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The dialectics of the Abstract & the Concrete in Marx's Capital

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Chapter One – Dialectical & Metaphysical Conception of the Concrete

The Conception of the Abstract and the Concrete in Dialectics and in Formal Logic

The terms 'the abstract' and 'the concrete' are employed both in everyday speech and in the special literature rather ambiguously. Thus, one hears of 'concrete facts' and 'concrete music', of 'abstract thinking' and 'abstract painting', of 'concrete truth' and 'abstract labour'. This usage is in each case apparently justified by the existence of shades of meanings in these words, and it would be ridiculously pedantic to demand a complete unification of the usage.

However, things are different when we are dealing not merely with words or terms but with the content of scientific categories that have become historically linked with these terms. Definitions of the abstract and the concrete as categories of logic must be stable and unambiguous within the framework of this science, for they are instrumental in establishing the basic principles of scientific thought. Through these terms, dialectical logic expresses a number of its fundamental principles ('there is no abstract truth. truth is always concrete', the thesis of 'ascending from the abstract to the concrete', and so on). Therefore the categories of the abstract and the concrete have quite a definite meaning in dialectical logic, which is intrinsically linked with the dialectico-materialist conception of the truth, the relation of thought to reality, the mode of theoretical reproduction of reality in thinking, and so on. As long as we deal with categories of dialectics connected with words, rather than with words themselves, any licence, lack of clarity or instability in their definition (let alone incorrectness) will necessarily lead to a distorted conception of the essence of the matter. For this reason it is necessary to free the categories of the abstract and the concrete from the connotations that have been associated with them throughout centuries in many works by tradition, from force of habit or simply because of an error, which has often interfered with correct interpretation of the propositions of dialectical logic.

The problem of the relationship of the abstract and the concrete in its general form is not posed or solved in formal logic, for it is a purely philosophical, epistemological question, quite outside its sphere of competence. However, when it is a matter of classifying concepts, namely, of dividing concepts into 'abstract' and 'concrete', formal logic necessarily assumes a quite definite interpretation of the corresponding categories. This interpretation appears as the principle of division and may therefore be established analytically.

On this point, most authors of books on formal logic apparently give a rather unanimous support to a certain tradition, albeit with some reservations and amendments. According to this traditional view, concepts (or ideas) are divided into abstract and concrete in the following manner:

'Concrete concepts are those that reflect really existing definite objects or classes of objects. Abstract concepts are those that reflect a property of objects mentally abstracted from the objects themselves.' [N I Kondakov]

'A concrete concept is one relating to groups, classes of things, objects, and phenomena or to separate things, objects, or phenomena.... An abstract concept is a concept of properties of objects or phenomena, when these properties are taken as an independent object of thought.' [M S Strogavich]

'Concrete concepts are those whose objects actually exist as things in the material world.... Abstract concepts are those that reflect a property of an object taken separately from the object, rather than the object itself.' [V F Asmus]

The examples cited to illustrate the definitions are mostly of the same type. *Concrete* concepts are usually said to include such concepts as 'book', 'Fido', 'tree', 'plane', 'commodity', whereas *abstract* ones are illustrated by 'whiteness', 'courage', 'virtue', 'speed', 'value', etc.

Judging from the examples, the division is in fact the same as in the well-known textbook on logic by G. I. Chelpanov. Improvements on the Chelpanov definition are mostly concerned not

with the division itself but with its philosophico-epistemological foundation, for Chelpanov was, philosophically, a typical subjective idealist.

Here is his version of the division of concepts into abstract and concrete ones:

‘Abstract terms are those that serve for designating *qualities or properties, states, or actions* of things. They denote qualities considered by themselves, without the things.... Concrete concepts are those of *things, objects, persons, facts, events, states of consciousness*, if we regard them as having definite existence. ...’ [*Textbook on Logic*]

The distinction between ‘term’ and ‘concept’ is a matter of indifference for Chelpanov. ‘States of consciousness’ are in his view in the same category as facts, things, and events. ‘Having definite existence’ is for him the same as ‘having definite existence in the individual’s immediate consciousness’, that is, in his contemplation, conception, or at least imagination.

Chelpanov therefore regards as concrete anything that may be conceived (imagined) as a separately existing single thing, or image, and he regards as abstract anything that cannot be so imagined, that can only be thought of as such.

The individual’s ability or inability to conceive something graphically is, in fact, Chelpanov’s criterion for the division into the abstract and the concrete. This division, however shaky it may be from the philosophical standpoint, is rather definite.

Inasmuch as some authors endeavoured to correct the philosophico-epistemological interpretation of the classification without changing the actual type of examples concerned, the classification proved to be open to criticism.

If one includes among concrete concepts only those that pertain to *objects of the material world*, a centaur or Athena Pallas will apparently be regarded as abstract concepts along with courage or virtue, while Fido will be included among concrete ones along with value.

What is the use of such a classification for logical analysis? The traditional classification is destroyed or confused by this kind of amendment introducing a completely alien element into it. On the other hand, no new strict classification is obtained.

Attempts by certain authors to oppose a new principle or basis of division to the one suggested by Chelpanov can hardly be regarded as apt, too.

Kondakov believes, for instance, that the division of concepts into abstract and concrete should express a ‘difference in the content of concepts’. That means that concrete concepts must reflect *things*, and abstract ones, *properties and relations* of these things. If the division is to be complete, neither properties nor relations of things can be conceived in concrete concepts, according to Kondakov. It remains unclear how one can conceive of a thing or a class other than through a conception of their properties and relations. In fact, any thought about a thing will inevitably prove to be a thought about some property of this thing, for conceiving a thing means forming a conception about the entire totality of its properties and relations.

If one frees the thought of a thing from all thoughts of properties of this thing, there will be nothing left of the thought other than the name. In other words, the division of concepts according to their content means, in actual fact, this: a concrete concept is a concept without content, while an abstract one does have some content, though very meagre. Otherwise the division will not be complete and will thus be incorrect.

The principle of division suggested by Asmus, ‘actual existence of the objects of these concepts’ is just as unfortunate.

How is one to understand this formula? Do the objects of concrete concepts actually exist, while the objects of abstract concepts are nonexistent? But the category of abstract concepts embraces not only virtue but also value, weight, speed, that is, objects whose existence is no less real than that of a plane or a house. If one means to say that extension, value, or speed actually do not exist outside a house, a tree, a plane, or some other individual things, clearly the individual things also exist without extension, weight and other attributes of the material world only in the head, only in subjective abstraction.

Real existence is consequently neither here nor there, the more so that it cannot be made into a criterion of division of concepts into abstract and concrete. That can only create the false

impression that individual things are more real than universal laws and forms of existence of these things.

All of this shows that the amendments to the Chelpanov division introduced by some authors are extremely inadequate and formal, and that the authors of books on logic have failed to make a critical materialist analysis of this division, restricting themselves to corrections of particulars, which merely confused the traditional classification without improving it.

We shall therefore have to undertake a small excursion into the history of the concepts of the abstract and the concrete to introduce some clarity there.

From the History of the Concepts of the Abstract and the Concrete

The definition of abstract concepts shared by Chelpanov was clearly formulated by [Christian Wolff](#). According to Wolff, abstract concepts have for their content properties, relations, and states of things mentally isolated from things and represented as an independent object.

Wolff is not the original source. He merely reproduces the view taken in theological treatises of medieval scholastics. All names/concepts (they did not distinguish name from concept) denoting properties and relations of things they called abstract, whereas names of things were called concrete.

This usage was originally determined by mere etymology. In Latin '*concretus*' means simply 'mixed', 'fused', 'composite', compound; while the Latin word '*abstractus*' means 'withdrawn', 'taken out of', 'extracted' (or 'isolated'), or '& estranged'. That is all that is contained in the original etymological meaning of these words. The rest pertains to the philosophical conception that is expressed through them.

The opposition of medieval realism and nominalism is not relevant to the direct etymological meanings of the words 'abstract' and 'concrete'. Both nominalists and realists equally apply the term 'concrete' to separate sensually perceived and directly observed 'things', individual objects, while the term 'abstract' is applied to all concepts and names designating or expressing their general 'forms'. The difference lies in that the former believe names to be merely subjective designations of individual concrete things, whereas the latter believe that these abstract names express eternal and immutable 'forms' having their existence in the womb of divine reason, the prototypes in accordance with which the divine power creates individual things.

Contempt for the world of sensually perceived things, for the 'flesh', that is characteristic of the Christian world-view in general and is particularly clearly expressed in realism, determines the fact that the abstract (estranged from the flesh, from sensuality, the purely cognitive) is believed to be much more valuable (both on the ethical and epistemological planes) than the concrete.

The concrete is here a full synonym of the sensually perceived, individual, carnal, mundane, transient ('composite and therefore doomed to disintegration, to disappearance). The abstract is a synonym of the eternal, imperishable, indivisible, divinely instituted, universal, absolute, etc. An individual 'round body' will disappear, but the 'round body' in general exists eternally as form, as entelechy creating new round bodies. The concrete is transient, elusive, fleeting. The abstract exists immutably, constituting the essence, the invisible scheme upon which the world is built.

It is the scholastic conception of the abstract and the concrete that is at the bottom of the antiquarian respect for the abstract which Hegel later so caustically ridiculed.

The materialist philosophy of the 16th and 17th centuries which, forming an alliance with natural science, commenced to destroy the foundations of the religious and scholastic worldview, in effect re-interpreted the categories of the abstract and the concrete.

The direct sense of these terms remained the same: the term 'concrete' referred, just as in scholastic doctrines, to individual, sensually perceived things and their graphic images, while the term 'abstract', was used to refer to the general forms of these things, to immutably recurring properties and law-governed relations of these things expressed in terms, names, and

numbers. However, the philosophico-theoretical content of these categories became the opposite of the scholastic one. The concrete, that which is given to man in sensual experience, came to be understood as the only reality worthy of attention and study, and the abstract, as a mere subjective psychological shadow of that reality, its meagre mental schema. The abstract became a synonym for expression of sensual empirical data in words and figures, a synonym for a sign description of the concrete.

But this interpretation of the relationship between the abstract and the concrete, characteristic of the first steps in natural science and materialist philosophy, very soon came into contradiction with the practice of natural-historical research. Natural science and materialist philosophy of the 16th-18th centuries tended more and more towards mechanistic views, and that meant that temporal and spatial characteristics and abstract geometrical forms became recognised as the only objective qualities and relations of things and phenomena. The rest appeared as mere subjective illusion created by man's sense organs.

In other words, everything 'concrete' was conceived as a *product of the activity of the sense organs*, as a certain psychophysiological state of the subject, as a subjectively coloured replica of the colourless abstract geometrical original. The prime task of cognition was also viewed in a new light: to obtain the truth, one had to erase or wash off all the colours superimposed by sensuality upon the sensually perceived image of things, baring the abstract geometrical skeleton, the schema.

So the concrete was interpreted as subjective illusion, merely as a state of the sense organs, while the object outside consciousness was transformed into something entirely abstract.

The picture thus obtained was as follows: outside man's consciousness there exists nothing but eternally immutable abstract geometrical particles combined according to identical, eternal, and immutable abstract mathematical schemes, while the concrete is within the subject only, as a form of sensory perception of the abstract geometrical bodies. Hence the formula: the only correct way to truth is through soaring away from the concrete (the fallacious, false, subjective) to the abstract (as the expression of eternal and immutable schemes for constructing bodies).

This determines the strong nominalistic bias in the philosophy of the 16th-18th centuries. Any concept, except for the mathematical ones, was simply interpreted as an artificially invented sign, a name serving as an aid to memory, to ordering the varied data of experience, to communication with other men, etc.

[George Berkeley](#) and [David Hume](#), the subjective idealists of those times, directly reduced concepts to names, to designations, to conventional signs or symbols, beyond which, they believed, it would be absurd to look for any other content except for a certain similarity of series of sensual impressions, the common element in experience. This tendency became particularly firm-rooted in England and is still living out its days in the shape of neo-positivist conceptions.

The weaknesses of this approach, that was in its perfect form characteristic of subjective idealism, were also peculiar to many materialists of that age. Particularly striking in this respect were the studies of [John Locke](#), [Hobbes](#) and Helvétius were no exception either. In their work this approach was present as a tendency obscuring their basically materialist positions.

Taken to an extreme, this view results in logical categories being dissolved in psychological and even linguistic, grammatical ones. Thus Helvétius defines the method of abstraction as a means to fix 'a great number of objects in our memory'. He regards 'abuse of words' as one of the most important causes of error. Hobbes follows a similar line of reasoning: "Wherefore, as men owe all their True Ratiocination to the right understanding of Speech; So also they owe their Errors to the misunderstanding of the same".

Since rational cognition of the external world was reduced to a purely quantitative, mathematical processing of data, and for the rest, to ordering and verbal recording of sensual images, the place of logic was naturally taken, on the one hand, by mathematics, and on the other, by the science of combination and division of terms and propositions, the science of the correct usage of words created by men.

This nominalistic reduction of the concept to the word, the term, and of thinking, to the ability for correct usage of words that we ourselves create, undermined the materialist principle itself. Locke, the classical representative and the originator of this view, found already that the

concept of *substance* could neither be explained nor justified as simply 'the general in experience', as the broadest possible universal', as an abstraction from individual things. Naturally Berkeley rushed into this broach, using the Lockean theory of concept formation against materialism and against the very concept of substance. He declared it to be a meaningless name. Continuing his analysis of the basic concepts of philosophy, Hume proved that the objective character of such a concept as causality could also be neither proved nor verified by reference to the fact that it expressed 'the general in experience', for abstraction from the sensually given individual objects and phenomena, from the concrete might just as well express the identity of the psychophysiological structure of the subject perceiving things rather than an identity of the things themselves.

The narrow empirical theory of the concept reducing it to a mere abstraction from individual phenomena and perceptions, reflected only the superficial psychological aspects of rational cognition. On the surface, thought indeed appears as abstraction of the 'identical' from individual things, as ascending to increasingly comprehensive and universal abstractions. Such a theory, however, may equally well serve diametrically opposite philosophical conceptions bypassing as it does the most important point-the question of the objective truth of universal concepts.

Consistent materialists realised the weakness of the nominalistic view of the concept, its vulnerability to idealist speculations and errors. Spinoza stressed that the concept of substance, expressing the 'first principle of nature', cannot be conceived abstractedly or universally, and cannot extend further in the understanding than it does in reality'. [[Spinoza](#), *Improvement of the Understanding, Ethics and Correspondence*, trans. to English 1901]

There is an idea running through Spinoza's entire treatise-that simple 'universals', simple abstractions from the sensually given multiformity recorded in names and terms are merely a form of vague imaginative cognition. Genuinely scientific, 'true ideas' do not emerge in that way. The establishment of 'the differences, the agreements, and the oppositions of things' is, according to Spinoza, the mode of 'chaotic experience' uncontrolled by reason. 'Moreover its (of the mode of perception – Ed.) results are very uncertain and indefinite, for we shall never discover anything in natural phenomena by its means, except accidental properties, which are never clearly understood, unless the essence of the things in question be known first.' [*ibid.*]

To begin with, the 'chaotic experience' forming universals is never completed, so that any new fact may overthrow the abstraction. Second, it contains no guarantees that the given universal really expresses a genuine universal form of things rather than a merely subjective fiction.

In opposition to 'chaotic experience' and its philosophical justification in empiric conceptions, Spinoza sets up a higher mode of cognition based on strictly verified principles and concepts expressing 'the adequate essence of a thing'. These are no longer 'universals', no longer abstractions from the sensually given multiformity. How are they formed and where do they come from?

Comments on this point often run as follows: these ideas (principles, universal concepts) are contained in the human intellect a priori and brought out by an act of intuition or self-contemplation. In this interpretation Spinoza's position becomes very much like that of [Leibniz](#) or [Kant](#) and has very little to do with materialism. But in reality it is all rather different-quite different, in fact. The thinking of which Spinoza treats is by no means the thinking of a human individual. This concept is by no means fashioned in his theory after the model of individual consciousness, but is actually oriented at mankind's theoretical self-consciousness, at the spiritual-theoretical culture as a whole. Individual consciousness is taken into account only insofar as it embodies this thinking, that is, thinking which agrees with the nature of things. An individual's intellect does not necessarily contain the ideas of reason at all, and no self-contemplation, however the rough it may be, can discover them in it.

They mature and crystallise in the human intellect only gradually, through reason's indefatigable work aimed at its own perfection. These concepts are by no means self-obvious to an intellect that is not developed through this kind of work. They are simply absent in it. It is only reasonable knowledge taken as a whole that, as it develops, works out such concepts.

Spinoza firmly asserts this view by an analogy with the perfection of instruments of material labour.

As far as the “method for finding out the truth [is concerned], the matter stands on the same footing as the making of material tools.... For, in order to work iron, a hammer is needed, and the hammer cannot be forthcoming unless it has been made; but in order to make it, there was need of another hammer and other tools, and so on to infinity. We might thus vainly endeavour to prove that men have no power of working iron.

“But as men at first made use of the instruments supplied by nature to accomplish very easy pieces of workmanship, laboriously and imperfectly, and then, when these were finished, wrought other things more difficult with less labour and greater perfection.... So, in like manner, the intellect, by its native strength, makes for itself intellectual instruments, whereby it acquires strength for performing other intellectual operations, and from these operations gets again fresh instruments, or the power of pushing its investigations further, and thus gradually proceeds till it reaches the summit of wisdom.” [*ibid.*]

Try as one might, this argument can hardly be made to resemble the view of Descartes, according to whom the higher ideas of intuition are directly contained in the intellect, or to that of Leibniz, according to whom these ideas are something like the veins in marble. According to Spinoza, they are innate in quite a specific sense-as natural, that is inherent from nature, intellectual capabilities, in precisely the same way as man’s hand is originally a ‘natural instrument’.

Here Spinoza attempts a fundamentally materialist interpretation of the innateness of ‘intellectual instruments’ deducing it from man’s natural organisation rather than from the ‘God’ of Descartes or Leibniz.

What Spinoza failed to understand was the fact that the originally imperfect ‘intellectual instruments’ are products of material labour rather than of nature. He believed them to be products of nature, and in this, and only this, point lies the weakness of his position. But this weakness is shared by [Feuerbach](#) even. This defect can by no means be regarded as idealist wavering. That is merely an organic, shortcoming of the entire old materialism.

Spinoza’s rationalism should therefore be strictly distinguished from the rationalism of both [Descartes](#) and Leibniz. His contention is that man’s ability to think is inherent in man’s *nature* and is explained from substance interpreted in a clearly materialistic manner.

When Spinoza calls thinking an *attribute*, that means precisely this: the essence of substance should not be reduced to extension only; thinking pertains to that very nature to which extension belongs-it is a property just as inseparable from nature (or substance) as extension and corporeality. It cannot be conceived of separately.

It is precisely this view that motivated Spinoza’s criticism of ‘abstract universals’, of those ways in which scholastics, occasionalists, and nominalist empiricists attempt to explain substance. That is the reason why Spinoza held a low view of the path from concrete existence to an abstract universal. This mode is incapable of solving the problem of substance, always leaving a gap for scholastic and religious constructions.

