptible data to ideas, the eternal and immutable principles of things, and, finally, to the primary idea of all, the idea of the Good. Since for Plato ideas are the only reality worthy of the name, dialectics or the science of ideas comprises science itself.

For Hegel, dialectics is the movement of ideas through the successive stages of thesis, antithesis and synthesis until the absolute idea is attained.

For Marx and Marxists, dialectics is no longer the movement of ideas, but rather the movement of things themselves through contradictions, of which the movement of the mind is but the conscious reflection. An extensive study of Marxist dialectics can be found in the fourth part of the present work.

**DIDEROT, Denis (1713-1784).** The most eminent thinker among the materialists of the French Enlightenment, he is the leader and soul of the Encyclopedists. During a quarter of a century, he published, along with d'Alembert, the famous *Encyclopedia* called *The Holy Alliance Against Fanaticism and Tyranny*. The publication of this undertaking, persecuted by the State and the Jesuits, demanded a sustained moral effort, an unflagging will-power, the greatest obstinacy and absolute devotion. Engels wrote, “If anyone has enthusiastically dedicated his entire life to truth and to the right—in the best sense of the word—it was Diderot.” He wrote on the most diverse topics: on natural science and mathematics, history and society, the economy and the State, law and morals, art and literature.

Raised in strict Catholicism, Diderot developed with remarkable logic, evolving from deism to militant materialism and atheism, and finally

embodying the highest goals of the revolutionary bourgeois philosophy of the French Age of Enlightenment. He exerted the most profound and long-lasting influence on the society of his time. But his thought was not restricted to the narrow limits of vulgar materialism. A number of glimmers of dialectical thought are to be found in his works. Already in his *Philosophic Thoughts* (the Hague, 1746), which were burned by the public hangman by order of the Parliament, and in his *Wandering of a Skeptic* (1747), confiscated before publication, he vigorously attacks the Church. His atheistic work, *An Essay on Blindness* (London, 1749), cost him a year in prison.

Diderot is justly considered a precursor of Lamarck and Darwin, for he already maintains, clearly and resolutely, the idea of the evolution of organisms and of the initial existence of a “primitive being” from which, by progressive transformations, the later diversity of the animal and plant kingdoms derived. Just as there is an individual evolution, there is also, according to Diderot, an evolution of species. Logically pursuing the idea of evolution, Diderot finally demands the recognition of the evolution of all inanimate matter. In this work, *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature* (1754), in order to explain psychic phenomena, he imagines the hypothesis of atoms endowed with sensation, which already exist in animals and which bring about thought in man. All natural acts are signs of a substance that comprises all of being, in which the unity of forces in perpetual transformations and reciprocal action is apparent.

Among his most daring and clever materialist writings should be noted: *A Conversation between d'Alembert and Diderot* (1769) and *D'Alembert's Dream* (1769), which are at the same time complete literary masterpieces. Diderot was, moreover, an eminent dramatist and a master of prose. In his struggle for reforms in art and the theater, he advocates naturalism, the uncamouflaged representation of living, concrete reality. Moreover, Diderot composed numerous witty novels and short stories (he was, by the way, Marx's favorite author) whose importance can be seen in the fact that men such as Lessing, Schiller and Goethe not only admired them but translated many of them into German as well. His most famous work is *Rameau's Nephew* (1762) which Engels calls a “masterpiece of dialectics.”

**DÜHRING, Eugen (1833-1921).** German philosopher and economist, for a while assistant lecturer of philosophy and political economy at the University of Berlin. Shortly afterwards becoming completely blind, Dühring, until his death, lived as a writer first in Berlin and later in Nowawes. The most notable representative of bourgeois socialism, he saw the “natural efforts of the individual mind” as the basis for the social order, preached the theory of the increasing participation of the workers in the social product and expected the salvation of the future to come from the reconciliation of class antagonisms. He considered himself to be a reformer of humanity.

Dühring gave many lectures before large crowds on a variety of topics, but was soon deprived of his lectureship following his vehement public attacks on the professors of Berlin. Between 1870 and 1880, he had a great deal of followers in the social democracy. In many works, Dühring developed a special socio-political system, which he had constructed with the help of a number of “final and absolute truths” that he thought he had discovered. He was an enemy of Christianity and an ardent anti-Semite. Despite himself, he indirectly served scientific communism; indeed, his fiery attacks on Marx and Lassalle and his “philosophy of reality,” stamped with megalomania, were to provoke the rejoinder of Engels’ famous classical work, *Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science (Anti-Dühring)*, a work that soon became the philosophical guide for the new revolutionary generation of workers. In this work, Engels tore into shreds Dühring’s entire system of platitudes and, with a master’s hand, gave a complete and clear account of dialectical materialism for the first time.

