

Notes on Dialectical Materialism,  
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A Revolutionary Philosophy:

"The Marxian doctrine is omnipotent because it is true," wrote Lenin. "It is complete and harmonious, and provides men with an integral world conception which is irreconcilable with any form of superstition, reaction or defense of bourgeois oppression."

-- *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism.*

Marxism is a philosophy which seeks to understand the world in order to change it:

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways," wrote Marx. "The point, however, is to change it."

-- *11<sup>th</sup> Thesis on Feuerbach.*

Dialectical materialism is a theoretical instrument in the hands of the people for changing the world.

In dialectical materialism, wrote Engels, "the materialist world outlook was taken really seriously for the first time and was carried through consistently. . . ." For "it was resolved to comprehend the real world—nature and history—just as it presents itself to everyone who approaches it free from preconceived idealist fancies. It was decided relentlessly to sacrifice every idealist fancy which could not be brought into harmony with the facts conceived in their own and not in a fantastic connection. And materialism means nothing more than this."

-- *Ludwig Feuerbach, ch. 4*

Hegel and the Weltgeist, coming to full dialectical self-awareness. Feuerbach turned the Weltgeist on its head: it is mankind, not a god. This was the fundamental realization which made the triumph of materialism possible.

"I have only found the key to the cipher of the Christian religion, only extricated its true meaning from the web of contradictions and delusions called theology; - but in doing so I have certainly committed a sacrilege. If therefore my work is negative, irreligious, atheistic, let it be remembered that atheism - at least in the sense of this work - is the secret of religion itself; that religion itself, not indeed on the surface, but fundamentally, not in intention or according to its own supposition, but in its heart, in its essence, believes in nothing else than the truth and divinity of human nature...."

"Religion is the dream of the human mind. But even in dreams we do not find ourselves in emptiness or in heaven, but on earth, in the realm of reality; we only see real things in the entrancing splendour of imagination and caprice, instead of in the simple daylight of reality and necessity. Hence I do nothing more to religion - and to speculative philosophy and theology also - than to open its eyes, or rather to turn its gaze from the internal

towards the external, i.e., I change the object as it is in the imagination into the object as it is in reality.”

-- Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 1843.

### Materialism and Idealism

#### Materialism and Idealism—Opposed Ways of Interpreting Every Question

Materialism is opposed to idealism since, while idealism holds that the spiritual or ideal is prior to the material, materialism holds that matter is prior. This difference manifests itself in opposed ways of interpreting and understanding every question, and so in opposed attitudes in practice.

While idealism takes many subtle forms in the writings of philosophers, it is at bottom a continuation of belief in the supernatural. It involves belief in two worlds, in the ideal or supernatural world over against the real material world. At its base materialism is the scientific outlook – seeking explanations in material phenomena observable in the material world.

Materialism is not a dogmatic system. It is rather a way of interpreting, conceiving of, explaining every question.

Historically religion underlies all idealism and has created the basis for idealism. “From the most primitive times men personified natural forces... with the birth of class society, when men were impelled to act by social relations which dominated them and which they did not understand, they further invented supernatural agencies doubling, as it were, the state of society. The gods were invented superior to mankind, just as the kings and lords were superior to the common people.

“All religion, and all idealism, has at its heart this kind of *doubling of the world*, and invents a dominating ideal or supernatural world over against the real material world.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 2.

To grasp the essence of idealism we should also understand what are the main assertions made in every form of idealism. There are three such main assertions of idealism.

1. Idealism asserts that the material world is dependent on the spiritual.
2. Idealism asserts that spirit, or mind, or idea, can and does exist in separation from matter. (The most extreme form of this assertion is subjective idealism, which asserts that matter does not exist at all but is pure illusion.)
3. Idealism asserts that there exists a realm of the mysterious and unknowable, "above," or "beyond," or "behind" what can be ascertained and known by perception, experience and science.

The basic teachings of materialism stand in opposition to these three assertions of idealism.

1. Materialism teaches that the world is by its very nature material, that everything which exists comes into being on the basis of material causes, arises and develops in accordance with the laws of motion of matter.
2. Materialism teaches that matter is objective reality existing outside and independent of the mind; and that far from the mental existing in separation from the material, everything mental or spiritual is a product of material processes.
3. Materialism teaches that the world and its laws are fully knowable, and that while much may not be known there is nothing which is in principle unknowable.

### Marxism and Religion

Party members can be religious. Adherence to the party program and party discipline are what makes someone a party member.