Spinoza rightly believed that the way leading from concrete existence to an empty universal, the way explaining the concrete by a reduction to an empty abstraction, was of little value from the scientific standpoint.

“Thus, the more existence is conceived generally, the more is it conceived confusedly, and the more easily can it be ascribed to a given object. Contrariwise, the more it *is* conceived particularly, the more is it understood clearly, and the less liable is it to be ascribed, through negligence of Nature’s order, to anything save its proper object.” [*ibid.*]

No comments are needed to realise that this view is much closer to the truth than the view of narrow empiricism insisting that the essence of rational cognition of things lies in regular ascents to increasingly more general and empty abstractions, in moving away from the concrete specific essence of things under study. According to Spinoza, this way does not lead from the vague to the clear but, on the contrary, it leads away from the goal.

The way of rational cognition is precisely the reverse. It begins with a clearly established general principle (but not with an abstract universal by any means) and proceeds as a step-by-step mental reconstruction of a thing, as reasoning which deduces the thing's particular properties from its universal cause (ultimately from substance). A genuine idea, as distinct from a simple abstract universal, must contain necessity, following which one can explain all the directly observable properties of the thing. As for 'universals', they reflect one of the more or less accidental properties out of which no other properties are deducible.

Spinoza explains this conception of his by citing an example from geometry—a definition of the essence of a circle. If we define a circle as a figure in which 'all straight lines drawn from the centre to the circumference are equal, every one can see that such a definition does not in the least explain the essence of a circle, but solely one of its properties'. According to the correct mode of definition, a circle is 'the figure described by any line whereof one end is fixed and the other free'. This definition, indicating the *mode of the origin* of a thing and a comprehension of the 'proximate cause', and thereby containing a mode of its mental reconstruction, enables one to deduce all the other properties of it, including the one pointed out above. [*ibid.*]

One should thus proceed not from a 'universal' but rather from a concept expressing the actual, real cause of the thing, its concrete essence. Therein lies the gist of Spinoza's method.

"... We may never, while we are concerned with inquiries into actual things, draw any conclusions from abstractions; we shall be extremely careful not to confound that which is only in the understanding of the thing itself". [*ibid.*]

It is not the "reduction of the concrete to the abstract" or explanation of the concrete through including it into a universal that leads to the truth but, on the contrary, deduction of the particular properties from the actual universal cause. In this connection Spinoza distinguishes between two kinds of general ideas: *notiones communes*, or concepts expressing the really universal cause of the origin of a thing, and the simpler abstract universals expressing, simple similarities or differences of many individual things, *notiones generalis universales*. The former include substance, the latter, for instance, existence in general.

To bring any thing under the head of the general 'universal' of the *existing* means to explain absolutely nothing about it. This used to be the vacuous preoccupation of scholastics. Worse still is the deduction of the properties of things according to the formal rules of syllogistics *ex abstractis* – 'from the universal'.

It is difficult to study and mentally reconstruct the entire process of the emergence of all the particular specific properties of a thing from one and the same really universal actual cause expressed in the intellect by the *notiones communes*. This 'deduction' is merely a form of reconstructing in the intellect of the real *process of emergence of a thing* out of nature, out of 'substance'. This deduction is not formed according to the rules of syllogistics but according to the 'truth norm', the norm of agreement, unity of thinking and extension, of the intellect and the external world.

It would hardly be appropriate to discuss here the shortcomings of Spinoza's conception, as they are well known: Spinoza failed to understand the connection between thinking and practical activity with objects, between theory and practice, the role of practice as the only objective criterion of the truth of a concrete concept. From the formal standpoint Spinoza's view is, of course, incomparably deeper and closer to the truth than Locke's.

Locke's theory afforded an easy transition to Berkeley or Hume without any essential alterations, merely through interpreting its propositions. Spinoza's position is not amenable to such an interpretation in principle. It is not for nothing that contemporary positivists brand this theory as 'rank metaphysics', whereas Locke sometimes rates a polite bow.

Spinoza's conception of the nature and formal composition of concretely universal concepts (that seems to be the best way of rendering his term *notiones communes*), as opposed -to simple abstract universals, abounds in brilliant anticipations of dialectics. For instance, the concept of 'substance', a typical and principal example of such a concept, is obviously viewed as a unity of two mutually exclusive and at the same time mutually assuming definitions.

Thinking and extension, two attributes and two modes of realisation of substance, have nothing *abstract-general* in common and neither can they have anything of the kind in common.

In other words, there is no abstract feature that would simultaneously form part of the definition of thinking and of the definition of the external world ('extended world').

This feature would be a universal that would be broader than the definition of the external world and of thinking. Such a feature would not be compatible either with the nature of thinking or that of extension. It would not reflect anything real outside intellect. The conception of 'God' characteristic of scholastics, is constructed precisely out of such features.

According to [Malebranche](#), both extended and ideal things are 'contemplated in God'-in that general element that mediates between the idea and the thing as a middle term, as a feature common to both. And such a common element (in the sense of an abstract universal) between thinking and extension does not exist. What is common to both of them is their primordial unity. Spinoza's God therefore equals nature plus thinking, a unity of opposites, of two attributes. But in this case there is nothing left of the traditional God. What is called God is actually the extended nature as a whole with thought as an aspect of its essence. Only nature as a whole possesses thinking as its attribute, as an absolutely necessary property. A separate, limited part of the extended world does not necessarily have this property. For instance, a stone as a mode does not 'think' at all. But it does form part of 'substance' that thinks, it is its mode, its particle – and it may well think if it forms part of an appropriate structure becoming, e.g., a particle of the human body. (That was exactly the way in which Diderot decoded the main idea of Spinoza's teaching: can a stone feel? – It can. All you have to do is pound it, grow a plant on the powder, and eat the plant, transforming the matter of the stone into the matter of a sentient body.)

However, these brilliant gleams of dialectics in Spinoza, combined with a fundamentally materialist view of the human intellect, were buried in the general flow of metaphysical thinking in the 17th and 18th centuries, being deluged by it. The Lockean theory of abstraction with its bias towards nominalism, for some reasons proved to be more acceptable for the natural and social sciences of the times. The rational kernels of Spinoza's dialectics came to the surface only in German classical philosophy late in the 18th and early in the 19th century and were developed on a materialist basis only by Marx and Engels.

[Immanuel Kant](#), endeavouring to reconcile the principles of rationalism and empiricism on the basis of subjective-idealist views of cognition, was driven to the conclusion that a hard and fast division of concepts into two classes, abstract and concrete, was in general impossible. As Kant puts it, it is absurd to ask whether a separate concept is abstract or concrete, if it is considered outside its links with other concepts, outside its usage.

'The expressions *abstract and concrete* refer not so much to the concepts themselves-for any concept is an abstract concept-as to their *usage*. And this usage can again have different grades;-according as one treats a concept now more, now less abstract or concrete, that is, takes away from or adds to it now more, now fewer definitions', writes Kant in his *Logic*.

According to Kant, a concept, if it is really a *concept* rather than an empty appellation, a name of an individual thing, always expresses something in general, a generic or specific definiteness of a thing, and is thus always abstract, whether it be substance or chalk, whiteness or virtue. On the other hand, any such concept is in some way or other defined 'within itself', through a number of its features. The more such features/definitions are added to a concept the more concrete it is, in Kant's view, that is, the more definite, richer in definitions. The more concrete it is, the fuller it characterises the empirically given individual things. If a concept is defined through inclusion in 'higher genera', through 'logical abstraction', it is used *in abstracts*; it is applicable to a greater number of individual things and species, but the number of definitions in its composition is fewer.

'Through abstract usage a concept approaches a higher genus, through concrete usage, on the contrary, it approaches the individual.... Through very abstract concepts, we learn little about many things; through very concrete concepts, we learn much about few things;-thus what we win on one side, we lose again on the other.' [Kant *op. cit.*]

The limit of concreteness is thus a sensually contemplated individual thing, a separate phenomenon. A concept, however, never reaches this limit. On the other hand, the highest and most abstract concept always retains in its composition a certain unity, a certain synthesis of

different definitions that one cannot break up (through formulating the ultimate definition) without making the concept senseless, without destroying it as such. For this reason even the highest generic concept has a measure of concreteness.

Here the empiric tendency, the Lockean tradition apparently makes itself felt. However, Kant combines with it an extremely rationalistic view of the nature of 'synthesis of definitions of a concept'. This synthesis or combining of definitions in the concept (that is, the concreteness of the concept) naturally cannot be simply oriented at the sensually given empirical multiformity of phenomena. To claim a *theoretical* significance, this synthesis must be based on another principle the ability to combine definitions a priori, independently of empirical experience. The concreteness of a concept (that is, that unity in diversity, the unity of different definitions that has a universal and necessary significance) is thereby explained and deduced by Kant from the nature of human consciousness which allegedly possesses original unity, the transcendental unity of apperception. This latter is precisely the genuine basis of the concreteness of a concept. In this way, the concreteness of a concept has no firm links with 'things-in-themselves', with the sensually given concreteness.

Hegel also assumed that any concept was abstract, if abstractness is to be interpreted as the fact that a concept never expresses in its definitions the sensually contemplated reality in its entirety. Hegel was in this sense much closer to Locke than to [Mill](#) or medieval nominalism. He realised quite well that definitions of concepts always include an expression of something general, if only because concepts are always embodied in words, and words are always abstract, they always express something general and are incapable of expressing the absolutely individual and unique.

Therefore anyone thinks abstractly, and the thinking is the more abstract the poorer in definitions those concepts that one uses. Abstract thinking is by no means a virtue but, on the contrary, a shortcoming. That is the whole point – thinking concretely, expressing through abstractions the concrete and specific nature of things rather than mere similarity, merely something that different things have in common.

The concrete is interpreted by Hegel as unity in diversity, as unity of different and opposing definitions, as mental expression of organic links, of syncretism of the separate abstract definitenesses of an object within the given specific object.

As for the abstract, Hegel interpreted it (just as Locke did, but not Mill or the scholastics) as anything general, any similarity expressed in word and concept, a simple identity of a number of things with one another, whether it be house or whiteness, man or value, a dog or virtue.

The concept 'house' is in this sense in no way different from the concept 'kindness'. Both register in their definitions the common elements inherent in a whole class, series, genus, or species of individual things, phenomena, spiritual states, etc.

If a word, term, symbol, name express only that – only the abstract similarity of a number of individual things, phenomena or images of consciousness – that is not yet a *concept*, according to Hegel. That is merely an abstractly general notion or representation (*Vorstellung*), a form of empirical knowledge, of the sensual stage of consciousness. This pseudo-concept always has a certain sensually given image for its meaning or sense.

As for concepts, they express not merely the general, but the general that contains the richness of particulars, comprehended in their unity. In other words, a genuine concept is not only abstract (Hegel, of course, does not negate that), but also concrete-in the sense that its definitions (what old logic calls features) are combined in it in a single complex expressing the unity of things, rather than merely joined according to the rules of grammar.

The concreteness of a concept lies, according to Hegel, in the unity of definitions, their meaningful cohesion – the only means of revealing the content of a concept. Out of context, an individual verbal definition is abstract and abstract only. Immersed into the context of a scientific theoretical discourse, any abstract definition becomes concrete.

The genuine sense, genuine content of each abstract definition taken separately is revealed through its links with other definitions of the same kind, through a *concrete unity of abstract definitions*. The concrete essence of a problem is therefore always expressed through unfolding

all the necessary definitions of the object in their mutual connections rather than through an abstract ‘definition’.

That is why a concept, according to Hegel, does not exist as a separate word, term, or symbol. It exists only in the process of unfolding in a proposition, in a syllogism expressing connectedness of separate definitions, and ultimately only in a system of propositions and syllogisms, only in an integral, well-developed theory. If a concept is pulled out of this connection, what remains of it is mere verbal integument, a linguistic symbol. The content of the concept, its meaning, remains outside it-in series of other definitions, for a word taken separately is only capable of *designating* an object, naming it, it is only capable of serving as a sign, symbol, marker, or symptom.

Thus the concrete meaning of a separate verbal definition is always contained in something else-whether it be a sensually given image or a well-developed system of theoretical definitions expressing the essence of the problem, the essence of the object, phenomenon, or event.

If a definition exists in the head separately, in isolation from the sensually contemplated image, unconnected with it or with a system ‘of other definitions, it is ratiocinated abstractly. There is certainly nothing commendable about this way of ratiocination. Thinking abstractly merely means thinking unconnectedly, thinking of an individual property of a thing without understanding its links with other properties, without realising the place and role of this property in reality.

‘Who thinks abstractly?’ asks Hegel; and his answer is, ‘An uneducated person, not an educated one.’ A market-woman thinks abstractly (that is, one-sidedly, in accidental and unconnected definitions) in regarding all men exclusively from her own narrow pragmatic viewpoint, seeing them only as objects of swindling; a martinet thinks abstractly in regarding a private only as someone to be beaten up; an idler in the street thinks abstractly in seeing a person being taken to execution only as a murderer and ignoring all of his other qualities, not interested in the history of his life, the causes of his crime, and so on.

Contrariwise, a ‘knower of men’ thinking concretely will not be satisfied with tagging phenomena with abstract indices- a murderer, a soldier, a buyer. Still less will the ‘knower of men’ view these general abstract tags as expressions of the *essence of an object*, phenomenon, man, event.

A concept revealing the essence of the matter is only unfolded through a system, through series of definitions expressing separate moments, aspects, properties, qualities, or relations of the individual object, all these separate aspects of the concept being linked by a logical connection, not merely concatenated in some formal complex grammatically (by means of such words as ‘and’, ‘or’, ‘if ... then’, ‘is’, etc.).

The idealism of Hegel’s conception of the abstract and the concrete consists in that he regards ability for synthesising abstract definitions as a primordial property of thinking, as a divine gift rather than the universal connection, expressed in consciousness, of the actual, objective, sensually perceived reality independent of any thinking. The concrete is in the final analysis interpreted as the product of thought.

That is also idealism, of course, but a much more ‘intelligent’ one than Kant’s subjective idealism.

Late 19th-century bourgeois philosophy, that was gradually sliding towards positivism, proved incapable of remembering even the views of Kant and Locke, let alone Spinoza or Hegel. To take a particularly clear example – Mill believed Locke’s theory of abstraction and its relation to concreteness to be an ‘abuse’ of those concepts that in his view were conclusively established by medieval scholastics.

“I have used the words concrete and abstract in the sense annexed to them by the schoolmen, who, notwithstanding the imperfections of their philosophy, were unrivalled in the construction of technical language, and whose definitions, in logic at least, have seldom, I think, been altered but to be spoiled.” [Mill, *System of Logic*]

The Locke school, in Mill's view, committed an unforgivable sin in extending the expression 'abstract name' to all 'general names', that is, to all 'concepts' 'which are the result of abstraction or generalisation'. [*ibid.*]

Summing up, Mill declares:

'By *abstract*, then, I shall always, in Logic proper, mean the opposite of *concrete*; by an abstract name, the name of an attribute; by a concrete name, the name of an object." [*ibid.*]

This 'usage' is in Mill closely linked with his subjective-idealist conception of the relation between thought and objective reality.

Mill does not like Locke's view that all concepts (except for individual names) are abstract, all of them being products of abstracting an identical property, the general form of many individual things.

In Mill's opinion, this usage deprives a whole class of words of a brief specific designation, namely the class of names of attributes. By attributes or properties Mill means general properties, qualities or relations between individual things that may and must be conceived abstractly, that is, separately from the individual things, as specific objects.

Thus, concepts like 'house' or 'fire', 'man' or 'chair' cannot be thought of in any other way than as a common property of individual things. 'House', 'fire', 'whiteness', 'roundness' always pertain to some individual thing or other as their characteristic. One cannot conceive 'fire' as something existing separately from individual fires. 'Whiteness', too, cannot be conceived as something existing separately, outside individual things and independent from them. All of these general properties exist only as general forms of individual objects, only in the individual and through the individual. Therefore, conceiving them abstractly would mean conceiving them incorrectly.

Abstract names, names of 'attributes', are quite a different matter. Abstract names (or concepts, which is one and the same thing according to Mill) express general properties, qualities and relations that not only may but even must be conceived independently from individual objects, as separate objects, although in direct contemplation they appear to be the same kind of general properties of individual things as 'whiteness', 'woodenness', 'fire', or 'gentleman'.

Among such concepts Mill includes 'whiteness', 'courage', 'equality', 'similarity', 'squareness', 'visibleness', 'value', etc. These are also general names but the objects of these names (or what in formal logic is referred to as the content of these concepts) should not be conceived as general properties of individual things. All these properties, qualities or relations are only erroneously taken to be the general properties of the (individual) things themselves, says Mill. In actual fact all these 'objects' exist not in the things but outside them, independently from them, though they are merged with them in the act of perception, appearing as general properties of individual things.

Where do such objects exist, then, if not in the individual things?

Mill's answer is: in our own spirit. These are either 'Feelings, or States of Consciousness', or 'the Minds which experience these feelings', or 'the Successions and Co-existences, the Likenesses and Unlikenesses, between feelings or states of consciousness'. [*ibid.*]

All these objects should also be conceived abstractly, that is, separately from things, precisely because they are no properties, qualities, or relations of these things. Conceiving them separately from things means conceiving them correctly.

The fundamental defect of this delimitation lies in it stipulating that some concepts should be linked in the mind with individual things (phenomena), given in contemplation, while others should be considered outside this connection, as specific objects conceived quite independently from any individual phenomena whatsoever.

For example, value in general, value as such, may according to Mill be conceived in abstraction, without analysing any of the types of its existence outside the head. This may and must be done precisely for the reason that it does not exist as a real property of objects outside the head. It only exists as an artificial method of assessment or measurement, as a general principle of man's subjective attitude to the world of things, that is, as a certain moral attitude. It

cannot therefore be considered as a property of things themselves, outside the head, outside consciousness.

According to this kind of logic, of which Mill is a classic representative, that is precisely why value should be regarded only as a concept, only as an a priori moral phenomenon independent from the objective properties of things outside the head and opposing them. As such, it exists only in self-consciousness, in abstract thinking. That is why it can be conceived ‘abstractly’, and that will be the correct mode of considering it.

We have dealt with Mill’s views in such detail only because they represent, more consistently and clearly than others, the anti-dialectical tradition in the interpretation of the abstract and the concrete as logical categories. This tradition is manifested not only as an anti-dialectical one but also as generally anti-philosophic. Mill consciously rejects the arguments developed in world philosophy during the past few centuries. For him, not only Hegel or Kant never seem to have existed – even Locke’s studies appear in the light of unwanted sophistication in dealing with things that were established absolutely rigorously and for all time to come by the medieval Schoolmen. That is why everything seems so simple to him. The concrete is that which is immediately given in individual experience as an ‘individual thing’, an individual experience, and a concrete concept is a verbal symbol that may be used as a name of an individual object. That symbol which cannot be used as a direct name of an individual thing is ‘the abstract’. One may say, ‘That is a red spot’. One cannot say, ‘That is redness’. The former is therefore concrete, the latter abstract. That is all there is to it.