**ELEATICS.** Philosophers of Elea, a city founded by the Greeks in southern Italy. Opposed to Heraclitus and the School of Miletus (see THALES), the Eleatics maintain the immutability of Being. The most famous of them is Zeno (ca. 500 BC).

**ENCYCLOPEDIA.** Generally speaking, a work containing a summary of all human knowledge. In French literary history, the *Encyclopédie* was the great work published in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in which all human knowledge was, for the first time, presented from the point of view of the revolutionary bourgeoisie. Besides the influence that the *Encyclopédie* exerted, by its vigorous denunciation of the injustices of the feudal monarchy, the three

areas in which it makes a decisive contribution are (mechanistic) materialism, atheism and technological advances.

**ENGELS, Frederick (1820-1895).** Karl Marx's dearest friend and inseparable comrade-in-arms, co-founder of dialectical materialism and scientific socialism and co-author with Marx of the *Communist Manifesto*; one of the founders of the Communist League and the International Association of Workingmen or First International. After Marx's death (1883), he became the recognized spiritual leader and the greatest authority of the international workers' movement. His principal merit lies in his exposition and development of dialectical materialism.

Among his theoretical works, primary importance should be assigned to his philosophical pamphlets. These are masterpieces whose influence on proletarian thought has been long lasting and whose importance continues to grow. In them Engels demonstrates with an incomparable mastery and clarity, the dialectical relations between philosophy and social class struggles, and between philosophy and the development of productive forces, and the parallel progress of the natural sciences. Thus he leads the reader along ever-new paths to the truth that the philosophy that truly liberates all of humanity can only be that of dialectical materialism, for only it is capable of preserving theoretical thought from the Scylla and Charybdis of idealism and vulgar, mechanistic materialism and of assuring the victory of a consistent materialist theory of knowledge.

His fundamental works are: *Anti-Dühring*, a polemical work composed in a style like Lessing's, full of freshness, spunk and fighting vigor—a remarkably rich defense of the materialist concept of the world; and *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, a brilliant essay on the development of philosophy from Hegel to Marx. A less-known work, but one which possesses all the qualities which make it, along with *Anti-Dühring*, the essential weapon of Marxists in the struggle against new idealistic systems of philosophy is *Dialectics of Nature*, a collection of articles and fragments written between 1873 and 1892. Even if in some areas it has become obsolete due to recent scientific discoveries, it constitutes an inexhaustible resource for all those who are interested in the struggle for dialectical materialism and for its correct interpretation, and

who are convinced of the necessity of harmoniously incorporating into Marxism the results of modern natural science.

Among his important theoretical and methodological works, let us mention: *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), the *Communist Manifesto* (1848)—written in collaboration with Marx, the *Bourgeois Democratic Revolution in Germany* (1850-1852)—containing “The Peasant War,” “Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany” and “The Campaign for the Constitution of the Reich”; *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), *The Housing Question* (1872), *Contribution to the History of Primitive Christianity* (reprinted in the collection Marx-Engels: *On Religion*), *Engels on Capital and The Critique of the Erfurt Program* (1891).

The study of Engels' correspondence is equally indispensable: above all, the Karl Marx-Frederick Engels Correspondence. (See Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, New York: International Publishers, 1975-1976.)

**EPICURUS (341-270 BC).** Greek philosopher. Taught philosophy in Athens. Of his work, which is said to have filled 300 volumes, only a few letters remain that contain a summary of his doctrine, as well as a collection of sayings.

Epicurus taught that the world is composed of an infinite number of atoms which meet, unite and dissociate by virtue of a causality whose starting point is an accident due to chance. There may be gods but, according to Epicurus, they are not concerned with our world. Man is therefore free and does not have to fear death. Thus liberated from fear and error, he must turn away from fragile and fleeting goods and seek the long lasting Good which moderate pleasures can provide.