Marxism-Leninism rejects religion by virtue of its materialist worldview.

“The foundation of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man – state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion.

“Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. **Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.**

“The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo. Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower.”

-- K. Marx, *Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, 1843.

Gus Hall used to say, “People talk about being a good communist. I’m still just trying to be a communist. That’s hard enough.” Making religious belief a stumbling block to engaging in real, concrete struggle for revolutionary change, for improving the lives and the future of working people is counterproductive. Magical thinking is a problem, but it isn’t just a problem of religious thought; ultraleftist reification of revolution is just as much a case of magical thinking.

As a scholar and theoretician, I am compelled to say that Marx, Engels and Lenin believed that atheism was entailed by the principles of dialectical and historical materialism. That is simply a fact. That there are good communist comrades who have religious beliefs is also a fact and, while I am prepared to engage in discussions of the implications of a materialist world-view, I also believe as did Engels that the need for religious faith will wither away, like the state, when mankind is empowered by socialism’s abolition of exploitation and people no longer feel the need to take solace in anything but their own empowerment. There is certainly no need to refuse people valuable roles in the struggle because we disagree over the implications of materialism.

A few examples of contemporary idealism:

Subjective idealism: the real world does not exist at all; nothing exists except the sensations and ideas in our minds, and there is no external material reality corresponding to them.

Dualism: asserts the existence of the spiritual as separate and apart from the material, and accords it equal reality.

Realism: assertion that the external material world really exists independent of our perceptions and is in some way reflected by our perceptions. This is official Catholic doctrine, which concludes that the real material world was created by god and ruled at all times by his will.

Materialism and Idealism in Practice: Magical Thinking

The conflict between materialism and idealism isn’t just between abstract theories; it colors different ways of understanding and interpreting every question.

Popular superstitions.

Twelve-step programmes.

Make the individual morally better or better educated – that will improve capitalism.

Among socialists, the idea that what is essentially wrong with capitalism is unfair distribution. Or that capitalism can be reformed into socialism.

Materialism teaches us to have confidence in ourselves and our reason, in our scientific understanding of the objectively real world. It is the basis for emergence of class consciousness and effective struggle.

### Mechanistic Materialism

Concept of change:

Idealist: change arises external to matter, not subject to the laws of the material world.

Materialist: change arises from within matter, in accordance with the laws of the material world.

Origin in Greek and Indian philosophy: the eternal and indestructible atom. Democritus, Lucretius. Marx's doctoral dissertation "The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature."

### Mechanistic Materialism, a Bourgeois Philosophy

Investigation of nature accompanied the development of capitalism. Relationship between science and technology.

The World and the Machine:

Newtonian mechanics.

Harvey's theory of blood circulation: hydraulics.

Definition of a mechanism:

- a) A mechanism consists of permanent parts, which fit together.
- b) It requires a motive force to set it going.
- c) Once set going, the parts interact and results are produced according to material laws exactly stated.

Achievement of mechanistic materialism: a huge blow against idealist thought.

Weaknesses of mechanistic materialism:

- a) susceptible to causal regress: prime mover.
- b) it tends to see all change as being of one kind: mechanical interaction. It sees change everywhere, but nothing new.
- c) it cannot explain social development.

Mechanistic materialism is preeminently a bourgeois philosophy: social atomism.

Mechanistic materialism and Utopian Socialism:

“The rights of man” – the conception of human rights cannot be deduced from the abstract nature of man, but is determined by the stage of society in which men exist. Nor does man have a “nature” – he is and becomes what he does as a result of social activity.

Owenian socialism: socialism would come into existence not through class struggle, but when everyone was convinced that it was just and adapted to the needs of human nature.

Improving the environment and providing education: “The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing and that, therefore, changed men are produced by changed circumstances and upbringing, forgets that circumstances are changed precisely by men and that the educator must himself be educated. [*Theses on Feuerbach*].

### From Mechanistic to Dialectical Materialism

The world does not consist of things, but of processes in which things come into being and pass away.

### The Correction of Mechanistic Materialism:

When we reject each of the assumptions of mechanistic materialism, we begin to see the need for a materialist doctrine of a new type – a materialism that overcomes the weakness and narrow, dogmatic assumptions of mechanism.

This materialist doctrine of a new type is dialectical materialism.

Dialectical materialism understands the world, not as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes in which all things go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away.