All neo-positivists retain the same distinction, the only difference being that the abstract and the concrete (just as all philosophical categories) are here treated as linguistic categories, and the question of whether phrases expressing ‘abstract objects’ are permissible or impermissible is reduced to that of fruitfulness or expediency of their utilisation in building ‘language frames’. ‘The abstract’ is here consistently treated as everything that is not given in individual experience as an individual thing and cannot be defined in terms of those types of objects that are given in experience, cannot be a direct name of individual objects that are moreover interpreted in subjective-idealist manner.

This interpretation of the terms ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ is refuted by the entire heritage of the history of philosophy and by Marxist philosophy; we are now passing on to the exposition of the treatment of these questions in the latter.

The Definition of the Concrete in Marx

Marx defines the concrete as ‘the unity of diverse aspects. [Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*] This definition may appear paradoxical from the standpoint of traditional formal logic: the reduction of the sensually given diversity to unity appears at first sight to be the task of abstract knowledge of things rather than of concrete one. From the point of view of this logic, to realise unity in the sensually perceived diversity of phenomena means to reveal the abstractly general, identical elements that all of these phenomena possess. This abstract unity, recorded in consciousness by means of a general term, appears at first sight to be that very ‘unity’ which is the only thing to be treated in logic.

Indeed, if one is to interpret the transition from living contemplation and notion to the concept, from the sensual stage of cognition to the rational, only as reduction of the sensually given diversity to abstract unity, Marx’s definition will certainly seem hardly justifiable in ‘logical’ terms.

The whole point is, however, that Marx’s views are based on a conception of thinking, its goals and tasks, quite different from those on which old, non-dialectical logic built its theory. This is reflected not only in the substance of the solution of logical problems but in terminology as well. And that is inevitable: ‘Every new aspect of a science involves a revolution in the technical terms of that science’. [Marx, *Capital* 1886 Preface]

When Marx defines the concrete as unity of diverse aspects, he assumes a dialectical interpretation of unity, diversity, and of their relationship. In dialectics, unity is interpreted first and foremost as connection, as interconnection and interaction of different phenomena within a

certain system or agglomeration, and not as abstract likeness of these phenomena. Marx's definition assumes exactly this dialectical meaning of the term 'unity'.

If one unfolds somewhat Marx's aphoristically laconic formula, his definition of the concrete means literally the following: the *concrete*, *concreteness*, are first of all synonyms of the real links between phenomena, of concatenation and interaction of all aspects and moments of the object given to man in a notion. The concrete is thereby interpreted as an internally divided totality of various forms of existence of the object, a unique combination of which is characteristic of the given object only. Unity thus conceived is realised not through similarity of phenomena to each other but, on the contrary, through their difference and opposition.

This conception of unity in diversity (or concreteness) is not merely different from the one which old logic proceeded from, but is its direct opposite. The conception approaches that of the concept of integrity or wholeness. Marx uses this term in those cases when he has to characterise the object as an integral whole unified in all its diverse manifestations, as an organic system of mutually conditioning phenomena in contradiction to a metaphysical conception of it as a mechanical agglomeration of immutable constituent parts that are linked with each other only externally, more or less accidentally.

The most important aspect of Marx's definition of the concrete is that the concrete is treated first of all as an objective characteristic of a thing considered quite independently from any evolutions that may take place in the cognising subject. The object is concrete by and in itself, independent from its being conceived by thought or perceived by sense organs. Concreteness is not created in the process of reflection of the object by the subject either at the sensual stage of reflection or at the rational-logical one.

In other words, 'the concrete' is first of all the same kind of objective category as any other category of materialist dialectics, as 'the necessary' and 'the accidental', 'essence, and 'appearance'. It expresses a universal form of development of nature, society, and thinking. In the system of Marx's views, 'the concrete' is by no means a synonym for the sensually given, immediately contemplated.

Insofar as 'the concrete' is opposed to 'the abstract' the latter is treated by Marx first and foremost objectively. For Marx, it is by no means a synonym of the 'purely ideal', of a product of mental activity, a synonym of the subjectively psychological phenomenon occurring in man's brain only. Time and again Marx uses this term to characterise real phenomena and relations existing outside consciousness, irrespective of whether they are reflected in consciousness or not.

For instance, Marx speaks in *Capital* of abstract labour. Abstractness appears here as an objective characteristic of the form which human labour assumes in developed commodity production, in capitalist production. Elsewhere he stresses that the reduction of different kinds of labour to uniform simple labour devoid of any distinctions 'is an abstraction which is made every day in the social process of production'. It is 'no less real (an abstraction) than the resolution of all organic bodies into air'. [Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*]

The definition of gold as material being of abstract wealth also expresses its specific function in the organism of the capitalist formation and not in the consciousness of the theoretician or practical worker, by any means.

This use of the term 'abstract' is not a terminological whim of Marx's at all: it is linked with the very essence of his logical views, with the dialectical interpretation of the relation of forms of thinking and those of objective reality, with the view of practice (sensual activity involving objects) as a criterion of the truth of the abstractions of thought.

Still less can this usage be explained as 'a throwback to Hegelianism': it is against Hegel that Marx's proposition is directed to the effect that 'the simplest economic category, e.g., exchange value ... cannot exist except as an abstract, unilateral relation of an already existing concrete organic whole'. [*ibid.*]

'The abstract' in this kind of context, very frequent in Marx, assumes the meaning of the 'simple', undeveloped, one-sided, fragmentary, 'pure' (i.e., uncomplicated) by any deforming

influences). It goes without saying that ‘the abstract’ in this sense can be an objective characteristic of real phenomena, and not only of phenomena of consciousness.

‘It is precisely the predominance of agricultural peoples in the ancient world which caused the merchant nations – Phoenicians, Carthaginians – to develop in such purity (abstract precision)’ [*ibid.*]; it was not, of course, the result of predominance of the ‘abstractive power of thought’ of Phoenicians or the scholars writing the history of Phoenicia. ‘The abstract’ in this sense is by no means the product and result of thinking. This fact is just as little dependent on thinking as the circumstance that ‘the abstract law of multiplying exists only for plants and animals’.

According to Marx, ‘the abstract’ (just as its counterpart, ‘the concrete’) is a category of dialectics as the science of universal forms of development of nature, society and thought, and on this basis also a category of logic, for dialectics is also the *Logic* of Marxism.

This objective interpretation of the category of the abstract is spearheaded against all kinds of neo-Kantian logic and epistemology which oppose, in a crudely metaphysical way, ‘pure forms of thought’ to forms of objective reality. For these schools in logic, ‘the abstract’ is only a form of thought, whereas ‘the concrete’, a form of a sensually given image. This interpretation, in the Mill-Humean and Kantian traditions in logic (e.g., Chelpanov and Vvedensky in Russia), is alien and hostile to the very essence of dialectics as logic and theory of knowledge.

The narrow epistemological (that is, essentially psychological, in the final analysis) interpretation of the categories of the abstract and the concrete became firmly rooted in modern bourgeois philosophy. Here is a fresh example – definitions from the *Philosophical Dictionary* by Max Apel and Peter Ludz [Berlin 1958]:

‘*abstract*: divorced from a given connection and considered by itself only. Thus abstract acquires the meaning of conceptual, conceived, in opposition to given in contemplation.

‘*abstraction*: the logical process for ascending, through omission of features, from that given in contemplation to a general notion and from the given concept to a more general one. Abstraction decreases the content and extends the volume. Opposed to determination.

‘*concrete*: the immediately given in contemplation; concrete concepts denote that which is contemplated, individual objects of contemplation. Opposed to abstract.’

This one-sided definition (abstraction is, of course, mental separation, among other things, but it is by no means reducible to it) varies but insignificantly from dictionary to dictionary. It has been polished in dozens of editions and has become generally accepted among philosophers in capitalist countries. That is certainly no proof of its correctness.

A ‘concrete concept’ is reduced by these definitions to ‘designating’ the sensually contemplated individual things, to a mere sign, or symbol. In other words, ‘the concrete’ is only nominally present in thought, only in the capacity of the ‘designating name’. On the other hand, ‘the concrete’ is made into a synonym of uninterpreted, indefinite ‘sensual givenness’. Neither the concrete nor the abstract can, according to these definitions, be used as characteristics of theoretical knowledge in regard of its real objective content. They characterise only the ‘form of cognition’: ‘the concrete’, the form of sensual cognition, and ‘the abstract’, the form of thought, the form of rational cognition. In other words, they belong to different spheres of the psyche, to different objects. There is nothing abstract where there is something concrete, and vice versa. That is all there is to these definitions.

The problem of the relation of the abstract to the concrete appears in quite a different light from Marx’s point of view, the point of view of dialectics as logic and theory of knowledge.

It is only at first sight that this question might seem a merely ‘epistemological’ one, a question of the relation of a mental abstraction to the sensually perceived image. In actual fact its real content is much wider and deeper than that, and it is inevitably supplanted by quite a different problem in the course of analysis – the problem of the relation of the object to itself, that is, relationship between different elements within a certain concrete whole. That is why the problem is solved, first and foremost, within the framework of objective dialectics – the teaching of the universal forms and laws of development of nature, society and thought itself, and not on the narrow epistemological plane, as neo-Kantians and positivists do.

Insofar as Marx treats the epistemological aspect of the problem, he interprets the abstract as any one-sided, incomplete, lopsided reflection of the object in consciousness, as opposed to concrete knowledge which is well developed, all-round, comprehensive knowledge. It does not matter at all in what subjective psychological form this knowledge is 'experienced' by the subject – in sensually perceived images or in abstract verbal form. The logic (dialectics) of Marx and Lenin establishes its distinctions in regard of the objective sense and meaning of knowledge rather than in regard of the subjective form of experience. Poor, meagre, lopsided knowledge may be assimilated in the form of a sensual image. In this case, logic will have to define it as 'abstract' knowledge, despite its being embodied in a sensually given image. Contrariwise, abstract verbal form, the language of formulas, may express rich, well-developed, profound and comprehensive knowledge, that is, concrete knowledge.

'Concreteness' is neither a synonym for nor a privilege of the sensual-image form of reflection of reality in consciousness, just as 'abstractness' is not a specific characteristic of rational theoretical knowledge. Certainly we speak, as often as not, of the concreteness of a sensual image and of abstract thought.

A sensual image, an image of contemplation, may just as often be very abstract, too. Suffice it to remember a geometric figure or a work of abstract painting. And vice versa, thinking in concepts may and even must be concrete in the full and strict meaning of the word. We know that there is no abstract truth, that truth is always concrete. And that does not mean at all that only the sensually perceived image, the contemplation of an individual thing may be true.

The concrete in thinking also appears, according to Marx's definition, in the form of combination (synthesis) of numerous definitions. A logically coherent system of definitions is precisely that 'natural' form in which concrete truth is realised in thought. Each of the definitions forming part of the system naturally reflects only a part, a fragment, an element, an aspect of the concrete reality – and that is why it is abstract if taken by itself, separately from other definitions. In other words, the concrete is realised in thinking through the abstract, through its own opposite, and it is impossible without it. But that is, in general, the rule rather than an exception in dialectics. Necessity is in just the same kind of relation with chance, essence with appearance, and so on.

On the other hand, each of the numerous definitions forming part of the conceptual system of a concrete science, loses its abstract character in it, being filled with the sense and meaning of all the other definitions connected with it. Separate abstract definitions mutually complement each other, so that the abstractness of each of them, taken separately, is overcome. In short, herein lies the dialectics of the relation of the abstract to the concrete in thinking which reflects the concrete in reality. The dialectics of the abstract and the concrete in the course of theoretical processing of the material of living contemplation, in processing the results of contemplation and notions in terms of concepts is the subject-matter of study in the present work.

Of course, we cannot claim to offer an exhaustive solution to the problem of the abstract and the concrete at all the stages of the process of cognition in general, in all forms of reflection. The formation of the sensually perceived image of a thing involves its own dialectics of the abstract and the concrete, and a very complicated one, and that is even more true of the formation of the notion connected with speech, with words. Memory, which also plays an enormous role in cognition, contains in its structure a no less complex relation of the abstract to the concrete. These categories also have a bearing on artistic creativity. We are compelled to leave all of these aspects out of consideration, as subject-matter of a special study.

The path of cognition leading from living contemplation to abstract thought and from it to practice, is a very complicated path. A complex and dialectically contradictory transformation of the concrete into the abstract and vice versa takes place in each link of this path. Even sensation gives a rougher picture of reality than it actually is, even in direct perception there is an element of transition from the concrete in reality to the abstract in consciousness. The transition from living contemplation to abstract thought is by no means the same thing as the movement 'from the concrete to the abstract'. It is by no means reducible to this moment, although the latter is always present in it. It is the same thing only for those who interpret the concrete as a synonym of an immediate sensual image, and the abstract, as a synonym of the mental, the ideal, the conceptual.

On the Relation of the Notion to the Concept

Pre-Marxian logic, alien to the dialectical approach to the relation of the sensually empirical stage or form of cognition to the rational one, was unable, despite all its efforts, to provide a clear-cut solution to the problem of relation of notions to concepts.

The concept was defined as verbal designation of the general in a number of simple ideas (notions), as a name/term ([Locke](#), [Hobbes](#)), or simply as any notion of a thing in our thought ([Christian Wolff](#)), or as something opposed to contemplation, inasmuch as it is a general notion or a notion of what is common to many objects of contemplation ([Kant](#)), or as a notion of definite, unambiguous, stable, generally accepted meaning (Sigwart), or a notion about a notion ([Schopenhauer](#)). Nowadays, too, widely current is the definition of concept as simply ‘the semantic meaning of a term’, whatever the latter might mean. Neo-positivists often refuse to deal at all with the relationship between concept and notion, proceeding to purely formal definitions of the concept-specifying the concept as ‘the function of an utterance’, ‘prepositional function’, and so on. Generally speaking, this question has remained extremely confused in modern bourgeois philosophy and logic. Very typical is the view expressed in Heinrich Schmidt’s *Philosophical Dictionary*. The concept is here defined as ‘the meaningful content of words’, and in the stricter ‘logical sense’ as a meaningful content of a word that is ‘freed from momentaneous perception in such a way that it may be transferred to other similar perceptions as their designation’. [1934] The Kirchner-Michaelis’ *Dictionary of Basic Philosophical Concepts* attempts to avoid the identification of concept and notion: ‘The concept is therefore not just a closed general notion, it emerges out of notions through their comparison and extraction of that which is common to them.’ [1911]

The Russian logician Vvedensky, a follower of Kant, proceeds from the assumption that a notion differs from a concept not in the ‘psychological mode of experience’ but in the fact that in the notion things are considered ‘with regard to any features whatsoever’, while in the concept, only ‘with regard to the essential features’. On the next page, however, he discards this distinction in a characteristic argument that ‘something may be essential from one viewpoint, and quite a different thin , from another’. But the question of whether certain features are ‘essential’ or ‘inessential’ is solved somewhere outside logic as a formal discipline, somewhere, in epistemology, ethics, or some such discipline. Therefore, logic, according to Vvedensky, is quite right in artlessly considering any verbally recorded ‘general’ entity, any term regarded from its meaningful aspect, as a concept.

These argument, (highly typical of non-Marxist, anti-dialectical logic) lead in the final analysis, in a more or less roundabout way, to one and the same denouement: the term ‘concept’ is taken to mean any *verbally expressed ‘general’*, any terminologically recorded abstraction from the sensually given multiformity, any notion of what is common to many objects of direct contemplation.

In other words, all the anti-dialectical versions of the concept ultimately go back to one and the same classical source – the definition of Locke and Kant, and at times even further back, to the definition of medieval nominalism which did not distinguish between word and concept at all.

The fundamental weakness of the conception of Locke and Kant lies in that its attempts to distinguish between notion as a form of sensual empirical knowledge and concept as a form of rational knowledge are firmly based on a Robinson Crusoe model of epistemology, in which the subject of cognition is a separate human individual isolated from the concatenation of social links and opposed to ‘all the rest’. That is why the relation of consciousness to objective reality is given a very narrow interpretation here-only as the relation of the individual consciousness, many times repeated, to everything that lies outside this consciousness and does not depend on its existence and will.

But it is not only material nature that exists outside of and independently from the consciousness and will of the *individual* – so does the extremely complex and historically shaped sphere of the material and spiritual culture of *mankind*, of society. Rising to conscious life within society, the individual finds pre-existing ‘spiritual environment’, objectively implemented spiritual culture. The latter is opposed to individual consciousness as a specific

object which the individual has to assimilate taking into account its nature as something quite objective. A system of forms of social consciousness (in the, broadest possible sense, including forms of political organisation of society, law, morality, everyday life, and so on, as well as forms and norms of actions in the sphere of thought, grammatical syntactic, rifles for verbal expression of notions, aesthetic tastes, etc.) structures from the very outset the developing consciousness and will of the individual, moulding him in its own image. As a result, each separate sensual impression arising in individual consciousness is always a product of refraction of external stimuli through the extremely complex prism of the forms of social consciousness the individual has appropriated. This 'prism' is a product of social human development. Alone, face to face with nature, the individual has no such prism, and it cannot be understood from an analysis of the relations of an isolated individual to nature.

The Robinson Crusoe epistemological model attempts to comprehend the mechanism of production of conscious notions and concepts precisely in the context of such a fairy-tale situation. The social nature of any, even the most elementary, act of production of conscious notions is here ignored from the outset, and it is assumed that the individual first experiences isolated, sensual impressions, then inductively abstracts something general from them, designates it by a word, then assumes an attitude of 'reflection' towards this general, regarding his own mental actions and their products-'general ideas' (that is, general notions recorded in speech) as a specific object of study. In short, the matter is presented in the manner outlined by John Locke, the classic representative and systematiser of this view, in his *Essay Concerning Human, Understanding*.

But the social human nature, of individual consciousness, which this theory drives out of the door, gets back through the window. 'Reflection', that is, consideration of the products of mental activity and operations upon them (syllogisms, reasoning based on concepts only), reveals it once that these products contain a certain result that is fundamentally inexplicable from the limited personal experience.

Insofar as social human experience is here interpreted only as reiterated personal experience, as a mere sum of separate experiences (rather than as the history of entire human culture), all forms of consciousness that have matured in the long and contradictory development of culture, appear to be in general inexplicable from experience, given *a priori*. There is no way in which they could necessarily be deduced from individual experience, and yet they most actively determine this experience, shaping the form in which it proceeds.

This conception is ultimately embodied in Kant's doctrine of 'the unity of transcendental apperception', in connection with which Kant gives his definition of the concept as a general notion, or notion of those general elements that are inherent in many objects of contemplation. Kant's doctrine of the concept is not reduced to this simple definition, of course; but it underlies all his constructions and has integral ties with them. At first sight, this definition coincides with one-sided empirical interpretation of the concept by Locke. And that is indeed so. But narrow empiricism is inevitably complemented by its counterpart, the idea of extra-experiential, non-empirical origin of a number of most important concepts of reason, the categories. The categories of reason, constituting a most complicated product of thousands of years of development of the culture of human thought, cannot be interpreted as general notions, as notions about the general element in many objects given in individual contemplation.