**FEUERBACH, Ludwig (1804-1872).** German materialist philosopher, son of a once-famous criminologist Paul-Anselm Feuerbach. Was obliged to give up his academic career because of his philosophical ideas and so lived in the countryside in straitened circumstances. From left-wing Hegelianism he evolved to materialism. “Thought came from being, not being from thought.” Man is the product of nature; religion is the mythical reflection of human nature. “In man's God, you can recognize man and in man you can also recognize his God; the two things are identical.” It

is not God who created man, but man, who created God in his image. Feuerbach's philosophy provided the intermediary link between Hegel's and Marx's philosophy. Although somewhere he wrote with scorn of the French materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, nevertheless, Feuerbach was in fact the restorer of 18<sup>th</sup> century materialism, with all its great merits and all its faults with its noble, proud and revolutionary hatred for all "theology" and its tendency towards idealism when explaining social acts and phenomena.

Marx and Engels, who were for a time Feuerbach's followers, soon denounced the insufficiencies of his materialism. They created dialectical materialism, which goes further than Feuerbach, and at the same time assimilated the valuable parts of his thought.

**GALILEO (1564-1642).** Mathematician, physicist, astronomer, and founder of experimental science in Italy. He discovered the law of the uniform duration of the swinging of a pendulum and demonstrated that bodies of different weights fall at the same speed in a vacuum. In astronomy, he accepted the Copernican system, constructed a new astronomical telescope and made discoveries that confirmed Copernicus' system. Hence, he held that the sun is the center of the world and that the earth revolves about the sun. Prosecuted by the Inquisition, he was forced to recant and, after his retraction, pronounced the famous words "And yet it turns!"

**HEGEL, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1770-1831).** The most important German idealistic philosopher. Especially important for his dialectical method, which he conceived of from an idealistic position, but which was basically correct. Hegel was an objective idealist. According to him, the primary principle of reality is the absolute Idea, which first reveals itself in nature and then becomes spirit and knowledge. This becoming of the Idea comprises a logical-dialectical development of which real history is but the expression. Hence, it is pure thought that creates the world and its history; the world is but the manifestation of the Idea. As Feuerbach showed, this Idea is nothing but the Christian God in an abstract and logical wrapping. Marx and Engels turned Hegel's dialectics right side up and "set it back on its feet" by giving it a materialist content and thus converting it into a truly revolutionary theoretical weapon.

**HEGELIANS (YOUNG).** After Hegel's death, his followers split into two hostile factions, according to the interpretation that they gave to his doc-

trine. Those who abided literally by this doctrine comprised the Hegelian right. They defended the Prussian State. Those who rejected Hegel's idealistic and conservative conclusions, grounding themselves on his very method, comprised the Hegelian left or the "Young Hegelians." They attacked all forms of reaction. Included among them were: Arnold Ruge, Strauss, Bruno Bauer, Feuerbach, Stirner, Koeppen, Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, et al.

**HELVETIUS, Claude Adrien (1715-1771).** Born in Paris, farmer-general, writer and philosopher; one of the great materialists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Major works: *On the Mind* (1758), which was burnt by order of the Parliament; and *On Man* (1772). An enemy of feudalism and theology, Helvetius advocates "legislation" based on the harmony of individual and social interests, but to reform society he relies on education.

**HERACLITUS (544-475 BC).** Also called "the obscure." Heraclitus lived in the commercial city of Ephesus in Asia Minor and was one of the most eminent dialecticians of antiquity. According to him, becoming is the fundamental law of the universe; struggle and the interpenetration of opposites, the unity of being and non-being—such is the essence of the world. In this instability of everything, in the continual change of all being, Heraclitus saw the most general law of the universe. Everything flows, nothing is constant. As a result, "We cannot jump into the same river twice." The universe is strife and peace, summer and winter, flux and rest, surplus and famine, etc. Contradiction, the dominant principle of the world, is, according to Heraclitus, inherent in all things, so that everything is an interpretation of opposites.