“Dialectical materialism considers that matter is always in motion, that motion is the mode of existence of matter, so that there can no more be matter without motion than motion without matter. Motion does not have to be impressed upon matter by some outside force, but above all it is necessary to look for the inner impulses of development, the self-motion in all process.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 4.

### Dislectical Conception of Development

Static, unchanging universe juxtaposed to the concept of evolution.

“The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence of all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions,

everlasting uncertainty and agitation, distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.”

-- K Marx and F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

Capitalists saw themselves as the bearers of progress. Progress was a law of capitalism. They made it into a law of the universe.

Idealist Conceptions of Change and Development:

Hegel – Absolute Idea realizing itself in history.

Herbert Spencer – increasing integration of matter by an “Incomprehensible and Omnipresent Power.”

Henri Bergson – Elan Vital.

Intelligent design.

Principal defects of idealist conceptions of change and development:

(1) Incomprehensibility of causal forces.

(2) Continuity is not the law of development.

Periods of smooth continuous evolutionary development are interrupted by sudden and abrupt changes. The emergence of the new stage in development takes place, when the conditions have matured, by a break in continuity, by the leap from one state to another.

Punctuated equilibrium (Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould)

The Dialectical Materialist Concept of Development:

“Dialectical Materialism considers the universe, not as static, not as unchanging. But as in continual process of development. It considers this development, not as a smooth, continuous and unbroken process, but as a process in which phases of gradual evolutionary change are interrupted by breaks in continuity, by the sudden leap from one state to another. And it seeks for the explanation, the driving force, of this universal movement, not in inventions of idealist fantasy, but within material processes themselves – in inner contradictions, the opposite conflicting tendencies, which are in operation in every process of nature and society.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 5.

The essential idea of Dialectical Materialism:

“...the recognition of the contradictory, mutually exclusive, opposite tendencies in all phenomena and processes of nature... This alone furnishes the key to the self-movement

of everything in existence. It alone furnishes the key to the leaps, to the breaks in continuity, to the transformation into opposite, to the destruction of the old and emergence of the new.... In its proper meaning, dialectics is the study of the contradiction within the very essence of things. Development is the struggle of opposites.”

-- Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*.

### Metaphysics

Metaphysics is essentially an abstract way of thinking. In a sense all thinking is ‘abstract,’ since it works with general concepts and cannot but disregard a great deal of particular detail.”

Metaphysical abstraction consists of thinking as though what is abstracted could exist in reality.

- 1, The example of “human nature.”
2. The example of “democracy.”

Metaphysics is a way of thinking that regards things (1) in abstraction from their conditions of existence, and (2) in abstraction from their change and development; (it thinks of things in separation from one another, ignoring their interconnections, and (4) as fixed and frozen in time and place, ignoring their change and development.

Unity and Struggle of Opposites:

“When we think of the properties of things, their relationships, their modes of action and interaction, the processes into which they enter, then we find that, generally speaking, all these properties, relationships, interactions and processes divide into *fundamental opposites*.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 6.

Hegel: “In opposition, the different is not confronted by any other, but by *its* other.”

-- *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences: Logic*, Sect. 119.

“The unity of opposites, their inseparable connection, is by no means to be understood as a harmonious and stable relationship, as a state of equilibrium. On the contrary, ‘The unity of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative. The struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute’”

-- V.I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*.

Dialectics and Metaphysics:

“Metaphysics thinks in terms of ‘ready-made’ things, whose properties and potentialities it seeks to fix and determine once and for all.... Contrary to metaphysics, dialectics refuses to think of things each by itself, as having a fixed nature and fixed properties...”

but it recognizes that things come into being, exist, and cease to be in a process of unending change and development, in a process of complicated and ever-changing inter-relationship, in which each thing exists only in its connection with other things and goes through a series of transformations, and in which is always manifested the unity, properties, aspects, tendencies characteristic of every phenomenon of nature and society “Contrary to metaphysics, the aim of dialectics is to trace the real changes and interconnections in the world and to think of things always in their motion and interconnection.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 6.

Change and Interconnection:

Four ways in which dialectics and metaphysics differ:

1. “Contrary to metaphysics, dialectics does not regard nature as just an agglomeration of things, each existing independently of the others, but considers things as ‘connected with, dependent on, and determined by each other.’ Hence nothing can be understood taken by itself... but must be understood ‘in its inseparable connection with other things, and as conditioned by them.’”