The universal concepts, the categories (cause, quality, property, quantity, possibility and so on) refer to all objects of contemplation without exception, rather than to 'many'. Consequently, they must contain a guarantee of universality and necessity, a guarantee that a contradictory case will never come up in human experience in the future (a phenomenon without a cause, or a thing devoid of qualities or unamenable to quantitative measurement, etc.). Empirical inductive abstraction naturally cannot contain such a guarantee-it is always threatened by the same kind of unpleasantness that happened to the proposition 'all swans are white'.

For this reason Kant in fact adopts a fundamentally different definition for these concepts as *a priori* forms of transcendental apperception and not at all as 'general notions'. The very concept of concept is thus rent by dualism. In actual fact there are two mutually excluding definitions. On the one hand, the concept is simply identified with the general notion, and on the other, concept and notion are separated by a gap. The 'pure' ('transcendental') concept, a

category of reason, proves to be entirely whereas the ordinary concept is simply reduced to a general notion. That is the inevitable retribution for the narrow-minded empiricism, which no school of logic can escape which identifies the concept with the meaning of any term, with the sense of a word.

The materialist dialectics of Marx, Engels, and Lenin gave a fine solution to the difficulties of defining the concept and its relation to the notion expressed in speech, as it fully took into account the socio-human, socio-historical nature of all forms and categories of cognition, including the forms of the empirical stage in cognition.

Owing to speech, the individual ‘sees’ the world not only and not so much through his own eyes as through millions of eyes. Marx and Engels therefore always interpret notions as something other than sensual images of things retained in individual memory. From the standpoint of epistemology centred on the social individual, a notion is a social reality, too. The content of a notion comprehends that which is retained in *social* memory, in the forms of this social memory as represented, first of all, by speech, by language. If an individual has acquired a notion of a thing from other individuals who observed it directly, the acquired form of consciousness of it is precisely that which he would have received had he contemplated this thing with his own eyes. Having a notion means having a socially comprehended (that is, expressed in speech or capable of being expressed in speech) contemplation. Neither I nor some other individual form a concept of some thing if I, through speech, observe this thing through the eyes of another individual or this other individual contemplates it through my eyes. We engage in mutual exchange of notions. A notion is precisely that-verbally expressed contemplation.

Contemplation and notion thereby appear as categories expressing the socio-historical nature of sensuality, of the empirical form of knowledge, rather than an individual’s psychological states. The notion always contains only that which I in my individual contemplation perceive in a social manner, that is, am capable of making the property of another individual through speech, and thereby my own property as a socially contemplating individual. Being capable of expressing the sensually contemplated facts in speech means being capable of transposing the individually contemplated onto the plane of notion as social consciousness.

But this in no way coincides yet with the ability and capability of working out *concepts*, the ability for logical processing of contemplation and notion into concept. It does not yet mean an ability for proceeding from the first, sensual stage of knowledge to the stage of logical assimilation.

In referring to theoretical processing of sensual data, Marx takes these data mostly to be something different from what the individual carrying out this logical processing *directly saw* with his own eyes or *touched* with his fingers. Marx always has in mind the entire *totality* of the factual *empirical data*, the *socially implemented contemplation*. The material of logical activity available to the theoretician, his sensual data, are not only and not so much what he as an individual contemplated directly but rather everything that he knows about the object from all *other* men. And he can know all this from other men only through speech, only due to millions of facts having been already recorded in social notions.

This determines an approach to comprehending the process of cognition quite different from the one that may be established from the standpoint of nominalist interpretation of thinking and its relation to sensuality: contemplation and notion are for Marx only the first, *sensual* stage in cognition. And that is sharply different from the interpretation of the sensual stage of cognition characteristic of the followers of Locke and Helvétius. The latter two, inevitably, refer that form of consciousness that Marx calls notion (*Vorstellung*), to the rational, logical stage in reflection, owing to their abstract anthropological conception of the subject of cognition.

The difference between concept and general notion expressed in word was originally clearly established by the dialectician Hegel, and he did it in the framework of logic (something no one had done before him). The reason that he could do so was that his starting point in logic was mankind as a whole in its development rather than an isolated individual.

Hegel pointed out on numerous occasions that if the process of cognition is considered from the psychological standpoint, that is, in the form in which it goes on in the head of an isolated

individual, 'one can stick to the tale that we begin with sensations and contemplations and that intellect extracts something general or abstract from the diversity of the latter'. [Hegel, *Science of Logic*]

This phase of the development Hegel calls the transition from contemplation to notion, that is, a certain stable form of consciousness, an abstract general image that is given a name, an expression in speech, in a term.

however, thought striving for truth does not take this form of consciousness to be either its goal or result but merely a premise, material for its specific activity. Old logic, notes Hegel, constantly confuses psychological premises of a concept with the concept itself, taking any abstract general notion to be a concept once it has been expressed in a term, a word, in speech.

For old logic, any abstract general notion recorded in a word is already a concept, a form of rational cognition of things. For Hegel it is merely a prerequisite of an actual concept, that is, of such a form of consciousness which expresses the real (dialectical) nature of things.

'In the new times, *no other* concept fared worse than the concept itself, the concept by and for itself, for concept is usually taken to mean abstract definiteness and one-sidedness of conception or of intellectual thinking, with which, of course, one cannot cognitively bring into consciousness either the entirety of the truth or beauty concrete by itself.' [Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*]

Hegel further explains that the concept is interpreted in this logic extremely one-sidedly or lopsidedly, namely, it is considered only from the side which is equally inherent both in the concept and in the general notion.

In this framework, the concept is essentially equated with the simple general notion, and all those specific features of the concept owing to which it proves to be capable of expressing the concrete nature of the object are left outside the sphere of interest of old logic.

'What one usually calls concepts, and moreover definite concepts, e.g. man, house, animal, etc., are least of all concepts, they are simple definitions and abstract notions – abstractions which borrow from the concept only the element of generality and leave out the particular and the individual, thereby being abstractions precisely from the concept.' [Hegel, §164 *Encyclopedia*]

It is easy to see that this distinction is closely linked with Hegel's critique of the metaphysical approach in logic and epistemology. In no way rejecting the quite obvious fact that the concept is always something abstract in comparison with the sensually concrete image of a thing, Hegel shows at the same time the superficiality of the view reducing the concept to mere expression of the abstractly identical, abstractly general property, feature or relation inherent in a whole series of phenomena. This reduction explains absolutely nothing about its ability to reflect the nature of the object more profoundly, correctly, and completely than do contemplation and notion.

'However, if what is taken over into the concept from the concrete event must serve merely as a *marker or sign*, it may, indeed, be some merely sensual individual definition of the object.' [Hegel, *Science of Logic*]

The difference between the image of living contemplation and the concept is thus reduced to a purely quantitative one. The concept expresses or, to be more precise, designates only one of the sensual properties of the phenomenon, whereas the sensual image contains a whole series of them. As a result, the concept is considered only as something more meagre than the image of living contemplation-only as an abstract one-sided expression of this image.

The transition from the image of contemplation to the concept is thus regarded merely as destruction of the sensually given concreteness, as elimination of a great number of sensually perceived properties for the sake of one of them.

'The abstract [says Hegel in this connection] is counted of less worth than the concrete, because from the former so much of that kind of material has been omitted. To those who hold this view, the process of abstraction means that *for our subjective needs* one or another characteristic is taken out of the concrete ... and it is only the *incapacity* of understanding to

absorb such riches that forces it to rest content with meagre abstraction. [Lenin, *Conspectus of Hegel's Logic*]

The transition from concrete contemplation to abstractions of thought appears, as a result, only as departure from reality given in direct contemplation, only as manifestation of the 'incapacity', weakness of thought. Not surprisingly, Kant, starting out from this premise, comes to the conclusion that thought is incapable of attaining objective truth.

Lenin took very copious notes of this passage in Hegel, making this remark *à propos* of it:

'Essentially, Hegel is completely right as opposed to Kant. Thought proceeding from the concrete to the abstract-provided it is *correct* (NB) (and Kant, like all philosophers, speaks of correct thought) – does not get away from the truth but comes closer to it.' [*ibid.*]

In other words, the concept may be something abstract as compared to the sensually perceived concreteness, but its strength and advantages over contemplation do not lie therein. The ascent from the sensually contemplated concreteness to the abstract expression of it is merely the form in which a more meaningful process is realised—the process of attaining the truth which contemplation is incapable of grasping. In commenting on Hegel, Lenin points out that scientific (that is, correct, serious, not absurd) abstractions reflect nature not only more deeply and correctly than living contemplation or notion but also *more* fully. And 'more fully' in the language of dialectical logic means nothing else but 'more concretely'.

'Consequently [continues Hegel in the passage quoted by Lenin] abstracting thought must not be considered as a mere setting aside of the sensuous material, whose reality is said not to be lowered thereby; but it is its transcendence, and the reduction of it (as mere appearance) to the essential, which manifests itself in the Notion only.' [*ibid.*]

In the process, the concrete is by no means lost, as Kant believes, along with the empiricists; on the contrary, its real meaning and content are brought out by thinking. That is precisely why Hegel regards the transition from the sensually contemplated concreteness to the concept as a form of movement from appearance to essence, from consequence to its antecedent.

A concept, according to Hegel, expresses the essence of contemplated phenomena. And that essence is by no means reducible to the abstractly identical in different phenomena, to the identical elements observed in each of the phenomena taken in isolation. The essence of an object is almost always contained in the unity of distinct and opposed elements, in their concatenation and mutual determination. That is why Hegel says of the concept: 'As far as the nature of *concept as such* is concerned, taken by itself it is not an *abstract unity* opposed to the *distinctions of reality*, but, as a concept, it is already a unity of different definitenesses, and thereby concrete reality. So notions like "man", "blue", etc., should not be called concepts but abstract general notions, which only become concepts when it is shown that they contain distinct aspects in unity, whereby this unity determined within itself constitutes the concept'. [*Lectures on Aesthetics*]

If man's thinking merely reduces the essentially sensually concrete image of an object to an abstract one-sided definition, it produces only a general notion and not a concept. This is quite a natural process if it is interpreted as transition from contemplation to notion. But if it is taken to be what it is not, namely, transition to the concept, the most important feature of this transition is left unexplained.

Lenin stressed, on more than one occasion, Hegel's idea that transition from notion to concept should be considered in logic first of all as transition from superficial knowledge to deeper, fuller, and more correct knowledge. "The object in its existence without thought and Notion is an image or a name: it *is* what it *is* in the determinations of thought and Notion," says Hegel, and Lenin makes a marginal note.

'That is correct! *Image and thought*, the development of both, *nil aliud*.' [Lenin, *Consp. Hegel's Logic*]

In analysing Hegel's arguments about the relation of notion to thought, Lenin deemed it necessary to point out that Hegel's idealism was not in evidence in regard to this point: 'Here, in the concept of time (and not in the relation of sensuous representation to thought) is the idealism of Hegel.' [*ibid.*]

Hegel's main idea is that intellectual abstractions do not take consciousness beyond the empirical stage of cognition, that they are forms of sensual empirical consciousness rather than thought in the strict sense of the term, are notions and not concepts. Confusing the two, identifying notion with concept on the grounds that both are abstractions, is a most characteristic mark of metaphysics in logic, of the logic of metaphysical thinking.

Therefore the first task of logic as a science studying logical processing of empirical data into concepts (transition from contemplation and notion to concept) is strict objective delimitation of concept and verbally expressed notion.

This delimitation is by no means a theoretical nicety. It is of enormous significance for epistemology as well as pedagogics. Formation of abstract general notions is in itself a sufficiently complicated and contradictory process. As such, it forms the subject-matter of special investigation, although not in logic.

The task of logic as a science grows out of the real needs of the developing cognition of the phenomena of the surrounding world. The question with which a thinking man turns to logic as a science is not at all the question of how abstractions should be made in general, how one can learn to abstract the general from the sensually given facts. To do that, one need not at all ask the logicians' advice, one merely has to have a command of one's native language and the ability to concentrate one's attention on the sensually given similarities and differences.

The question with which one turns to logic and which can only be answered by logic involves a much more complicated cognitive task: how is one to work out an abstraction which would express the objective essence of facts given in contemplation and notions? The manner in which processing a mass of empirically obvious facts yields a generalisation expressing the real nature of the object under study – that is the actual problem, whose solution is identical with that of the problem of the nature of concepts as distinct from abstract general notions.

Concepts being defined as reflection of the essentially general, materialism in logic compels one to distinguish between what is essential for the subject (his desires, aspirations, goals, etc.) and that which is essential for the objective definition of the nature of the object entirely independent of the subjective aspirations.

Neo-Kantian logic consciously blurs this distinction, purporting to prove that the criterion for distinguishing between the subjectively essential and that which is essential as far as the object itself is concerned can neither be found nor given. This view is most consistently developed in pragmatist and instrumentalist conceptions. Any concept is construed as a projection of subjective desires, aspirations and impulses on the chaos of sensually given phenomena. Clearly, it is not only the boundary between the subjective and the objective that is obliterated here but also the boundary between the spontaneously formed notion and concept, between empirical and rational logical cognition.

As an illustration, let us cite a characteristic example of present-day philosophising on the subject of the abstract and the concrete—an article by Rudolf Schottlaender, a West-German theoretician, which reflects, as in a mirror, the level of bourgeois thought in the field of dialectical categories.

The Alpha and Omega of his approach is the opposition of the abstract and the concrete as categories belonging to two fundamentally different spheres. For Schottlaender, the abstract is only a mode of action of the subject of cognition. The concrete is identified with the sensually perceived image of living contemplation in its entirety, while the object outside consciousness is not distinguished at all from its sensual experience. The subject 'takes out', 'extracts', 'takes away' from the concrete certain general abstract features, apparently motivated by a purely subjective purpose, constructing a concept out of these features. Whether the features abstracted are essential or inessential is determined, according to Schottlaender, entirely by the goals of the subject of cognition, his 'practical' attitude to the thing. One cannot consider the essential *from the standpoint of the object itself*. J. Schottlaender believes, without going back to the positions of the 'scholastic quintessence', of the 'real essence'.

The abstract and the concrete are thereby metaphysically distributed between two different worlds—the world of 'the subject of cognition' and the world of 'the object of cognition'. On

these grounds Schottlaender believes it expedient to drop the problem of the relation of the abstract to the concrete *as a question of logic*, which studies the world of the subject.

And, since he is dealing with logic, it is not the concrete that he opposes to the abstract but the ‘Subtrahendum’ invented for the purpose, that is, everything that the subject making an abstraction consciously or unconsciously leaves aside, the unused remainder of the richness of the sensually perceived image of the thing. And further he believes it, expedient, in the spirit of the modern semantic tradition, also to rename the abstract ‘Extrahendum’ (that is, what is extracted and incorporated in the concept).

In as much as a complete synthesis of abstractions corresponding to the infinite fullness of the sensual image is unattainable, philosophical justification of any abstraction (the ‘Extrahendum’) may be reduced to an indication of the goal or value for the sake of which the subject of cognition has made the extraction. The sensually, intrusively grasped fullness of the thing minus the ‘Extrahendum’ is called the ‘Subtrahendum’. The latter is stored away by the subject of cognition as reserve for the occasion when ‘the essential’ will turn out to be precisely there, in the light of other objectives, values, or aspirations.

In approaching the question of the relation of concept to notion one must apparently fully take into account the fact that the notion, as a form and a stage in reflecting objective reality in man’s mind is also an abstraction, whose formation is affected by a great number of factors, and first of all the direct practical interest, man’s need and the purpose reflecting the need ideally.

The links between the concept—a theoretical abstraction expressing the objective essence of the thing—and practice is much broader, deeper, and more complicated. In the concept, the object is comprehended from the standpoint of mankind’s practice in its entire volume throughout the history of world development, rather than from the standpoint of the particular, narrow pragmatic objective and need. Only this viewpoint coincides in the long run with consideration of the object from the object’s own point of view. Only from this standpoint can one distinguish the objectively essential definitions of the thing – ‘that in which the object is what it is’; in other words, the abstraction of a concept is formed.

To define a concept does not at all mean to find out the sense imparted by men to the corresponding term. To define a concept means to define the object. From the standpoint of materialism, it is one and the same thing. The only correct definition is therefore to arrive at the essence of the matter.

One can always establish a convention or agreement on the meaning or sense of a term; the content of a concept is quite a different thing. Although the content of a concept is always directly brought out as the ‘meaning of a term’, that is by no means one and the same thing.

That is an extremely important point closely linked with the problem of concreteness of the concept as interpreted in materialist dialectics (dialectical logic).

Neo-positivists reduce the problem of defining the concept to establishing the meaning of a term in a system of terms built according to formal rules, and the question of correspondence between definitions of the concept and its object existing outside and independently from consciousness, that is, from definition, is thus eliminated in general. As a result, they arrive at the absolutely insoluble problem of the so-called abstract object. This designation refers to the meaning of such a term that cannot be applied as a name to an individual thing given in the individual’s immediate sensual experience. Let us note that the sensual image of the single object in the individual’s consciousness is here again named the concrete object, which is in complete agreement with the age-long traditions of extreme empiricism.

Insofar as the whole of actual science consists of definitions that have no immediate equivalent in the individual’s sensual experience (that is, have some ‘abstract object’ for their meaning), the question of the relation of the abstract to the concrete is transformed into the problem of the relation of a general term to an individual image in the consciousness. As a question of logic, it is also ignored, being replaced by a partly psychological, partly formal linguistic question. But on this plane it is indeed impossible to solve the problem of the

objective truth of any general concept, for the formulation of the question itself precludes any possibility of answering it. Neo-positivist 'logic' focused on the study of links and transitions between one concept and another (in actual fact, between one term and another), assuming beforehand that there is no transition from the concept to an object outside consciousness (that is, outside the definition and sensual experience), and there can be no such transition. Passing from term to term, this logic can at no point discover a bridge from a term to an object rather than to another term, a bridge to 'concreteness' in its genuine sense rather than to a thing given to an individual in his direct experience.

The only bridge leading from term to object, from the abstract to the concrete and back, a bridge that permits to establish a firm unambiguous connection between the two, is, as Marx and Engels showed already in *The German Ideology*, practical activity involving objects, the objective being of things and men. The purely theoretical act is not enough here.

'One of the most difficult tasks confronting philosophers is to descend from the world of thought to the actual world. *Language* is the immediate actuality of thought. Just as philosophers have given thought an independent existence, so they were bound to make language into an independent realm. This is the secret of philosophical language, in which thoughts in the form of words have their own content,' [*German Ideology*] wrote Marx as early as 1845, almost a hundred years before the latest positivist discoveries in the field of logic were made. As a result of this operation, 'the problem of descending from the world of thoughts to the actual world is turned into the problem of descending from language to life' [*op. cit.*], and it is perceived by philosophers of this trend as a task to be solved verbally, too, as a task in inventing special magic words which, while remaining words, would nevertheless be something more than mere words.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels demonstrated brilliantly that that task was an imaginary one, arising merely from the view that language and thought are separate spheres organised according to their own immanent rules and laws rather than forms of expression of real life, of objective being of men and things.