**HOLBACH, Paul Henry Dietrich, baron d' (1723-1789).** French materialist. Arriving in Paris at the age of 12, he studied in France, which had become his true fatherland, and then at Leiden. Along with Diderot, Holbach took one of the most active parts in the composition of the *Encyclopédia*. In it he wrote articles and reviews about natural science. At his dinner parties the best brains of France of the period were brought together. It was there that the revolutionary ideology of the Third Estate took shape, and there that the principles of the philosophy, which was later to be called the French materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, were formulated in a narrow circle of friends. In his works mechanistic materialism was most systematically

and completely expressed. Holbach stands against dualism, the splitting of the world into matter and spirit. Man is but the necessary product of nature. Nature is matter in motion. Matter is what acts directly or indirectly on our senses. Spiritualistic and theological systems are only man's cerebral lucubrations, the fruit of his ignorance and the conscious trickery of the majority by those who benefit from doing so, especially the Church. His *System of Nature* (1770) had, in its time, an extraordinary revolutionary impact.

**HUME, David (1711-1776).** Scottish philosopher. Skeptic and agnostic in philosophy and active politician, he composed essays on socioeconomic problems and was an original historian. His philosophy represents the culmination of the direction of thought peculiar to the English bourgeoisie, which begins with Locke's experimental philosophy and then turns to Berkeley's subjectivism and finally favors, in all fundamental questions, agnosticism, i.e., the theory that maintains the impossibility of true knowledge.

Hume is not satisfied, as is Berkeley, with denying the existence of matter. Rather he extends his skepticism to the causal relations of things, by maintaining that relations of causality have no objective reality and are maintained simply out of subjective habit. Man observes the regular repetition of a series of phenomena and concludes from this and for no other reason, that one thing is these of the other. I observe, says Hume, that each time the white marble hits the red marble, the latter is set in motion. I express this constancy by saying: the shock of the white marble is the cause of the motion of the red marble. But what assures me that this is a case of necessary and objective causality and not simply a personal illusion? Who can guarantee me that tomorrow the shock of the white marble will again move the red marble and will again be the cause of its motion? Hence, Hume refuses to recognize any guarantee for the relation of causality that is, however, central to the explanation and knowledge of the world. Thus for him the exterior world is, in the last analysis, only a hypothesis, a "belief." It is to "refute" Hume that Kant will develop his "critical" doctrine.

His theory of money, which Marx analyzes in the *Critique of Political Economy*, is an application to economic relations of his mystifying bour-

geois concept, in which the superficial appearance of things always replaces the essential, fundamental processes. Major philosophical works: *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748).

**INDUCTION.** Type of reasoning which consists of drawing a general conclusion from a body of specific facts of similar meaning—or which concludes from the specific to the general.

**KANT, Emmanuel (1724-1804).** Famous German philosopher. Taught philosophy his entire life at the University of Koeningsberg. In 1755, published his *Universal Natural History and Theories of the Heavens*, a work that paved the way for Laplace's theory on the formation of heavenly bodies. In 1781, wrote the *Critique of Pure Reason* and in 1787, *Perpetual Peace*. His agnosticism claims that it is impossible to know things as they are “in themselves” but only as they appear to us (phenomena=appearances, in the etymological sense).

Kant sympathetically welcomed the French Revolution. He was a liberal, but abided by established laws. In religion, he is a rationalist, but he respects positive religions. In philosophy, he attacks dogmatism, but rejects skepticism. In ethics, he rejects any external law only to submit himself to an internal law that is more severe than any he rejects. Boldness in matters of speculation but respect for order in practical matters, such is the character of his mind. In short, a typical bourgeois liberal.

**LA METTRIE, Julien Offroy de (1709-1751).** French doctor and philosopher. The publishing of his clearly materialist work, *Natural History of the Soul*, having caused him to lose his position as military doctor, he went to the court of Frederick II, whose favorite court-reader he was to become.

La Mettrie wrote many works in which he applied the Cartesian theory of the automatism of animals to men, explaining sensations, mental images and judgments by a mere mechanical functioning of the nervous system. Let us cite his *Man the Machine* (1748).

**LENIN, Vladimir Ilyich.** Lenin was born April 22 (10 Old Style), 1870, in Simbirsk (now Ulyanovsk), Russia. His father, Ilya Nikolayevich Ulyanov, was an inspector of the public schools of Simbirsk Province. In his

student years Lenin came into conflict with the authorities for his activities in Marxist circles.

In 1895 Lenin united the Marxist workers' study circles of St. Petersburg into the "League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class" which represented the embryo of the revolutionary proletarian party in Russia. At the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party which took place in July 1903, Lenin—having exposed and isolated the opportunist trend of economism—made possible the victory of revolutionary Marxism and united around himself the group known as the "Bolsheviks" (from bolshinstvo-majority). In the struggle with the Mensheviks (from menshinstvo-minority) at and after the Congress he worked out the organizational foundations of the Bolshevik Party, a party of a new type.