2. “Contrary to metaphysics, dialectics considers everything in ‘a state of continuous movement and change, of renewal and development, something is always arising and developing and something always disintegrating and dying away.’”

3. “Contrary to metaphysics, dialectics does not regard the process of development as ‘a simple process of growth,’ but as ‘a development which passes from... quantitative changes to open, fundamental changes, to qualitative changes,’ which occur ‘abruptly, taking the form of a leap from one state to another.’ Hence it considers development as ‘an onward and upward movement, as a transition from an old qualitative state to a new qualitative state, as a development from the simple to the complex, from the higher to the lower.’”

4. “Contrary to metaphysics, dialectics ‘holds that the process of development from the lower to the higher takes place... as a disclosure of the contradictions inherent in things... as a struggle of opposite tendencies which operate on the basis of these contradictions.’”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 7.

Considering things in their interconnection and circumstances:

“No working-class leader can be of very much use if he tries to decide questions of policy in terms of ‘general principle’ alone, without taking into account the actual circumstances in relation to which policy has to be operated, without understanding that the same policy can be right in one case and wrong in another, depending on the concrete circumstances of each case.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 7.

“This readiness on the part of Marxists to adapt policy to circumstances and to change policy with circumstances is sometimes called Communist ‘opportunism.’ But it is nothing of the kind – or rather, it is the very opposite. It is the application in practice of the science of the strategy and tactics of working-class struggle. Indeed, what is meant by opportunism in relation to working-class policy? It means subordinating the long-term interests of the working-class as a whole to the temporary interests of a section, sacrificing the interests of the class to defence of the temporary privileges of some particular group.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 7..

Against “ready-made schemes” – “Truth is Always Concrete”:

“The employment of the Marxist dialectical method does not mean that we apply a preconceived scheme and try to make everything fit into it. No, it means that we study things as they really are, in their real connections and movement. ‘The essential thing in Marxism,’ Lenin wrote, ‘is the concrete analysis of concrete conditions.’”

"Genuine dialectics," Lenin wrote, proceeds "by means of a thorough, detailed analysis of a process in all its concrete-ness. The fundamental thesis of dialectics is: there is no such thing as abstract truth, truth is always concrete."

-- *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*.

Example of how dialectics consists of analysis of a process in its concreteness, the opposite of applying a ready-made scheme:

Mensheviks; Russia must recapitulate the capitalist development of Europe before socialism is possible in Russia.. Lenin: theory of combined and uneven development; a socialist revolution can, and will, arise at the weakest point of international capitalism.

The “triad” – thesis, antithesis, synthesis:

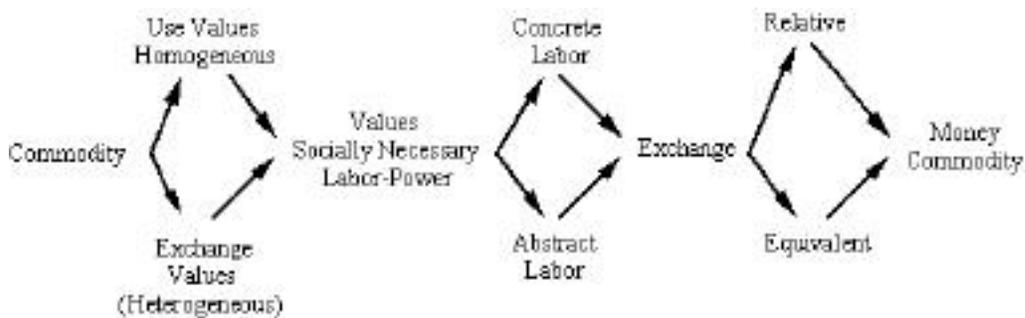
The triad is not an accurate summary of how Hegel uses the dialectic (although it is used as a simplification device by him), and it is explicitly rejected by Lenin and Marx. It emerges first in Kant, and is then more fully elaborated by Johann Gottlieb Fichte.

“It is clear to everybody that the main burden of Engel’s argument is that materialism must depict the historical process correctly, and that insistence on... selection of examples which demonstrate the correctness of the triad is nothing but a relic of Hegelianism... And, indeed, once it has been categorically declared that to attempt to ‘prove’ anything by triads is absurd, what significance can examples of ‘dialectical’ process have?... Anyone who reads the definition and description of the dialectical method given by Engels will see that the Hegelian triads are not even mentioned, and that it all amounts to regarding social evolution as a natural-historical process of development,,,

“What Marx and Engel called the dialectical method is nothing more nor less than the scientific method in sociology, which consists in regarding society as a living organism in a constant state of development, the study of which requires an objective analysis of the relations of production which constitute the given social formation and an investigation of its laws of functioning and development”

-- V.I. Lenin, *What the “Friends of the People” Are and How They Fight the Social Democrats*, part I.