'We have seen that the whole problem of transition from thought to reality, hence from language to life, exists only in philosophical illusion.... This great problem ... was bound, of course, to result finally in one of these knights-errant setting out in search of a word which, as a *word*, formed the transition in question, which, as a word, ceases to be simply a word, and which, as a word, in a mysterious super-linguistic manner, points from within language to the actual object it denotes.' [*German Ideology*]

In these days too, many bourgeois philosophers attempt to solve this pseudo-problem rooted in the conception that the whole gigantic system of 'abstract concepts' is based on such a shaky and elusive foundation as the individual image in an individual's perception, as 'the only individual' that is, apart from everything else, termed the 'concrete' object. All this is but the old search for the absolute. While Hegel looked for the absolute in the concept, neo-positivists are searching for it in the sphere of words or signs combined according to absolute rules.

Marx and Engels, resolutely discarding idealism in philosophy, viewed thought and language as '*only manifestations of actual life*', [*German Ideology*] and definitions of concepts, as verbally recorded definitions of reality. But reality was here construed not as simply a sea of individual things in which separate individuals catch abstract general definitions in the net of abstraction, but rather a concreteness organised in itself, that is, an articulate system of men's relations to nature. Language and thought are precisely a direct expression (form of manifestation) of this system of men and things.

On this basis Marx and Engels solved the problem of the objective meaning of all those 'abstractions' which to this day appear in idealist philosophy (including neo-positivist philosophy) as specific 'abstract objects' independently existing in language.

Marx and Engels gave a materialist interpretation to all those mysterious abstractions which, according to idealist philosophy, exist only in consciousness, in thought and language, finding their objective factual equivalents in concrete reality. The problem of the relation of the abstract to the concrete thereby ceased to be, one of relation of a verbally expressed abstraction to an individual, sensually given thing. It emerged as the problem of internal division of concrete

reality within itself, as the problem of the relationship between the discrete elements of this reality.

The solution of the problem found by Marx and Engels is apparently very simple: definitions of concepts are nothing but definitions of different elements of the actual concreteness, that is, of the law-governed organisation of a system of relations of man to man and of man to things. Scientific study of this concrete reality must yield ‘abstract’ definitions of concepts expressing its structure, its organisation. Each abstract definition of the concept must express a discrete element that is actually (objectively) singled out in the concrete reality. The solution is very simple at first sight, yet it cuts it a stroke the Gordian knot of problems that idealist philosophy has so far been unable to unravel.

The abstract is not, from this point of view, just a synonym of the purely ideal, existing only in the consciousness, in man’s brain in the shape of sense or meaning of a word-sign. This term is also applied by Marx, with every justification, to reality outside consciousness, e.g.: ‘human labour in the abstract’, [*Capital Vol. I*] abstract – isolated-human individual, [See *Theses on Feuerbach*] or ‘Gold as the material aspect of abstract wealth’, [*Contribution to Critique of Political Economy*] and so on.

All these expressions will seem absurd and incomprehensible to logicians and philosophers for whom the abstract is a synonym of the purely ideal, mental, intellectual, while the concrete is a synonym of the individual, sensually perceived. That is solely due to the fact that their kind of logic would never be able to solve the dialectical task that the concrete reality of capitalist relations poses before thought. From the standpoint of school logic, this reality will appear wholly mystical. Here, for instance, it is not ‘the abstract’ that has the meaning of an aspect or property of ‘the concrete’, but on the contrary, the sensually concrete has the meaning of mere form of manifestation of the abstractly universal. In this inversion, the essence of which was not revealed before Marx, lies the whole difficulty of the understanding of value form.

‘This *inversion*, through which the sensually concrete emerges only as a form of the abstractly general, and not, conversely, the abstractly general as a property of the concrete, characterises the expression of value. That is what makes its comprehension difficult. If I say that Roman law and German law are both laws, that is self-obvious. If I say, on the contrary, *the* law, this abstraction, *realises itself* in Roman law and in German law, in these concrete laws, then the relationship becomes mystical.’ [*Capital*]

And that is not simply, a mystifying form of expressing facts in speech, in language, neither is it a speculative Hegelian turn of speech, but rather a completely accurate verbal expression of the actual ‘inversion’ of elements of reality connected with one another. That is an expression of nothing but the actual fact of universal dependence of the separate isolated links of social production upon each other, a fact completely independent of either men’s consciousness or their will. To man, this fact inevitably appears as the mystic power of ‘the abstract’ over ‘the concrete’, that is, the power of a universal law guiding the movements of separate (individual) things and persons over each individual person and each individual thing.

This ‘mystical’ turn of speech, so reminiscent of the Hegelian mode of expression, reflects the real dialectics of ‘things’ and relations’ within which the thing exists. The most interesting point is, however, that the mystical nature of this expression results precisely from the fact that ‘the abstract’ and ‘the concrete’ are used in the sense attributed to them by school logic.

Indeed, if ‘concrete’ is applied to the definition of a thing, and ‘abstract’, to the definition of a relation between them, regarded as a special and independent object of thought and definition, a fact like money instantly begins to appear quite mystical. For objectively, apart from the illusions that one may have on this score, ‘money, though a physical object with distinct properties, represents a social *relation* of production’ [*Contribution to Critique of Political Economy*] (italics mine – E.I.). For this reason bourgeois economists, as Marx remarks, are continually amazed ‘when the phenomenon that they have just ponderously described as a thing reappears as a social relation and, a moment later, having been defined as a social relation, teases them once more as a thing’. [*ibid.*]

Let us point out that this ‘mystique’ is not a feature specific for capitalist production only. The dialectics of the relation between an individual ‘thing’ (that is, the object of a ‘concrete

concept') and that 'relation' within which the thing is this particular thing (that is, the object of the 'abstract concept') is a universal relation. This is a manifestation of the objectively universal fact that there are in general no things in the world that would exist in isolation from the universal links-things always exist in a system of relations to one another. This system of interacting things (what Marx calls concreteness) is always something determining and therefore *logically primary* with regard to each separate sensually perceived thing. The extraordinary situation when 'relation' is taken for a 'thing', and a 'thing' for a 'relation', arises precisely due to this dialectics.

A system of interacting things, a certain law-governed system of their relations (that is, 'the concrete') always appears in contemplation as a separate sensually perceived thing, but it appears only in some fragmentary, particular manifestation, that is, abstractly. The whole difficulty of theoretical analysis is that neither the 'relation' between things should be regarded abstractly, as a specific independent object, nor conversely the 'thing' should be viewed as an isolated object existing outside a system of relations to other things, but rather each thing should be interpreted as an element or moment of a certain concrete system of interacting things, as a concrete individual manifestation of a certain system of 'relations'.

The turn of speech presenting 'the concrete' as something subordinated to 'the abstract' and even as its product (and that is the root of the entire Hegelian mystification of the problem of the universal, the particular, and the individual) expresses in actual fact the absolutely real circumstance that each individual phenomenon (thing, event, etc.) is always born and exists in its definiteness and later dies within a certain concrete whole, within a system of individual things developing in a law-governed way. The 'power' or the determining action of the law (and law is the reality of the universal in nature and society) with regard to each individual thing, the determining significance of the whole in relation to its parts, is exactly what is perceived as the power of 'the abstract' over 'the concrete'. The result is the mystifying expression.

Marx uncovered this mystification by showing the reality of 'the concrete' as a whole system of interacting things, developing and resulting from development, as a whole divided in accordance with some law, rather than as an individual isolated thing. Given this interpretation, any shade of mystification disappears.

The concrete (and not the abstract) – as reality taken as a whole in its development, in its law-governed division – is always something primary with respect to the abstract (whether this abstract should be construed as a separate relatively isolated moment of reality or its mental verbally recorded reflection). At the same time any concreteness exists only through its own discrete elements (things, relations) as their specific combination, synthesis, unity.

That is exactly why the concrete is reflected in thought only as a unity of diverse definitions, each of which records precisely one of the moments actually distinguished in its structure. Consistent mental reproduction of the concrete is therefore realised as 'ascent from the abstract to the concrete', that is, as logical combination (synthesis) of particular definitions into an aggregate overall theoretical picture of reality, as movement of thought, from the particular to the general.

The order of singling out the separate (particular) definitions and linking them up is by no means arbitrary. This sequence is generally determined, as the classics of Marxism-Leninism showed, by the historical process of the birth, formation, and growing complexity of the concrete sphere of reality which in this given case is reproduced in thought. The fundamental, primary, universal abstract definitions of the whole, with which a theoretical construction should always begin, are not formed here, by any means, through simple formal abstraction from all the 'particulars' without exception which form part of the whole.

Thus value, the primary universal category of *Capital*, is not defined through abstractions that would retain the general features equally inherent in commodity, money, capital, profit, and rent, but through the finest theoretical definitions of one 'particular', namely, commodity, all the other particulars, however, being strictly left out of account.

Analysis of commodity, this elementary economic concreteness, yields universal (and in this sense abstract) definitions pertaining to any other particular form of economic relations. The whole point is, however, that commodity is the kind of particular which simultaneously is a

universal condition of the existence of the other particulars recorded in other categories. That is a particular entity whose whole specificity lies in being the universal and the abstract, that is, undeveloped, elementary, “cellular” formation, developing through contradictions immanently inherent in it into other, more complex and well-developed formations.

The dialectics of the abstract and the concrete in the concept reflects quite precisely the objective dialectics of the development of one kind of actual (historically defined) relations between men into other kinds of relations, just as actual, mediated by things. The entire movement of thought from the abstract to the concrete is therefore at the same time absolutely strict movement of -thought from fact to fact, transition from considering one fact to considering another fact, rather than movement ‘from concept to concept’.

This specific feature of Marx’s method had to be continually stressed by the classics of Marxism in their arguments against Kantian interpretations of the logic of *Capital*. This specific feature consists in flat in applying this method ‘we are dealing with a purely logical process and its explanatory reflection in thought, the logical pursuance of its inner connection.’ [[Supplement to Capital Vol III on Law of Value](#)]

The problem of the relation of the abstract to the concrete in the concept is correctly solved only on the basis of this approach. Every concept is abstract in the sense that it records only one of the particular moments of concrete reality in its entirety. Each concept is concrete, too, for it does not record the formal general ‘features’ of heterogeneous facts but rather in a more precise manner the concrete definiteness of the fact to which it pertains, its specific feature due to which it plays this and not some other role in the aggregate whole that is reality, having this particular function and ‘meaning’ and not some other.

Every concept (if it is really a well-developed concept and not merely a verbally fixed general notion) is therefore a concrete abstraction, however contradictory that may sound from the standpoint of old logic. It is always a thing that is expressed in it (that is, a sensually, empirically stated fact), but a thing considered with regard to its property which it has specifically as an element of a given concrete system of interacting things (facts) rather than simply as an abstract thing belonging to an indeterminate sphere of reality. A thing regarded outside any concrete system of relations with other things is also an abstraction – no better than relation or property regarded as a specific object unconnected with things, the material carriers of relations and properties.

The Marxist conception of the categories of the abstract and the concrete as logical (universal) categories was further elaborated in Lenin’s numerous philosophical works and fragments as well as in his excursions into logic which he undertook in considering social, politico-economic, and political problems. Whenever he touched on these problems, Lenin unswervingly defended the views developed by Marx and Engels, emphasising the objective significance of theoretical abstractions and sharply rejecting empty formal abstractions which record in verbal form arbitrarily chosen formal affinities, ‘similar features’ of heterogeneous actually unconnected phenomena. For Lenin, ‘the abstract’ was always a synonym of verbiage divorced from life, a synonym of formal word-creation, of an empty and untrue definition to which no definite fact corresponds in reality. And on the contrary, Lenin always insisted on the concrete nature of the truth and of concepts expressing reality, on the indissoluble links between word and deed, for it is only these links that ensure actual reasonable synthesis of the abstract with the concrete, of the universal with the particular and the individual. Lenin’s views on this score are of enormous importance for logic, requiring further careful study, generalisation, and systematisation. It is easy to see that these views have nothing in common with the metaphysical division of concepts, given once and for all, into ‘abstract’ (concepts of individual things or facts) and ‘concrete’ (referring to relations and properties considered ‘in isolation from things’, as ‘specific objects’). Lenin assessed concepts of both type as equally abstract, he did not value them highly at all, always insisting that facts and things should be comprehended in their overall cohesion and concrete interaction (that is, in their ‘relations’), while any consideration of social relations should always be based on a most careful and thoughtful treatment of ‘things’, of strictly attested facts, the social relations never to be taken as ‘a specific object’ considered separately from things and facts. In other words, Lenin insisted on all

occasions on concrete thinking, for concreteness was to him, just as to Marx, a synonym of the objective meaning and truth of concepts, while abstractness, a synonym of their emptiness.

What we have said here warrants the following conclusion: both in dialectical and formal logic, it is inadmissible to divide concepts, once and for all, into two classes – abstract and concrete. This division is connected with traditions in philosophy that are far from the best, precisely those traditions against which not only Marx and Lenin fought but also Hegel, Spinoza, and generally all those thinkers who understood that concept (as a form of thought) and term (a verbal symbol) were essentially different things. There are certain grounds for dividing terms into names of separate things sensually perceived by the individual and names of their 'general' properties and relations, while in regard to concepts this division has no sense. It is not a logical division. There are no grounds for it in logic.

The Concept of Man and Some Conclusions from its Analysis

Let us now consider the concept of man in the light of the above. What is man? At first sight, the question appears to be ridiculously simple. Each of us links up quite a definite notion with this word, easily distinguishing man from any other being or object on the basis of this notion. From the standpoint of pre-Marxian logic that means that every individual of common sense possesses the concept of man. However, no other concept, it seems, has occasioned more, acrimonious debate among philosophers than this one.

According to the metaphysical (anti-dialectical) view it is not difficult to define this concept, just as any other. For this purpose one should abstract that general element that is equally inherent in every individual representative of the human race but not in any other beings.

An attempt to carry out this recommendation, however, immediately runs into a number of difficulties of fundamental philosophical significance. It turns out that before making such an abstraction, one has to decide first of all what living beings could be included in the human race and what could not. Considerations that are by no means of formal nature immediately come into play. For instance, Aristotle did not take slaves into account in his famous definition of man as a 'political being'. Slaves were included into a different 'genus', namely that of 'instruments', albeit 'speaking' ones. For Aristotle as an ideologue of his own class, only the activity of a free citizen was 'genuinely human'.

Elementary analysis of the concept of man discloses at once that it is bound by a thousand ties to the existence and struggle of classes and their worldviews and to a definite interpretation of humanism that has never been non-partisan or purely academic.

The bourgeois system, asserting itself in the struggle against feudal law, proved its advantages by insisting that it was the only structure to conform to the genuine nature of man, while feudalism was based on distorted and false preconceptions of his nature. The ideologists of contemporary imperialism endeavour to prove that socialism is incompatible with 'the demands of human nature' only to be satisfied under the 'free enterprise' system.

Let us analyse in this connection the situation depicted in a novel by Vercors, a progressive French author. In a generalised, acute, and witty form, the novel outlines the typical views of man conflicting in the modern world. The plot is as follows. A community of strange creatures is discovered in a remote part of tropical forest. According to some criteria current in modern science these are anthropoid apes, according to others, they are men. One thing is clear: it is an extraordinary previously unknown *transitional* form between the animal, biological world and the human, social world. The whole question is whether they have made the step across that hardly perceptible boundary that separates man from animal, or not.

That is seemingly a purely academic question with which only a specialist in biology or anthropology may be concerned. In these days, however, there are no purely academic questions, and neither can there be. The *tropi* (as the creatures invented by the author are called) very soon become, the centre of conflicts of diverse interests and therefore of different viewpoints. An abstract theoretical question, 'Are these men or animals?' demands a definite and quite concrete answer. The main protagonist of the novel consciously kills one of these beings. If *tropi* are men, then he is a murderer who will have to be executed. If they are animals, there is

no *corpus delicti*. The same question torments the, old clergyman. If *tropi* are men, he is obliged to save their souls, to perform the rite of baptism. But supposing these are merely animals? In that case he risks a repetition of the sacrilege of St Maël who, being purblind, baptised penguins. Another powerful interest is that of an industrial company that sees the *tropi* as ideal labour force. Trained animals that know neither trade unions nor class struggle nor needs above the physiological ones – what can be better from the point of view of a capitalist?

The company on whose territory the *tropi* are discovered tries to prove that these are animals constituting the company's private property. The debate about the nature of the *tropi* involves hundreds of men, dozens of theories and doctrines, its scope gets wider and the problem itself more and more entangled, the whole thing growing into a debate about quite different objects and values. The characters of the novel are compelled to ponder the criterion for solving the question in a rigorous and unambiguous manner. This proves to be a more difficult task than might seem at first sight.

If preference is given to a certain 'property of man', the *tropi* are included in the category of men, and if another one is preferred, they are not. Working out a series of such features does not help either, for in this case the question arises as to the number of such features, and the difficulty remains the same. By increasing the number of men's properties, including in this number those which the *tropi* do not have, one automatically leaves the *tropi* outside the human race. By paring down the number of features, leaving only those that both the previously known men and the *tropi* have, one obtains a definition which includes the *tropi* in the family of men. The thinking gets into the rut of a vicious circle: to define the nature of the *tropi*, one has to have a previous definition of man. But one cannot define man unless one has decided beforehand whether one will include the *tropi* as a species of the *homo sapiens* or not.

Besides, interpretation of each of the features immediately leads to explosive debate. What is one to understand by thinking? How is one to interpret speech? How is one to define labour? And so on and so forth. In one sense of these concepts, the *tropi* possess both thinking and speech, while in a different sense they do not. In other words, on each attribute of man the same kind of debate flares up as regards the concept of man itself. There is no visible end to the debate, it reaches the sphere of the most general philosophical concepts only to flare up with greater force and fury.

The debate becomes particularly acute when it touches on the subject of which of the modes of life activity should be regarded as 'genuinely human', what organisation of life 'conforms with man's nature', and wherein lies this 'nature'?

All attempts to establish that 'general and essential feature' that would permit to distinguish strictly between man and non-man, again and again run into an ancient difficulty. Such a feature may only be defined if a boundary between man and his nearest animal forebears is previously drawn; but how is one to draw this boundary line unless one has in one's head that very 'general feature' which has to be determined? It is not difficult to tell very cold water from very hot; but what about warm water? One stone does not make a heap, and neither do two stones. How many stones does one need to make a heap? Where is the point at which a balding man becomes bald? Does such a clear-cut boundary exist at all? Isn't it simply an arbitrary imaginary line drawn for the sake of convenience of classification only? In that case, where should it lie? It will be drawn where the powers that be will want to draw it—that is the conviction to which the hero of the novel comes. Indeed, the subjective idealist doctrines (pragmatism, instrumentalism, etc.) hand over the solution of this question to the powers that be. Their voice becomes the criterion of truth; everything is made dependent on their will and caprice. All the misfortunes of this world stem from the fact that men have not grasped yet what man is, and they have not agreed about what they would like him to be—that is the way the protagonist of the novel philosophises.