Lenin's book, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which appeared in 1909, made an immense contribution to the task of forming a party of social revolution conceived along new lines. In this book Lenin defended the theoretical foundations of the Marxist party—dialectical and historical materialism—in the struggle against revisionists, defeatists, and falsifiers, and developed further the philosophy of Marxism, incorporating the results of developments in science since the days of Engels. During World War I, in addition to his other activities, Lenin worked strenuously to develop further the philosophical foundations of Marxism. His philosophical notes, abstracts, and fragments of this period represent an important source of material for Marxist philosophy. These appear in *Philosophical Notebooks*.

In April 1917, Lenin returned to Russia from exile and immediately began preparing the Bolshevik Party for the proletarian revolution that came in November. During the summer he completed his celebrated work, *State and Revolution*, in which he developed further the teachings of Marx and Engels on the dictatorship of the proletariat. With the establishment of the Soviet Republic, Lenin threw his full energies into organizing the new socialist state, winning the support of the peasantry for the new order, and conducting a successful struggle against the forces of counter-revolution and foreign intervention. In 1919, as a result of many years of work, the Third Communist International was established, reviving the best traditions of the revolutionary struggles of the working class.

At the conclusion of the Civil War, Lenin organized and directed the work of reconstructing the Soviet national economy, effected the transition from war communism to the “New Economic Policy” (NEP) and carried on a struggle against the Trotskyites, Bukharinites, and other enemies of Bolshevism, who were undermining the unity and sapping the fighting strength of the Party. The difficult conditions of Lenin’s life in the days of tsarism, his inhumanly strenuous practical and theoretical work, together with the serious wound he received from a would-be assassin in 1918, overtaxed the strength of the great leader and shortened his life. He died on January 21, 1924.

Lenin’s role in the development of Marxism was so great that ever since his time, scientific socialism is referred to as Marxism-Leninism.

**LEUCIPPUS (5<sup>th</sup> century BC).** Materialist philosopher, student of Zeno and teacher of Democritus, developed the theory of atoms.

**LOCKE, John (1632-1704).** English philosopher, representative of empiricism, which asserts that experience is the only foundation for all knowledge. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke resorts to the principle of experience for the solution of the problem of knowledge, denying the existence of innate ideas and deriving all mental images from two sources: external senses and internal senses. To the extent that Locke explains external sensations by the influence of things on us—and that he even formulates the then audacious hypothesis that matter (if God so willed) could think—he speaks from a materialist standpoint. But to the extent that he remains attached to the ideas of the soul and of God—which, according to him, belong to the sphere of faith—he is a dualist (dividing the world into matter and spirit) and inaugurates the development of English theism. Characteristic of his theory of knowledge is the “atomization” of human understanding, i.e., he reduces the mind to a summation, a “mosaic” of sensations. This mosaic of the consciousness comprises nothing other than the mirror-image of the atomized bourgeois world. In his sociopolitical ideas Locke resolutely defended the interests of the bourgeoisie; as a theoretician of liberalism, he advocated a constitutional monarchy, the tolerance of atheism, etc. Major works: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1685-1704).

**LUCRETIUS, Titus Lucretius Carus (ca. 95-51 BC).** Famous Latin poet born in Rome. A student of Epicurus, he glorifies the materialist ideas of his teacher in his poems. Major work: *On the Nature of Things*.

**MARX, Karl Heinrich (1818-1883).** One of the greatest geniuses of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, immortal founder of scientific communism, of the theory and practice of class struggle, and modern revolutionary of the international proletariat. To him the communist ideal owes its theory and its scientific program. Marx's system rests on the principles of dialectical materialism. Through his masterly analyses of concrete problems, be it a question of discovering the internal laws of capitalism or of explaining periods and events determined by the history of humanity, Marx demonstrated the superiority of materialist dialectics as a theoretical method for research into the historical relations of the past, for knowledge of the true motor forces of social evolution in the present, as well as for the determination of tendencies towards development in the future. His brilliant criticism of bourgeois society was both destructive and constructive: destructive in that it proclaimed the death of the bourgeoisie, and constructive in that it announced the victory of the proletariat. His dialectics is at the same time a research method and a guideline for human action. His materialist dialectics extends not only to the knowledge of the laws of human history, but also to the knowledge of natural history. Whence his adherence to the revolution in natural science provoked by Charles Darwin's doctrine of evolution. The method of thought and action that comprises Marxism is the proletariat's most precious weapon in its struggle for emancipation and for the advent of a total humanism.