Example of the dialectical structure of Marx’s arguments in the first chapter of *Capital*, vol. I:



### The Laws of Development

Definition of development: “We speak of development where stage by stage something new keeps emerging.”

“Thus there is a difference between mere change and development. Development is change proceeding according to its own internal laws from stage to stage.... [D]evelopment means... passing into a qualitatively new stage, becoming qualitatively different.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch.8.

### The Law of the Transformation of Quantitative into Qualitative Change:

“All change has a quantitative aspect, that is, an aspect of mere increase or decrease which does not alter the nature of that which changes.

“But quantitative change, increase or decrease, cannot go on indefinitely. At a certain point it always leads to a qualitative change; and at that critical point (or ‘nodal point’. As Hegel called it) the qualitative change takes place relatively suddenly, by a leap, as it were.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch.8.

“In general qualitative changes happen with relative suddenness – by a leap. Something new is suddenly born, though its potentiality was already contained in the gradual evolutionary process of continuous quantitative change which went before.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch.8.

In physics, the concept of critical mass.

In biology, the concept of punctuated equilibrium.

Development takes place Through the Unity and Struggle of Opposites:

“In general, the reason why in any particular case a quantitative change leads to a qualitative change lies in the very nature, in the content of the particular processes involved. Therefore, in each case we can, if we only know enough, explain just why a qualitative change is inevitable, and why it takes place at the point it does.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch.8.

Omnipresence of opposites, of contradictions.

“We cannot deduce the laws of development in the concrete case from the general principles of dialectics: we have to discover them by actual investigation in each case. But dialectics tells us what to look for.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 8.

The Dialectics of Social Development -- The Contradictions of Capitalism:

“I was not in doubt that amid the welter of innumerable changes taking place in nature the same dialectical laws of motion are in operation as those which in history govern the apparent fortuitousness of events.”

-- F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*.

“The basic contradiction of capitalism is not simply the conflict of two classes, which confront one another as two external forces which come into conflict... [I]t is the contradiction within the social system itself, on the basis of which the class conflict arises and operates.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 8.

Capital brought about:

“The basic contradiction of capitalism is, therefore, the contradiction between socialized production and capitalist appropriation.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 8

“In this contradiction... the whole conflict of today is already present in germ... The contradiction between social production and capitalist appropriation became manifest as the antagonism between proletariat and bourgeoisie.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 8.

A further development: social production and increasing concentration of ownership of the means of production.

### Contradictions:

“Movement and change result from causes *inherent* in things and processes, from *internal* contradictions.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

“If we consider the real, complex movements and interconnections of real complex things, then we find that contradictory tendencies can and do exist in them.... The existence of contradictions in things is a very familiar state of affairs. There is nothing in the least abstruse about it,.... A real contradiction is a *unity* of opposites. There is a real contradiction inherent, as we say, in the very nature of a thing or process or relationship when in that thing or process opposite tendencies are combined in such a way that neither can exist without the other. In the unity of opposites, the opposites are held together in a relationship of mutual dependence, where each is the condition of existence of the other.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

“It is the unity of opposites in a contradiction which makes inescapable and necessary the struggle of opposites. Since the opposed terms are inseparably united, there is no getting out of the struggle.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

“We may also speak of the *interpenetration* of opposites in a contradiction. For being united in struggle, each opposed tendency is in its actual character and operation at any phase of the struggle influenced, modified or penetrated by the other in many ways.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

### The Working Out of Contradictions:

“Contradiction is the driving force of change. So if we want to understand how things change, and to control and utilize their changes, then we must understand their contradiction.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

“...[n]o... society exists or ever could exist, because from the very nature of the conditions of human life there must always be contradictions in society. By satisfying their needs people create new unsatisfied needs, and by advancing their forces of production they bring about a state of affairs in which they need to change their social relations and institutions correspondingly. This is why change happens in society. The social process is not a process of repetition but a process in which new things happen.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

### The Universality and Particularity of Contradictions:

“Contradiction is a universal feature of all processes. But each particular kind of process has its own particular contradictions, which are contradictions of it and different from those of other processes.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

“We can never deduce what will happen in any particular case, or how a particular process can be controlled, from the universal idea of contradiction.