Having found from practical experience that the general and essential feature of man is not so easy to discover as might appear at first sight, the heroes of the novel are compelled to look for a solution in philosophical and sociological conceptions. But where is one to find the criterion of the truth of the latter? Here it all begins from the beginning. Vercors and his heroes are familiar with Marxist answer to this question. Yet it appears 'one-sided' to them. Vercors believes that a conception proceeding from 'the real relations of men in material production' ignores 'other forms of human solidarity', first of all 'ritual philosophy': 'there are many tribes

in the world whose human solidarity is built on hunting, wars, or fetishist rituals rather than on material production'; 'the strongest tie now binding 300 million Hindus is their ritual philosophy rather than their backward agriculture'. The heroes of the novel vacillate, at the author's will, between the Marxist and the idealist Christian definition of the general and essential criterion of the human being, daring to accept neither. They are looking for a third one, that would reconcile dialectical materialism and Christianity.

'Each man is a man first and foremost, and only then is he a follower of Plato, Christ, or Marx,' wrote Vercors in the afterward to the Russian edition of the book. 'In my view it is much more important to show the way in which points of contact may be found between Marxism and Christianity proceeding from such a criterion, than to emphasise as such regardless of their differences.' The essence of man the ideological differences, does not lie in adherence to some doctrine or other. But wherein does it lie? In the fact that 'man is first and foremost ... man'. That is the only answer that Vercors was able to oppose to the 'one-sided' view of dialectical materialism. But this kind of 'answer' takes us back to the starting point – to a simple name unendowed with any definite content. To move away from the tautology, one will have to take up the line of reasoning from the very beginning.

The position so vividly and wittily outlined by Vercors expresses very well the attitudes of those sections of Western intellectuals who struggle agonisingly with the burning issues of our times yet have not solved so far the problem for themselves – where lie the ways of redeeming the noble ideals of humanism? They see clearly that capitalism is innately hostile to these ideals. Yet they do not dare to take up communism for fear of losing in it 'independence of thinking', the sham 'privileges of the thinking part of mankind'. While this part of mankind agonises over the choice between these two real poles of the modern world, any uncomplicated theoretical question grows out of any proportion into a most intricate and completely insoluble problem, while attempts to solve it with the aid of the most sophisticated instruments of formal logic ultimately lead to a tautology: $A = A$, man is man. Nothing else can result from a search for a definition of man through establishing the abstractly identical property which each individual representative of present-day mankind possesses. Logic based on this kind of axiom is absolutely powerless to do anything here. The essence of man to be expressed in the universal definition is by no means an abstraction inherent in each individual, it is not the identical feature which each individual representative of the human race taken separately possesses. A universal definition of man cannot be obtained on this path. here one needs a different kind of logic, a logic based on the dialectical materialist conception of the relationship between the universal and the individual. This essence is impossible to discover in a series of abstract features inherent in every individual. The universal cannot be found here however hard one might look for it. The search along this path is fruitless also in the case when it is assisted by most sophisticated logic. An excellent illustration of this point is to be found in *Dialectic*, by Gustav E. Mueller, an American philosopher. Judging from the book, the author has learnt something from Hegel. He even assimilated the Hegelian propositions on the interpenetration of opposites, on the role of contradictions in the development of scientific theses, on the relation of consciousness to self-consciousness, and many other things. However, all this formal dialectical erudition runs idle, resulting in vacuity.

'Man could not know what man is, could he not *identity* man with himself; yet equally man could have no experience of man, if he could not differentiate himself from what he experiences of himself.' [1953] A series of 'identifications' and 'differentiations' which Mueller's man carries out within himself according to the rules of formal dialectical schemes bring him to constructions so unintelligible and involved that their creator cannot untangle them himself. The end result of this pseudo-dialectical logic is as follows: man is so complicated and contradictory a being that the more you study him, the less you can hope to understand him. The only 'general feature' that Mueller manages to isolate in the intricate complexity of interacting individuals ultimately proves to be the 'power of reflection' and 'love for reflection'. 'His true humanity lies in this power of reflection... And the better the self thus knows itself, the more questionable and uncertain it appears. To embrace in the questionable individual the absolute, is what Plato calls *Eros*, love. Man's true self is *Love*.' [*ibid.*]

One would be hard put to it to discern here the ‘power of reflection’. Powerlessness is much more in evidence. Man’s essence certainly has nothing to do with this. What is expressed here is merely the essence of a philosopher and his love for contemplating the way he contemplates. Reproaching Mueller himself for all this is both unkind and useless. The impotence of his thought is first of all to be blamed on the conditions that create such a one-sided and abstract psychology—the psychology of an intellectual completely divorced from the real life and struggle of the masses, the psychology of the man who contemplates only the manner in which he contemplates. If Mueller sees this contemplation of contemplation as ‘true humanity’, it is easy to appreciate his position: after all, one must have some consolation. However, real humanity, the working and fighting humanity, will hardly agree to its essence being identified with the individuality of a personalist philosopher nurturing in solitude his love for impotent contemplation and contemplation about this impotent love.

The essence of modern humanity, and thereby a universal definition of man, is of course a subject-matter worthy of the closest attention of a philosopher. A clear view of the world is the first and necessary premise for approaching this problem correctly. But one also needs a more developed logic than that which suggests that the solution lies in searching for the ‘general and essential property’ inherent in all the individual representatives of modern mankind taken separately and reducing the universal to the merely identical. Such logic cannot yield anything but empty tautologies. Besides, the abstract motto, ‘Look for the general, and thou shalt find the knowledge of the essence’, gives a free hand to arbitrariness and subjectivism in delimiting the range of facts from which the general is abstracted.

All of this is evidence of the fact that the links between logic and worldview are integral ones, just as those between the operations of generalisation and a definite party position in life and philosophy. A most sophisticated system of formal rules for generalisation will not ensure true generalisation unless it is combined with a clear and progressive worldview principle.

And another thing is no less true. A progressive worldview cannot be mechanically combined with a logic that posits its neutrality with regard to any worldview as a virtue, restricting itself to working out such abstract rules as may be employed this way and that, depending on the irrationally emotional bias for some worldview or other.

The Marxist-Leninist world-view is based on a scientifically worked out conception of facts rather than on ethical postulates. It is logical through and through. However, the logic with the aid of which this worldview has been worked out also contains within itself, in its own propositions, rather than somewhere outside, a certain worldview principle. The warmest emotional attachment to the working class and communist ideals will not redeem a theoretician if he employs the ancient purely formal logic with its claim to ‘non-partisanship’. Such a theoretician will never arrive at correct conclusions and generalisations.

In his theses on Feuerbach Marx opposed his dialectical materialist conception of the essence of man to all previous attempts to define this much talked-of essence, saying that ‘the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual’. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations’. [[Theses on Feuerbach](#)]. This expresses not only a world-view, sociological truth but also a profound logical tenet or principle, one of the most important propositions of dialectical logic. It is easy to see that this proposition assumes a conception of the categories of the abstract, the concrete, the universal, and the individual quite different from the one on which old, non-dialectical logic was based. Translated into the language of logic, this proposition means: it is useless to look for universal definitions of the essence of a genus through abstraction of the identical property possessed by each individual representative of this genus.

An expression of the essence of a genus is not to be found in a series of ‘abstractions’, hard as one might try, for it is not contained in this series.

The essence of human nature in general, and thereby the genuine human nature of each man, can only be revealed through quite a concrete study of the ‘ensemble of the social relations’, through a concrete analysis of those laws which govern the birth and development of human society as a whole and of each human individual.

Human society is a most typical case of concrete community, and the relation of a human individual to society is a characteristic instance of the relation of the individual to the universal.

The dialectical nature of this relation appears here in sharp relief, while the question of the relation of the abstract to the concrete is closely interwoven with the problem of the relation of the universal to the particular and the individual.

The Concrete and the Dialectics of the Universal and the Individual

The search for the [essence](#) of man through ideally equating men in the concept of the [genus](#) assumes a [metaphysical](#) conception of the relation of the [universal](#) to the [individual](#).

For the metaphysician only the individual is [concrete](#) – an individual sensually perceived thing, object, phenomenon, event, a separate human individual, etc. For him, the abstract is the product of mental separation whose counterpart in reality is similarity of many (or all) individual things, phenomena, men.

According to this position, the universal exists in reality only as similarity between many individual things, only as one of the aspects of a concrete individual thing, while its being separately from the individual thing, its being as such, is only realised in man's head, only as a word, as the sense and meaning of a term.

At first sight, this view of the relation between the universal and the individual appears to be the only materialist and common-sensical one. But that is only at first sight. The thing is that this position completely ignores, in the very approach to the problem, the dialectics of the universal and the individual in the things themselves, in the reality outside the head.

This can be shown most graphically by considering the way in which the [Feuerbachian](#) and Marxist-Leninist conception of the essence of man diverge. While criticising Hegel quite sharply for his idealism, for taking 'pure thought' to be the essence of man, Feuerbach proved to be incapable of opposing to Hegel a conception of dialectics contained in the relations of man to man and of man to nature, in the material production of the life of society.

That was why he remained centred on the *abstract* individual both in sociology and epistemology, despite his own insistence that he was concerned with the 'concrete', 'real', 'actual' man. This man proved to be 'concrete' only in Feuerbach's imagination. He failed to see wherein lay the actual concreteness of man. Apart from everything else, that means that the terms 'the concrete' and 'the abstract' were used by Feuerbach in a sense directly opposite to their true philosophical sense: what he calls concrete is in fact, as brilliantly proved by Marx and Engels, extremely *abstract*, and vice versa.

The term 'concrete' is applied by [Feuerbach](#) to an aggregate of sensually perceived qualities inherent in each individual and common to all individuals. His conception of man is based on these qualities. From the point of view of Marx and Engels, from the dialectical standpoint, that is a typically abstract portrayal of man.

Marx and Engels were the first to show, from the materialist viewpoint, wherein lies the genuine concreteness of human existence and what is the objective reality to which a philosopher is entitled to apply the term 'concrete' in its full meaning.

They discovered man's concrete essence in the overall process of social life and laws of its development rather than in a series of qualities inherent in each individual. The question of man's concrete nature is here formulated and solved as the problem of development of a system of social relations of man to man and of man to nature. The universal (socially concrete) system of interaction between men and things appears, with regard to a separate individual, as his own human reality that was formed outside of and independently from him.

[Nature](#) as such creates absolutely nothing 'human'. Man with all his specifically human features is from beginning to end the result and product of his own [labour](#). Even walking straight, which appears at first sight man's natural, anatomically innate trait, is in actual fact a result of educating the child within an established society: a child isolated from society à la Mowgli (and such cases are numerous) prefers to run on all fours, and it takes a lot of effort to break him of the habit.

In other words, only those features, properties, and peculiarities of the individual that are ultimately products of social labour, are specifically human. Of course, it is mother nature that

provides the anatomic and physiological prerequisites. However, the specifically human form which they ultimately assume is the product of labour, and it can only be comprehended or deduced from labour. Conversely, all those properties of man that are not a product of labour, do not belong to the features expressing man's essence (e.g., soft lobes of the ear, although they are a 'specific feature' of man and not of any other living being).

An individual awaking to human life activity, that is, a natural biological being becoming a social one, is compelled to assimilate all forms of this activity through education. None of them are inherited biologically. What is inherited is the physiological potential for assimilating them. At first they confront him as something existing outside and independently from him, as something entirely objective, as an object for assimilation and imitation. Through education, these forms of social human activity are transformed into a personal, individual, subjective possession and are even consolidated physiologically: an adult person is no longer able to walk on all fours, even if he wants to do so, and that is not at all because he would be ridiculed; raw meat makes him sick.

In other words, all those features the sum of which makes up the much talked-of essence of man, are results and products (ultimate ones, of course) of socio-human labour activity. Man does not owe them to nature as such, still less to a supernatural force, whether it be called [God](#) or by some other name (e.g., [the Idea](#)). He owes them only to himself and the labour of previous generations. This is even more true of the more complex forms of human activity, both sensual and objective (material) and spiritual, than of straight walking.

Mankind's culture accumulated throughout history appears to a modern individual as something primary, determining his individual human activity. From the scientific (materialist) point of view the individual, the human personality should therefore be regarded as a unitary embodiment of universal human culture, both material and spiritual. This culture is naturally realised in the individual in a more or less one-sided and incomplete manner. The extent to which an individual can make the riches of culture into his property does not depend on him alone; to a much greater degree it depends on society and on the mode of division of labour characteristic of society.

Actual assimilation of some area of culture or other, some form of human activity or other, means assimilating it to such an extent as to be able to develop it further in an independent, individual, and creative manner. Nothing can be assimilated through passive contemplation – that is like building castles in the air. Assimilation without active practice yields no results. That is why the form of assimilating universal human culture by the individual is determined by the form of the division of labour. Of course, there is one-sidedness and one-sidedness. The principal achievement of Marx and Engels in the solution of this problem was their careful and concrete study of the contradictions of the bourgeois division of labour.

The antagonistic [class](#) division of labour makes each individual into an extremely one-sided man, a 'partial' man. It develops some of his abilities through eliminating the possibility of developing others. Certain abilities are developed in some individuals, while others, in other individuals, and it is this *one-sidedness* of development that links individuals with one another as men, acting as the form in which universal development is realised.

The concrete fullness of human development is here due to the fullness of personal, individual development, to the fact that each individual taken separately proves to be a defective, one-sided, that is, [abstract](#), man.

If Feuerbach regarded such an *objectively abstract* individual as a 'concrete' man, that was a manifestation not only of the limitations of a bourgeois theoretician, of an ideological illusion veiling the actual state of things, but also of the logical weakness of his position. To construct a concrete conception of the essence of man, of man as such, Feuerbach made an abstraction from all the actual differences developed by history, looking for that general property that would be equally characteristic of tailor and painter, locksmith and clerk, peasant and clergyman, wage worker and entrepreneur. He endeavoured to find the essence of man, the genuine concrete nature of the human being, amongst properties common to individuals of any class and any occupation. He made an abstraction precisely from all the elements that constituted the *real*

essence of mankind, developing through opposites as a totality of mutually conditioning modes of human activity. [See [Hegel on Abstract General](#)]

According to the logic of Marx and Engels, a concrete theoretical conception of man, a concrete expression of the essence of man could only be formed in the diametrically opposite way, through considering exactly those differences and oppositions (class, professional, and individual) which Feuerbach ignores. The essence of man is real only as a well-developed and articulated system of abilities, as a complex system of the division of labour which, in accordance with its needs, moulds the individuals – mathematicians, philosophers, entrepreneurs, bankers, servants, etc.

In other words, a theoretical definition of the essence of man can only consist in revealing the necessity which gives rise to and develops all the multiform manifestations and modes of socio-human activity.

In regard of the most general characteristic of this system, of the ‘universal definition’ of human nature, one must point out that that characteristic should express the real, objectively universal foundation on which the entire wealth of human culture necessarily grows. Man, as is well-known, becomes separated from the animal world when he begins to work using implements of labour which he himself created. Production of labour implements is exactly the first and in time, logically and historically) form of human life-activity, of human existence. [See Engels’ *Part Played by Labour*]

Thus the real universal basis of everything that is human in man is production of instruments of production. It is from this basis that other diverse qualities of the human being developed, including consciousness and will, speech and thinking, erect walk and all the rest of it.

If one were to attempt a universal definition of man in general, a short definition of the concept, it would sound like this: ‘man is a being producing implements of labour’. [Franklin, see [Capital I, Ch 7](#).] That will be a characteristic example of a concrete universal definition of a concept.

This definition, from the standpoint of old logic, is inadmissibly ‘concrete’ to be universal. Such undoubted representatives of the human race as Mozart or Raphael, Pushkin or Aristotle, can hardly be included in this definition by means of simple formal abstraction, through a syllogistic figure.

On the other hand, the definition of man as ‘a being producing implements of labour’ will be assessed by old logic as a purely [particular](#) definition of man rather than a universal one, it will be recognised to be a definition of quite a specific, type, class, or occupation of men – workers of machine-building plants or shopworks and nothing but.

What is the cause of this divergence? The fact of the matter is that the logic of Marx, on the basis of which this concrete universal definition was worked out, is founded on a different conception of the correlation between the universal, the particular, and the individual (separate) from that of non-dialectical logic.

Production of implements of labour, of instruments of production is indeed a real and therefore quite *specific* form of human existence. At the same time that does not make it less real as a *universal* basis of the rest of human development, a universal genetic basis of all that is human in man.

Production of labour implements as the first universal form of human activity, as the objective basis for all other human traits without exception, as the simplest, elementary form of man’s human being – that is what is expressed in the universal concept of the essence of man in the system of Marx and Engels. But, being an objectively universal basis of man’s entire most complex social reality, production of labour implements was a thousand years ago, is now, and will be in the future quite a particular form of man’s activity actually realised in individual acts performed by individual men. Analysis of the social act of the production of labour implements should reveal the internal contradictions of this act and the nature of their development giving rise to such abilities of man as speech, will, thought, artistic feeling, and further, class division of the collective, emergence of law, politics, art, philosophy, state, etc.

In this conception, *the universal* is not metaphysically opposed to *the particular* and *the individual* as a mental abstraction to a sensually given fullness of phenomena, but is rather opposed, as a real utility of the universal, the particular, and the individual, as an objective fact, to other just as objective facts within one and the same concrete historically developed system, in this case, to man's social and historical reality.

The problem of the relation of the universal to the individual arises in this case not only and not so much as the problem of the relation of mental abstraction to the sensually given objective reality but as the problem of the relation of sensually given facts to other sensually given facts, as *the object's internal relation to the object itself*, the relation of its different aspects to one another, as the problem of internal differentiation of objective concreteness within itself. On this basis and as a consequence of it, it arises as the problem of the relation between the concepts expressing in this connection the objective articulated concreteness.

To determine whether the *abstract* universal is extracted correctly or incorrectly, one should see whether it comprehends directly, through simple formal abstraction, each particular and individual fact without exception. If it does not, then we are wrong in considering a given notion as universal.

The situation is different in the case of the relation of the *concrete* universal concept to the sensually given diversity of particular and individual facts. To find out whether a given concept has revealed a universal definition of the object or a non-universal one, one should undertake a much more complex and meaningful analysis. In this case one should ask oneself the question whether the particular phenomenon directly expressed in it is at the same time the universal genetic basis from the development of which all other, just as particular, phenomena of the given concrete system may be understood in their necessity.

Is the act of production of labour implements that kind of social reality from which all other human traits may be *deduced in their necessity*, or is it not? The answer to this question determines the logical characterisation of the concept as a universal or non-universal one. Concrete analysis of the *content* of the concept yields in this case an affirmative answer.

Analysis of the same concept from the standpoint of the abstract logic of the intellect yields a negative answer. The overwhelming majority of beings that are undoubtedly individual representatives of the human race do not directly conform to this definition. From the standpoint of old non-dialectical logic this concept is too concrete to be justified as a universal one. In the logic of Marx, however, this concept is genuinely universal exactly because it directly reflects the factual objective basis of all the other traits of man which have developed out of this basis factually, historically, the concrete universal basis of anything that is human.