Let us cite Marx's most important works in chronological order:

*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (1844);

*The Holy Family* (1844);

*The German Ideology* (with Friedrich Engels) (1845-1846);

*The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847);

*The Communist Manifesto* (with Friedrich Engels) (1847);

*Wage-Labor and Capital* (1847);

*Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850* (1850);

*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1851-1852);

*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859);

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*Herr Vogt* (1860);

*Value, Price and Profit* (1865);

*Capital*, Volume One (1867);

### Posthumously Published:

*Capital*, Volume Two (1893);

*Capital*, Volume Three (1894);

*Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875);

*Theories of Surplus Value* (1863)

These last two are often considered to comprise Volume Four of *Capital*.

Some additional works by Marx to be read and studied are *Pre-Capitalist Formations*, *On Colonialism*, *The Civil War in the United States*, *Letters to Americans*, and a single volume, *Selected Works*. Also see the collection of articles on Marx by Lenin, *The Teachings of Karl Marx*.

**MECHANICS.** Science of movements and forces.

**METAPHYSICS.** System of more or less fantastic and religious ideas and theses that attempts to explain the world by supernatural and immaterial principles—most often by God. Method of thought that isolates things and objects under study from each other and refuses to consider them in their perpetual mobility. In contrast to dialectics (see Part Three of the present work).

**MOLIERE, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, alias (1622-1673).** The greatest French comic author. His theater dramatizes all the social stations of his time: peasants, merchants, bourgeois, doctors, city-dwellers and courtesans. While the comic element of his plays may be of a quite different nature in his farces (*The Doctor In Spite Of Himself* or *The Cheats of Scapin*) and in his other comedies on morals and character (*The Miser*, *Le Misanthrope*), it always derives from the representation of human folly and moral deformity. Molière always defends common sense by appealing to the common sense of the audience. He knows how to provoke laughter and thought simultaneously. By dealing with ever-real problems, in a usually conversational language, spiced with a popular or local flavor, he is prodigiously natural. The subject-matter of his plays is always the reality of man such as it reveals itself through the absurdities of his contemporaries. His work is of considerable proportions.

**MYSTICISM.** Philosophical and religious attitude in which perfection (in knowledge and in morality) consists of a sort of contemplation which mysteriously unites man with God. Mysticism may also signify a mental disposition towards preferring the obscure and mysterious. Opposed to rationalism.

**MYTHOLOGY.** Fabulous and legendary history of the gods in ancient or primitive peoples. By extension: any system of myths.

**NOMINALISM.** Philosophical doctrine which holds that general concepts, types and species exist only in name. Only the individual exists. A concept or type exists only for the intellect.

**ORTHODOXY.** Conformity of an opinion to an accepted religious faith. By extension, used to designate conformity to the original and exact concept of a philosophical or scientific theory, etc.

**PALEONTOLOGY.** Science dealing with fossils, i.e., animals or vegetables that have been preserved in the form of remains or imprints in geological strata.

**PASTEUR, Louis (1822-1895).** Born in Dôle, France. Famous chemist and biologist who, through his numerous scientific and utilitarian discoveries, contributed to the progress of science in the fight against contagious diseases.

**PHLOGISTIC.** Principle or fluid imagined by early chemists to explain the phenomenon of combustion or fire.

**PHYSIOLOGY.** Science that studies organic life functions.

**PLATO (427-348 BC).** Greek philosopher and the greatest idealist thinker of antiquity. According to Plato, things which we perceive do not comprise true reality; they are but appearances, reflections or copies. True reality belongs only to Ideas, the primitive models of perceptible things, suspended in an intellectual sky—immutable and eternal, etc. Hence, there are as many Ideas as things: an Idea for table, an Idea for chair, etc. It should be clearly understood that, for Plato, these Ideas are not just mere representations in us, but real beings, leading a life independently of us. For Plato, knowledge is possible only because we “remember” Ideas that

we perceived in an earlier existence, before our physical birth: this is the theory of “recollection.”