“In order to understand a process, then, and to learn how to control and master it, we must get to know its essential contradictions and investigate the specific forms they take in specific instances.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

The Outcome of Contradictions:

“The outcome of the working out of contradiction is, then, a change in the domination relation characteristic of the original unity of opposites. Such a change in the nature of a thing, a change from one state to another, a change from one thing to another, a change entailing not merely some external alteration but a change in the internal character and laws of motion of the thing.

“It is precisely such a change that we mean by a qualitative change.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

“Qualitative change is the result of a change in the balance of opposites. Such a change is prepared by a series of quantitative changes affecting the domination relation in the unity of opposites. As the domination relation changes, quantitative change passes into qualitative change.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

The Suddenness and Gradualness of Qualitative Change:

Whatever the method by which different contradictions work out, a point is always reached where the quantitative aspect of the struggle of opposites within the contradiction has been sufficiently modified for the new quality to emerge. This is the point where qualitative change *begins*. How it *continues* depends entirely on the particular character of the contradiction of which it is the outcome, on the particular way of the struggle of opposites continues.... While, therefore, qualitative change begins suddenly, it continues gradually. How quickly or how slowly the new supplants the old depends on the nature of the process and the conditions under which it occurs.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

Transition to socialism.

Antagonism and Non-Antagonism in Contradictions:

“The working out of contradictions always involves one side struggling with and overcoming the other. But according to the nature of the contradiction, this process may take place in different ways. And in society in particular, a distinction must be drawn between contradictions the solution of which involves the forcible suppression or

destruction of one side by the other, and those whose solution does not require such methods.

“The change from capitalism to socialism, for example, takes place through the forcible suppression of the capitalist class by the working class. But the ensuing change from socialism to communism does not require the forcible suppression of anyone.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

“In general, social contradictions are antagonistic when they involve conflicts of economic interest... But when conflicts of economic interest are not involved, there is not antagonism and therefore no need for the forcible suppression of any group by any other.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

“Antagonism, therefore, is not the same thing as contradiction. Nor is it the same thing as the struggle of opposites within a contradiction. The struggle of opposites is a universal, necessary feature of every contradiction, and it may take an antagonistic form or it may not, depending on the particular nature of the particular contradiction.”

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 9.

Revisionism fails to recognize that there are antagonistic contradictions.

### Development and Negation

The forward Movement of Development:

Hegel: directed and undirected processes.

Example of undirected process: ice – water – steam – water – ice.

“The changes that take place in nature, however infinitely various they may be, exhibit only a perpetually repeating cycle; in nature there take place ‘nothing new under the sun’... only in those changes which take place in the region of the Spirit does anything new arise.”

-- G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*.

No concept of biological evolution in Hegel. Directed process: Weltgeist. Feuerbach: Spirit (*Geist*) = man.

Real explanation: “What, then, is the basis of direction in processes, of the internal causes of a forward movement of development? It is to be found in the existence and long-term operation in those processes of essential contradictions which work out by taking a series of specific form. This is what gives rise to a directed series of stages, a long-term process of development in a definite direction.

“...[T]he permanent existence of this contradiction gives rise to a permanent tendency of man to improve his forces of production, and as this tendency operates so stage by stage contradictions arise between the social forces of production and the relations of

production. The direction of man's social evolution is the direction of man's mastery over nature, and the movement of society takes this direction simply because of the natural conditions of human life, the impulses to change and development which people experience because of the necessity to satisfy their needs.... A process usually contains not one but many contradictions. It is a knot of contradictions."

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 10.

Basic (primary) contradiction: between forces of production and relations of production.

Secondary contradictions.

Role of Negation:

Opposition to Revisionist Social Democracy: Utter negation of capitalism is necessary for resolving the primary contradiction.

"The old is not simply abolished, leaving this as though it had never existed: it is abolished only after it has given rise to the conditions or the new stage of advance."

-- Maurice Cornforth, *Materialism and the Dialectical Method*, ch. 10.

The negation of the former stage is the final, necessary step in the development of the new.

These two phenomena constitute the positive element of negation.

Negation of the negation: "This modern materialism is not the merely reestablishment of the old, but adds the permanent foundations of this old materialism the whole thought content of two thousand years of philosophy and natural science."

-- F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*.

Primitive communism → abolished by societies with classes → abolished by a society ruled by the working class → abolished by classless Mature Communism