In other words, the question of the universal character of a concept is transferred to another sphere, that of the study of the real *process of development*. The developmental approach becomes thereby the approach of *logic*. This approach also determines the proposition of materialist dialectics to the effect that the concept should not express the abstractly universal but rather that universal which, according to [Lenin's apt formula](#), embodies in itself the richness of the particular, the individual, the single, being the *concrete universal*.

This richness of the particular and the individual is naturally embodied not in the *concept* as such but rather in the objective reality which is reflected in the concept, that particular (and even individual) sensually given reality whose characteristics are abstracted as definitions of a universal concept.

Thus, it is not the concept of man as a being producing labour implements that contains in itself the concepts of all the other human traits but rather the actual fact of producing labour implements contains in-itself the necessity of their origin and development. It is not the commodity concept or value concept that contains in itself the entire diversity of other theoretical definitions of capitalism but rather the real commodity form of links between producers is the embryo from which all the 'riches', including the poverty of the wage workers, develop. That was why Marx was able to reveal *all* the contradictions of modern society in his analysis of simple commodity exchange as an actual, directly observable relation between men.

Nothing of this sort, naturally, is to be observed in the concept of commodity. In his polemics with bourgeois critics of *Capital*, Marx had to emphasise the fact that the first sections

of this book do not contain an analysis of the concept of commodity at all but an elementary economic concreteness called commodity relation – a real sensually contemplated fact, and not an abstraction existing in the head.

The *universality* of the category of value is therefore a characteristic not only and not so much of the concept, of mental abstraction, as, first of all, of *the objective role* played by the commodity form in the emergence of capitalism. Only as a result of this does universality prove to be also a logical characteristic of the concept expressing this reality and its role in the structure of the whole under study.

The word 'value' and the corresponding, rather definite, notion, were not created by [Petty](#) or [Smith](#) or [Ricardo](#). Anything that could be bought, sold, or exchanged, everything that *cost* something, was referred to as value by any merchant of those times. Had theoreticians of political economy attempted an elaboration of the concept through abstracting the general element possessed by all referred to as 'value' in the traditional usage, they would never construct a *concept*, of course. They would merely brought out the meaning of the word 'value', precisely the same meaning that was implied by any merchant. They would have enumerated the properties of those phenomena to which the word 'value' was applicable. The whole thing would not have gone beyond finding out the limits of the applicability of the word, the name, beyond an analysis of the sense implied in the name.

The whole point is, however, that they formulated this question in quite a different way, so that the resultant answer to it proved to be a *concept*. Marx clearly showed the real essence of such an approach. The classics of political economy, beginning with Petty, did not at all engage in making abstraction from all those individual cases that were observed on the surface of capitalist commodity circulation, and that the current usage referred to as cases of the movement of values. They raised the question, quite explicitly and directly, of the *real source* of the value properties of things, of the *substance* of value.

Their main achievement lay precisely in that they attempted to strictly define the substance of value through considering elementary commodity exchange. Owing to this, they discovered that the substance of value was contained in social labour. In working out the concept of value, they actually closely studied the exchange of one commodity for another in an attempt to understand why, on what objective basis, within what concrete substance, one thing was actually equated with another. In other words, without realising clearly the logical essence of their operations, they actually considered one specific case of the movement of values, namely the *fact of simple commodity exchange*. Analysis of this specific case yielded the concept of value.

William Petty, the first English economist, obtained the concept of value by reasoning thus: 'If a man can bring to London an ounce of Silver out of the Earth in Peru, *in the same time* that he can produce a Bushel of Corn, then one is the natural price of the other. ...' [*Theories of Surplus Value* IV]

Let us note that this argument does not contain the word 'value' at all – Petty speaks of 'natural price'. Yet what emerges here is exactly the *concept of value* as the embodiment of socially necessary quantity of labour time in a commodity.

A concept, inasmuch as it is a real concept rather than merely a general notion expressed in a term, always expresses the *concretely universal*, not the abstractly universal, that is, it expresses a reality which, while being quite a particular phenomenon among other particular phenomena, is at the same time a genuinely universal, concretely universal element, a 'cell' in all the other particular phenomena. [See [Capital, Chapter One, § 3](#)]

The classic representatives of bourgeois political economy spontaneously, by trial and error, discovered this correct path of defining value. But they did not quite realise the genuine significance of this mode of thought. The philosophy of [Locke](#), at which their thinking was consciously oriented, offered them no key to the problem of defining universal concepts. This led them to a number of paradoxes, quite instructive from the logical viewpoint, and a number of fundamental difficulties, the genuine meaning of which was only elucidated in Marx' analysis.

The cardinal difference between Marxian analysis of value as the universal basis for all the other categories of capitalist economy, and that kind of analysis which was attained in bourgeois political economy, lay precisely in the fact that Marx formed scientific definitions of ‘value in general’, ‘value as such’, on the basis of concrete consideration of direct exchange of one commodity for another involving no money. In doing so, Marx made a strict abstraction from all the other kinds of value developed on this basis (surplus-value, profit, rent, interest, and so on). Ricardo’s main error, according to Marx, lay in his inability ‘to forget profit’ in considering ‘value as such’, so that his abstraction turns out to be incomplete, insufficient, ‘formal’.

Marx includes in the definitions of ‘value in general’ only those definitions that were revealed through analysis of one kind of value, precisely that kind of value which proves to be elementary, primordial both logically and historically (that is, both in essence and in time). The product of his analysis are genuinely universal definitions of value in general, definitions that have the meaning of concretely universal definitions in regard of money and profit alike. In other words, these are the concretely universal definitions of all the other specific kinds of manifestation of value.

That is a most splendid example of a concretely universal concept. Its definitions express that real (rather than formal) general moment which constitutes the elementary, ‘generic’ essence of all the other particular categories. These genuinely universal definitions are further reproduced in money, in profit, in rent, constituting definitions common to all these categories. But, as Marx shows, one would never have been able to reveal these definitions through simple formal abstraction from the specific features of commodity, money, profit, and rent.

Universal definitions of value directly coincide in *Capital* with the theoretical expression of the specific features of simple commodity exchange, of the laws which reveal these specific features. The reason for that is that the specific feature of simple commodity form lies exactly in that it constitutes the genuinely universal foundation of the whole system, its ‘elementary cell’, the first real form of manifestation of ‘value in general’.

In considering this specific instance, Marx reveals in it, through his analysis, by ‘the power of abstraction’, the universal definitions of value. Analysis of exchange of linen for a coat, an individual instance at first sight, yields universal rather than individual definitions as its conclusion. One sees at a glance that this raising of the individual to the universal is radically different from the simple act of formal abstraction. The specific properties of the elementary commodity form distinguishing it from profit, rent, and other kinds of value are not ignored here as something inessential. On the contrary, theoretical analysis of these properties leads to the formation of a universal concept. That is the dialectical way of raising the individual to the universal.

Old non-dialectical logic would here recommend a different approach. In accordance with its principles, a definition of ‘value in general’ would have to be formed through abstraction from the specific features of all kinds of value, *including simple commodity exchange*, through identifying the common features of commodity, profit, rent, interest, etc. The specific features of the commodity form of value would have been ignored as ‘inessential’. The universal would have been taken in isolation from the particular.

Marx practises quite a different approach. Insofar as the universal exists in reality only through the particular and the individual, it can only be revealed by a thorough analysis of the particular rather than an act of abstraction from the particular. The universal is the theoretical expression of the particular and the individual, an expression of the law of their existence. The reality of the universal in nature is the law of the existence of the particular and the individual rather than mere formal affinity of phenomena in some respect, serving as a basis for including them in one class.

It is Marxian dialectics that permits to bring out the actual, real general content of the commodity form, of money, of profit, and of all the other categories. This general content cannot be revealed through an act of simple formal abstraction. It is only useful in the initial classification of phenomena. It proves inadequate where a more serious task arises—that of working out universal objective theoretical definitions, concepts; moreover, it is here applied beyond its sphere and cannot solve the task. A more profound method is needed here.

It is indicative that Hegel, who came very close to the correct dialectical conception of the problem of the concretely universal, betrayed dialectics on the most significant point, and that owing to the idealist nature of his conception.

In explaining his conception of the dialectics of the universal and the particular, Hegel comments on the well-known argument of Aristotle on geometric figures. According to Aristotle, “amongst figures, only the triangle and the other definite figures”, the rectangle, the parallelogram etc. “are really something. For the common is the figure; but this general figure, that is the common, does not exist”, it is nothing real, it is nothing, an empty thing of the mind, it is only an abstraction. “On the contrary, the triangle is the first figure, the real, general, which also appears in the rectangle, etc.” – the figure reduced to the simplest definition. On the one hand the triangle stands side by side with the rectangle, the pentagon, etc., as a particular thing, but on the other hand—and here lies the greatness of Aristotle’s intellect – it is a real figure, a really general figure.’ [Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*]

At first sight, Hegel sees the principal difference between the concrete universal concept and the empty abstraction in that it has an immediately objective meaning and expresses a certain empirically given concreteness. Hegel himself often warned, however, that the relationship between the universal, the particular, and the individual should by no means be likened to mathematical (including geometric) images and their relations. The latter, according to his explanation, are merely a certain allegory of a concept: they are too much ‘burdened with sensuality’. The genuinely universal, which he interprets as a concept fully freed from the ‘sensual matter’, ‘from the matter of sensuality’. He attacked materialists on this point, for their interpretation of the universal essentially eliminates the universal, transforming it into ‘the particular side by side with other instances of the particular [*Besonderen*]’.

The universal as such, the universal which includes the richness of the particular and the individual, exists according to Hegel only as a concept, only in the ether of pure thought, by no means in the sphere of ‘external reality’. That was, properly speaking, the reason why Hegel believed materialism to be impossible as philosophy (for philosophy is a science of the universal, and the universal is thought and nothing but thought).

For the same reason, the definition of man as a creature producing labour implements is just as unacceptable to Hegelian logic as a universal definition, as it is to the logic that preceded it. In Hegel’s view, that is also merely a particular definition of man, a particular form of the revelation of his universal ‘thinking’ nature.

An idealist conception of the universal, its interpretation only as a concept, directly leads Hegel to the same result as its metaphysical interpretation. If Hegel’s logic in its original dogmatic form were to be applied to the analysis of Marx’s *Capital*, Marx’s entire line of reasoning would appear to be incorrect. According to Hegel, definitions of value cannot be obtained in the way Marx obtained them. A Hegelian adept would say about the first sections of *Capital* that definitions of one particular form of value are there taken to be universal definitions of value, while they are not universal definitions at all. He would recommend to deduce universal definitions of value from definitions of reasonable will (the way they are deduced by Hegel in *The Philosophy of Right*).

All of this proves that Hegelian logic, despite all its advantages over the old metaphysical logic, cannot be adopted by materialism without a radical critique, without radical elimination of all traces of idealism. The category of value in Marx is fundamentally different from mere formal abstraction as well as from Hegel’s ‘pure concept’. It is obviously ‘burdened with sensuality’, appearing as theoretical expression of the particular. Value, says Marx, has a ‘sensual-supersensual character, something that, from the Hegelian viewpoint, just cannot be. Moreover, the simple (universal) form of value, as Marx emphasises, by no means was the universal form of economic relations at all times, not at the beginning. Only capitalist development turned it into such a form.

Direct commodity exchange, as a phenomenon in considering which one may obtain a universal definition of value, as a phenomenon in which value is represented in pure form, is realised before the appearance of money, surplus-value and other particular well-developed forms of value. That means, apart from other things, that the form of economic relations which

becomes genuinely general under capitalism, was realised before that as quite a particular phenomenon or even as an accidental individual phenomenon.

In reality it always happens that a phenomenon which later becomes universal originally emerges as an individual, particular, specific phenomenon, as an exception from the rule. It cannot actually emerge in an other way. Otherwise history would have a rather mysterious form.

Thus, any new improvement of labour, every new mode of man's action in production, before becoming generally accepted and recognised, first emerge as a certain deviation from previously accepted and codified norms. Having emerged as an *individual exception* from the rule in the labour of one or several men, the new form is then taken over by others, becoming in time a new *universal norm*. If the new norm did not originally appear in this exact manner, it would never become a really universal form, but would exist merely in fantasy, in wishful thinking.

In the same way, a concept expressing the really universal, directly includes in it a conception of the dialectics of the transformation of the individual and the particular into the universal, directly expressing *the individual and the particular* which in reality, outside man's head, *constitutes the universal* form of development.

In his conspectuses and notes on Hegel's logic, Lenin continually refers to one of the pivotal points of dialectics – to the conception of the universal as the concretely universal as opposed to abstractly universal distillations of the intellect. The relation of the universal to the particular and the individual is expressed in dialectics by 'a beautiful formula', as Lenin puts it:

"Not merely an abstract universal, but a universal which comprises in itself the wealth of the particular."

'Cf. *Capital*,' Lenin makes a note in the margin, and then continues:

'A beautiful formula: "Not merely an abstract universal, but a universal which comprises in itself the wealth of the particular, the individual, the single" (all the wealth of the particular and the single!)!! Très bien!' [Lenin, *Conspectus of Hegel's Logic*]

The concrete universal expressed in the concept does not, of course, comprise in itself all this wealth in the sense that it comprehends all the specific instances and is applicable to them as their general name. That is exactly the metaphysical conception which Hegel opposes, and that is what Lenin approves about his position. A concrete universal concept comprises in itself 'the wealth of the particulars' in its concrete definitions-in two senses.

First, a concrete universal concept expresses in its definitions the specific concrete content (the internal law-governed structure) of a single, quite definite form of the development of an object under study. It comprises in itself 'the whole wealth' of the definitions of this form, its structure and its specificity. Second, it does not express in its definitions some arbitrarily chosen form of development of the object as a whole but that, and only that form which constitutes the really universal basis or foundation on which 'the whole wealth' of other formations grows.

A most striking example of such a concept is the value category in *Capital*. This concept is the result of an exhaustive analysis of one 'most elementary economic concreteness' of the capitalist world – direct exchange of one commodity for another involving no money. The specificity of this form consists in that it contains, like a 'cell' or embryo, the wealth of more complex, more developed forms of capitalist relations. That is why 'in this very simple phenomenon (in this "cell" of bourgeois society) analysis reveals all the contradictions (or the germs of all the contradictions) of modern society.' [[Lenin's Conspectus of Hegel's Logic](#)] That is why the result and product of this analysis, expressed in definitions of the category of value, offers a key to a theoretical conception of the whole of the capitalist world.

The difference of this category from mere abstractions (like 'furniture', 'courage', or 'sweetness') is of fundamental nature. The latter, of course, do not contain any 'wealth of the particular and the individual' – this 'wealth' is merely externally correlated with them as with general names. The concrete definitions of such concepts do not in any way express this wealth. The concept of furniture in general records merely the general element which a table has in common with a chair, a cupboard, etc. It does not contain specific characteristics of chair, table, or cupboard. Definitions of this kind do not express a single species. On the contrary, the

category of value comprises in itself an exhaustive expression of such a *species* whose specificity lies in being simultaneously the genus.

That does not, of course, belittle the significance and cognitive role of elementary, 'intellectual' general abstractions. Their role is great: no concrete universal concept would be possible without them. They constitute the prerequisite and condition of the emergence of complex scientific concepts. A concrete universal concept is also an abstraction – in the sense that it does not record in its definitions the absolutely individual, the unique. It expresses the essence of the typical and in this sense of the general, million-fold repeated phenomenon, of an individual instance that is an expression of the universal law. In analysing the simple form of value, Marx is not interested, of course, in the individual features of a coat or linen. Nevertheless the relation of coat and linen is taken for the immediate object of analysis, and precisely for the reason that it is a typical (and in this sense general) case of simple commodity exchange, a case corresponding to the typical peculiarities of exchange without money.

'In a general analysis of this kind it is usually always assumed that the actual conditions correspond to their conception, or, what is the same, that actual conditions are represented only to the extent that they are typically of their own general case.' [*Capital* [Vol III](#)]

Of course, concrete universal concepts are for this reason similar to simple intellectual abstractions in that they always express a certain general nature of individual cases, things, phenomena, also being products of 'raising the individual to the universal'. This moment or aspect pointing to an affinity between a scientific concept and any elementary abstraction is certainly always present in the concept and is easy to discover in it. The point is, however, that this moment in no way gives a specific characterisation of the scientific concept, it does not express its specificity. That is precisely the reason why logical theories that simply equate such abstractions as value and whiteness, matter and furniture, on the grounds that both kinds equally refer to many individual phenomena rather than to a single individual one and are in this sense equally abstract and general, do not assert something absurd at all. Yet this conception, sufficient for simple abstractions, is quite inadequate for complex scientific ones. And if this is taken to be the essence of scientific concepts, this view becomes false, just as, for instance, the proposition 'value is the product of labour' is false. A concrete phenomenon is here characterised in a much too general and abstract way and therefore quite incorrectly. Of course, man is an animal, and a scientific concept is an abstraction. The inadequacy of such a definition, however, lies in its extreme abstractness.

Dialectical logic does not at all reject the truth of the proposition that a universal concept is an abstraction expressing the 'general nature', the 'mean type' of the separate cases, individual things, phenomena, events, yet it goes further and deeper, and therein lies the difference between its conceptions and those of old logic. A dialectical conception of the universal assumes the transformation of the individual into the universal and of the universal into the individual, a transformation continually going on in any actual development.

It is easy to see, however, that this position presupposes a *historical view* of things, of the *objective reality* expressed in concepts. That is why neither Locke and Helvétius nor even Hegel could give a rational solution to the problem of the relation of the abstract to the concrete. Hegel was unable to offer such a solution, because the idea of development, the historical approach were only put fully into practice in his system with regard to thought but not to the objective reality itself constituting the subject-matter of thought. Objective reality develops in Hegel's view only inasmuch as it becomes the external form of the development of thought, of spirit, inasmuch as the spirit, imbuing it, quickens it from within, making it move and even develop. Objective sensual reality does not possess its own immanent spontaneous movement. Therefore in his eyes it is not genuinely concrete, for the living dialectical interconnection and interdependence of its different aspects belongs in fact to the spirit permeating it rather than to reality itself as such. Therefore in Hegel only the concept and nothing but the concept is concrete as the ideal principle of ideal interconnection of individual phenomena. Taken in themselves, individual things and phenomena are abstract and abstract only.

However, this conception contains not only idealism but also a dialectical view of cognition, of the process of apprehension of sensual data. Hegel calls an individual thing, phenomenon or fact abstract, and this usage is well founded: if consciousness has perceived an individual things

as such, without grasping the whole *concrete chain of interconnections* within which the thing actually exists, that means it has perceived the thing in an extremely abstract way despite the fact that it has perceived it in direct concrete sensual observation, in all the fullness of its sensually tangible image.

On the contrary, when consciousness has perceived a thing in its *interconnections* with all the other, just as individual things, facts, phenomena, if it has grasped the individual through its universal interconnections, then it has for the first time perceived it concretely, even if a notion of it was formed not through direct contemplation, touching or smelling but rather through speech from other individuals and is consequently devoid of immediately sensual features.