In addition, Plato developed elements of dialectics, but in both an idealistic and verbal manner. In its socio-political theses, Platonic idealism is the ideology of the ruling classes of an ancient society founded on slave-labor, in a period in which its decadence was accelerated by the development of a commercial and usurious economy. Plato explains his ideal of the State in a work entitled *The Republic*, in which he calls for the joint possession of goods for the dominant fraction of the aristocrats, which comprises the greatest aberration of the socialist utopias of antiquity. His main works are in dialogue form: *Kriton*, *The Apology*, *Phaedo*, *Timaeus*, *Phaedrus*, *Gorgias*, *The Banquet*, *Theaetetus*, *The Republic*, *The Laws*, etc.

**PORT-ROYAL (Abbey of).** Founded in 1204. Famous Jansenist abbey near Chevreuse, France. Owes its celebrity to the fight between Jansenists and Jesuits under Louis XVI, and to the *Treatise on Logic, of Aristotelian tendencies*, which was written there. Was destroyed in 1710 by order of the King.

**PROUDHON, Pierre-Joseph (1809-1865).** French writer and economist. Classical representative of petit-bourgeois socialism. The son of poor peasants, Proudhon worked as a proofreader in Paris, Marseilles and other cities. He directed a printing press for a while in Besançon.

Proudhon wrote *What Is Property?*, published in 1840, which contains the famous sentence “Property is theft,” and *System of Economic Contradictions or the Philosophy of Poverty*, published in 1846, to which Marx replied in *Poverty of Philosophy*. He also wrote, *On the Political Power of the Working Classes* (1851), which had a profound influence on the French socialist workers, movement. All told, he is a petit-bourgeois utopian, none of whose arguments could hold up against Marx’s criticism and to whom the reaction often claimed allegiance. Following the revolution of 1848, Proudhon was named as a member of the Constituent Assembly. At the time of the coup d'état of December 2, 1851, he trusted Louis-Napoléon to ensure the triumph of social justice.

**RATIONALISM.** System based on reason, in contrast to systems based on religious revelation. The name rationalism is also given to the system whereby reason is at the origin of ideas, in contrast to empiricism, which

maintains that we can only know the data of experience. Finally, this word also signifies a method of thought which trusts in reason and rejects mysticism. For us, rationalism is especially the method of scientific thought that obliges us to rely on reason alone and to avoid everything which depends on an uncontrolled imagination, speculative fantasy and “faith.” It should be noted that only with the help of dialectics can rationalism be fruitful and “modern.”

**SENSUALISM.** Philosophical system according to which all ideas are directly derived from sensations.

**SPIRITUALISM.** Philosophical doctrine whereby spirit exists as a reality from matter that it animates and directs, and which often sees in God a superior spirit on which all the laws of nature depend. Variant and consequence of idealism.

**TELEOLOGY.** Hypothesis according to which all beings in nature have an end (*telos* in Greek=end), a particular goal, usually willed by God or by Providence. The most elaborate form of this explanation was provided by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (18<sup>th</sup> century), who held that if an apple hangs from the branch of a tree, it is so that man can grab it easily; that if a pumpkin grows on the ground and not on a tree, it is so that passersby will not risk getting knocked down, etc. This hypothesis is still maintained today in a less caricatural form by some biologists.

**THALES.** One of the major thinkers of the School of Miletus, in Asia Minor (6<sup>th</sup> century BC). The School of Miletus was the first materialist school in ancient Greece. The philosophers of Miletus tried to explain how everything is derived from air, fire or water.

**THEOLOGY.** “Science” (!) of God, study of religious dogmas and texts.

**THOMAS AQUINAS, Saint (1227-1274).** Theologian and philosopher of the Middle Ages. Received the title of Doctor of the Church. His principal works are a *Summa contra gentiles* (*On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*) and *Summa theologiae*. The first explains and defends Catholic doctrine and attempts to demonstrate that faith and reason are never opposed. The second, which the Church places alongside holy books, is divided into three parts: 1. A Treatise on God, 2. A Theory of Man’s Faculties, 3. A

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Treatise on Jesus Christ, Redemption and the Sacraments. Thomism is the theological and philosophical doctrine of Saint Thomas of Aquinas, and is still quite widespread among Catholic philosophers. This doctrine is extremely scholastic and basically reactionary.





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