In other words, already in Hegel abstractness and concreteness lose the meaning of immediate psychological characteristics of the form in which knowledge exists in an individual head, becoming logical (meaningful) characteristics of knowledge, of the content of consciousness.

If an individual thing is not understood through the universal concrete interconnection within which it actually emerged, exists, and develops, through the concrete system of interconnections that constitutes its genuine nature, that means that only abstract knowledge and consciousness have been obtained. If, on the other hand, an individual thing (phenomenon, fact, object, event) is understood in its objective links with other things forming an integral coherent system, that means that it has been understood, realised, cognised, conceived *concretely* in the strictest and fullest meaning of this word.

In the eyes of a materialist metaphysician, only the sensually perceived individual is concrete, while the universal is a synonym of the abstract. For a dialectical materialist things are quite different. From his viewpoint, concreteness is, first of all, precisely *the universal objective interconnection and interdependence of a mass of individual phenomena*, ‘unity in diversity’, the unity of the distinct and the mutually opposed rather than an abstract identity, the abstract dead unity. At best, the latter only indicates or hints at the possibility of the presence in things of internal links, of latent unity of phenomena, yet that is not always the case and by no means obligatory: a billiard ball and the Sirius are identical in their geometric form, but it would not do at all to look for any real interaction here, of course.

Concrete Unity as Unity of Opposites

We have thus established that thinking in concepts is directed at revealing the living real unity of things, their *concrete connection of interaction* rather than at defining their abstract unity, dead identity.

The analysis of the category of interaction shows directly, however, that mere sameness, simple identity of two individual things is by no means an expression of the principle of their mutual connection.

In general, interaction proves to be strong if an object finds in another object a complement of itself, something that it is lacking as such.

‘Sameness’ is always assumed, of course, as the premise or condition under which the link of interconnection is established. But the very essence of interconnection is not realised through sameness. Two gears are locked exactly because the tooth of the pinion is placed opposite a space between two teeth of the drive gear rather than opposite the same kind of tooth.

When two chemical particles, previously apparently identical, are ‘locked’ into a molecule, the structure of each of them undergoes a certain change. Each of the two particles actually bound in the molecule has its own complement in the other one: at each moment they exchange the electrons of their outermost shell, this mutual exchange binding them into a single whole. Each of them gravitates towards the other, because at each given moment its electron (or electrons) is within the other particle, the very same electron which it lacks for this precise reason. Where such a continually arising and continually disappearing difference does not exist, no cohesion or interaction exists either; what we have is more or less accidental external contact.

If one were to take a hypothetical case, quite impossible in reality—two phenomena absolutely identical in all their characteristics—one would be hard put to it to imagine or conceive a strong bond or cohesion or interaction between them.

It is even more important to take this point into account when we are dealing with links between two (or more) developing phenomena involved in this process. Of course, two completely identical phenomena may very well coexist side by side and even come into certain contact. This contact, however, will not yield anything new at all until it elicits in each of them internal changes which will transform them into different and mutually opposed moments within a certain coherent whole.

Patriarchal subsistence households, each of which produces within itself everything that it needs, the same things that a neighbouring household produces, do not need one another. There are no strong links between them, for there is no division of labour, an organisation of labour under which one does something that someone else does not. Where differences arise between subsistence households, the possibility for mutual exchange of labour products also arises for the first time. The bond emerging here consolidates and further develops the difference and, along with it, the mutual connection. The development of differences between once identical (and precisely for this reason indifferently coexisting) households is the development, of mutual *links* between them, it is the process of their transformation into distinct and opposed elements, of a single economic whole, integral producing organism.

In general, the development of forms of labour division is at the same time the development of forms of interaction between men in the production of material life. Where there is no division of labour, not in the elementary form even, there is no society – there is only a herd bound by biological rather than social ties. Division of labour may take antagonistic class form and it may, on the other hand, take the form of comradely collaboration. Yet it always remains *division* of labour and can never be ‘identification’ of all forms of labour: communism assumes maximal development of each individual’s capabilities both in spiritual and material production, rather than levelling of these abilities. Each individual here becomes a personality in the full and noble meaning of this concept exactly because every other individual interacting with him is also a unique creative individuality rather than a being performing the same stereotype, standardised, abstractly identical actions or operations. Such operations are in general moved outside the scope of human activity and handed over to machines. And exactly for this reason each individual here is needed by and of interest to others much more than in the world of capitalist division of labour. The social links binding personality to personality are here much more direct, comprehensive and strong than the links in commodity production.

That is why concreteness understood as an expression of living, factual, objective bond and interaction between real individual things, cannot be expressed as an abstract identity, bare equality, or pure similarity of things under consideration. Any instance of real interaction in nature, society, or consciousness, be it ever so elementary, necessarily contains identity of the distinct, a *unity of opposites*, rather than mere identity. Interaction assumes that one object realises its given specific nature only through its interrelation with another object and cannot exist outside this relation as such, as ‘this one’, as a specifically definite object.

To express the individual in thought, to *understand* the individual in its organic links with other instances of the individual and the concrete essence of their connection, one must not look for a naked abstraction, for an identical feature abstractly common to all of them taken separately.

Let us now take a more complex and at the same time more striking example. Wherein lies, for instance, the actual, living, concrete and objective bond between the capitalist and the wage workers, that ‘general element’ which each of these individual economic characters has in comparison with others? The fact that both of them are men, both of them need food, clothing, etc., both of them are capable of reasoning, talking, working? Undoubtedly they have all of these features. Moreover, all of this even constitutes the necessary *premise* of their bond as capitalist and wage worker, yet it in no wise constitutes the very essence of their relation as *capitalist and wage worker*. Their actual bond is founded on the fact that each of them has an economic trait that the other lacks, that their economic definitions are diametrically opposed. The point is that one of them possesses a feature that the other lacks, and he *possesses* it exactly

because the other does not have it. Each mutually needs the other because of the diametrical opposition of their economic definitions. And that is exactly what makes them the necessary poles of an identical relation binding them stronger than anything they might have in common ('their sameness').

One individual thing is as it is, and not the other thing, exactly because the other is diametrically opposed to it in all characteristics. That is exactly why it cannot exist as such without the other, outside its connection with its own opposite. As long as a capitalist remains a capitalist and a wage worker, a wage worker, each of them necessarily reproduces in the other a diametrically opposed economic definiteness. One of them appears as a wage worker because the other is a capitalist vis-à-vis the former, the two economic figures having diametrically opposed traits.

That means that the essence of their bond *within the given concrete relationship* is based precisely on complete absence of a definition abstractly common to both.

A capitalist cannot, within this bond, have any traits that a wage worker possesses, and vice versa. And that means that none of them possesses an economic definition that would be simultaneously inherent in the other, that would be common to both. It is precisely this community that is lacking in their concrete economic bond.

It is a well-known fact that the banal apologists castigated by Marx insisted on looking for the basis of the mutual links between capitalist and worker in the community of their economic characteristics. From Marx's viewpoint, the really concrete unity of two or more interacting individual, Particular things (phenomena, processes, men, etc.) always appears as the unity of *mutually exclusive* opposites. Between them, between aspects of this concrete interaction there is nothing abstractly identical or abstractly general and neither can there be.

In this case, the common as concretely general is exactly that very mutual bond between the elements of interaction as polar, mutually complementary, and mutually presupposing opposites. Each of the concretely interacting sides is what it is, that is, what it is in the context of a given concrete link, only through its relation to its own opposite.

The term 'common' does not coincide here in its meaning with 'identical' or 'the same'. Yet this usage, characteristic of dialectical logic, is by no means alien to the common usage and is based on a shade of meaning present in the word 'common'. Thus, in all languages an object in joint or collective possession is called 'common': e.g., one speaks of a 'common field', a 'common ancestor', and so on. The dialectical approach has always been based on this etymologic-al shade of meaning. Here 'common' has the meaning of bond which by no means coincides in its content with the identical features of different correlated objects, men, and so on. The essence of the concrete bond between men jointly possessing a field is by no means contained in those identical traits they may have in common. What is common to them here is that particular object which each of them has outside them, confronting them, that object through relation to which the relation between them is established. The essence of their mutual bond is thereby given by a more general system of conditions, a system of interaction, within which they can play most diverse roles.

What does a reader have in common with the book which he reads, what is the essence of their mutual relation? Certainly the community does not lie in that both reader and book are three-dimensional, that both of them belong to spatially defined objects, that both consist of identical atoms, molecules, chemical elements, etc. That which is common to them does not consist in the identical properties of both. Quite the contrary: the reader is the reader exactly because he is confronted, as a condition without which he is not a reader, by that which is read, the reader's concrete opposite.

One exists as such, as a given concretely defined object, exactly because and only because it is confronted by something different as *concretely different from it* – an object whose definitions are all diametrically opposed to those of the former object. Definitions of one are inverted definitions of the other. That is the only way in which concrete unity of opposites, concrete community, is expressed in a concept.

The essence of concrete links (concrete community, concrete unity) is therefore determined not by looking for the identical traits abstractly inherent in each of the elements of such a community but by other means.

Analysis is in this case directed at the concrete system of conditions within which two elements, objects, phenomena, etc., emerge which simultaneously both mutually exclude one another and mutually assume one another. To establish the opposites whose mutual relations give existence to the interaction system in question, a given, concrete community, means to solve the task. Analysis of dialectical community therefore proves to be the study of the process that creates the two elements of interaction (e.g., capitalist and wage worker or reader and book) each of which cannot exist without the other because it has a characteristic which the other does not possess, and vice versa.

In this case, in each of the two interacting objects a definition will be discovered which is inherent in it as a member of the given, uniquely specific, concrete mode of interaction. Only in this case in each of the two related objects that aspect will be discovered (and singled out through abstraction) which makes this object into an element of the given concrete whole.

Concrete identity, identity of opposites – these are the dialectical formulas: identity of the different, the concrete unity of mutually excluding and therefore mutually assuming definitions. A thing has to be conceived as an element, as an individual expression of a universal (concrete universal) substance. That is the task of cognition.

This point of view explains, for instance, the difficulties which prevented Aristotle from discovering the essence, the substance of the exchange relation, the mystery of the equality of one house and five beds. The great dialectician of antiquity here, too, tried to find an *internal unity* of the two things rather than their *abstract identity*. Nothing could be easier than to find the latter, while discovering the former is quite hard.

In considering the exchange relation between a house and a bed, Aristotle came up against a task that was insoluble at the time, though not because he could not see anything that the two had in common. A brain much less sophisticated in logic will find abstract features common to both house and bed; Aristotle had plenty of words at his disposal to express something that a house and a bed had in common. Both house and bed are equally objects of everyday life, part of man's household environment, both are sensually perceived things existing in time and space, both have weight, form, hardness, etc., ad infinitum. It should be assumed that Aristotle would not have been too much surprised if someone drew his attention to the fact that both house and bed were equally made by the hands of man (or slave), that both were products of human labour.

So Aristotle's difficulty did not at all lie in finding an abstract general property common to both house and bed or in including both in a 'common genus' but rather in revealing the real substance in which they are equated irrespective of the will of the subject, of the abstraction-making head and of the purely artificial devices man invented for purposes of practical convenience. Aristotle gives up further analysis not because he cannot find anything that a house and a bed will have in common but rather because he cannot find an entity which necessarily *requires the fact of mutual exchange*, of mutual substitution of two different objects for its realisation or manifestation. Aristotle's inability to find something in common between two so different things reveals the *dialectical* strength and profundity of his thinking rather than a weakness of his logical abilities or lack of observation. Not satisfied by the abstract general, he attempts to discover the deeper roots of the fact. He is not interested merely in the proximate genus in which both may be included, if one so desires, but in the *real genus*, of which he has a much more meaningful conception than that for which the school tradition in logic has made him responsible.

Aristotle wants to find a reality that is only implemented as a property of a bed and a house due to the exchange relation between them, something general that requires *exchange* for its manifestation. However, all those common properties that he observes in them also exist when they have no reference to exchange and consequently do not form the specific essence of exchange. Aristotle thus towers head and shoulders above those theoreticians who, two thousands years after, saw the essence and substance of the value qualities of a thing in its

utility. The utility of a thing is not at all necessarily connected with exchange, it does not obligatorily require exchange to be revealed.

In other words, Aristotle wants to find an essence which manifests itself only through exchange and is in no way manifested outside exchange though it constitutes the ‘latent nature’ of the thing. Marx showed clearly what precluded Aristotle’s comprehending the essence of the exchange relation: the *absence of the value concept*. Aristotle could not understand or reveal the real essence, the real substance of the exchange properties of things as this substance is in fact social labour. The whole point is that the *concepts of value and labour* did not exist. Let us point out at the same time that a general abstract notion of both did exist at his time. ‘Labour seems to be a very simple category. The notion of labour in this universal form, as labour in general, is also extremely old’, [*Critique of Political Economy*] and Aristotle was certainly aware of it. Including both house and bed in the abstract notion of ‘products of labour in general’ would not have been an overly complicated and still less insoluble logical task for Aristotle.

What Aristotle lacked was the *concept of value*. The word, the name that contained the simple abstraction of value did exist in his time, of course, as in his time, too, there existed merchants who regarded all things from the abstract viewpoint of buying and selling.

But the *concept of labour* did not exist in that epoch. That merely shows, once again, that in Marx’s terminology a concept is something different from an abstract general notion fixed in a term. What is it then?

The concept of labour (as distinct from and opposed to of it) assumes a realisation of the role of labour in the overall process of human life. In Aristotle’s epoch, labour was not seen a substance of all phenomena of social life, as the ‘real essence’ of all that was human, as the real source of all human qualities without exception.

The *concept of a phenomenon* exists, in general, only where this phenomenon is understood not abstractly (that is, not as a recurring phenomenon) but concretely, that is, in regard to its position and role in a definite system of interacting phenomena, in a system forming a certain coherent whole. A concept exists where the particular and the individual are realised as more than merely the individual and the particular (though recurrent) – they are realised through their mutual links, through the *universal* construed as an expression of the *principle* of these links.

Aristotle did not have such a conception of labour, for mankind had not yet worked out at that epoch any clear realisation of the role and place of labour in the system of social life. Moreover, Aristotle’s contemporaries did not believe labour to be a form of life activity that might be included in the sphere of human life proper. He did not conceive labour as the real substance of all forms and modes of human life. Not surprisingly, he failed to understand it as the substance of the exchange properties of a thing. In Marx’s terminology, that means precisely this, that he did not have a concept of labour and value but only an abstract notion of them. This abstract notion could not serve as the key to understanding the essence of commodity exchange.

The classic representatives of bourgeois economy were the first to perceive labour as the real substance of all forms of economic life including, first and foremost, such a form as commodity exchange. That means that they were the first to form a concept of that reality of which Aristotle had only an abstract notion. The reason for that is not, of course, that English economists proved to be greater logicians than the Stagirite. The reason is that the economists studied this reality within a better developed social environment.

Marx showed clearly what was involved here: the object of study itself, in this case human society, matured to the degree that it was necessary and possible to study it in terms of concepts expressing the concrete substance of all its manifestations.

Labour as the universal substance, as an ‘active form’ appeared here, not only in consciousness but also in reality, as that ‘proximate real genus’ which Aristotle failed to see. The reduction of all phenomena to ‘labour in general’, to labour devoid of all qualitative differences, for the first time took place here in the reality of economic relations itself rather than in the abstract-making heads of theoreticians. Value became that goal for the sake of which each thing was realised in labour; it became an ‘active form’, a concrete universal law governing the destinies of each separate thing and each separate individual.

The point is that reduction to labour devoid of all differences appears here as an abstraction, but as a *real* abstraction, 'which is made every day in the social process of production'.

[*Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*] As Marx puts it, this reduction is no more and no less of an abstraction than resolution of organic bodies into air. 'Labour, thus measured by time, does not seem, indeed, to be the labour of different persons, but on the contrary the different working individuals seem to be mere organs of this labour. [*ibid.*]

Here labour in general, labour as such appears as a concrete universal substance, and a single individual and the single product of his labour, as *manifestations of this universal essence*.

The concept of labour expresses something greater than merely the identical elements that can be abstracted from the labour activities of individual persons. It is a real universal law which dominates the individual and the particular, determines their destinies, controls them, makes them into its organs, forcing them to perform the given functions and not some others.

The particular and individual itself is formed in accordance with the requirements contained in this real universal, and the impression is that the individual in its particularity appears as the individual embodiment of the really universal. Distinctions between individuals themselves prove to be a form of manifestation of the universal rather than something standing side by side with the universal and having no relation to it.

A concept is a theoretical expression of this universal. Through a concept, every particular and individual element is apprehended precisely in those aspects which belong to the given whole, is an expression of the given concrete substance and is comprehended as an emerging and disappearing element of the movement of the concrete specific system of interaction. The substance itself, the concrete system of interacting phenomena is understood as a system that was historically formed.

A concept (as distinct from a general notion expressed in a word) does not merely equate one thing (object, phenomenon, event, fact, etc.) to another in the proximate genus, extinguishing in it all its specific differences, abstracting from them. Something quite different takes place in the concept: the individual object is reflected in its particular features which make it a necessary element of some whole, an individual (one-sided) expression of a concrete whole. Each separate element of any dialectically divided whole expresses, one-sidedly, the universal nature of this whole precisely in its difference from other elements rather than through abstract affinity to them.

The concept (in its strict and precise sense) is not therefore a monopoly of scientific theoretical thought. Every man has a concept, rather than a general notion expressed in a term, about such things as table or chair, knife or matches. Everybody understands quite well both the role of these things in our lives and the specific features owing to which they play a given role rather than some other one and occupy a given position, rather than some other one, in the system of conditions of social life in which they were made, in which they emerged. In this case the concept is present in the fullness of its definition, and every man consciously handles things in accordance with their concept, proving thereby that he has this concept.

Things like the atom or art are quite a different matter. Not every artist has a well-developed concept of art, by any means, although he may create magnificent works of art. The present author is not ashamed to admit that he has a rather vague notion of the atom, as compared to a physicist. But it is not every physicist that has a concept of the concept. A physicist who shuns philosophy is not likely to acquire it.

To avoid misunderstandings, we shall have to make the following qualification. In the present work thought is taken to mean first of all scientific theoretical thought, that is, thought operating in scientific theoretical study of the world. This restriction on the scope of the work does not at all mean that the so-called everyday thinking is not worthy of logic as science or that it develops according to different laws. The whole point is that scientific theoretical thought is the best developed form of thought. Its analysis therefore permits to establish, with greater facility, the laws which operate in thought in general. On the other hand, thought as it is practiced everyday does not so easily lend itself to the discovery of these universal laws and forms of thought: they are always hidden from view by a mass of complications, of various factors and circumstances. The process of thinking is here often interrupted by interferences due

to pure association or purely individual emotional motives; very often a number of links in the chain of reasoning is simply omitted, the gap being filled with an argument based on purely individual experiences crossing one's mind; no less frequently man orients himself in a situation, in his relation to another man or event with the aid of well-developed aesthetic taste and perception, while reasoning in the strict sense plays an accessory or auxiliary role, etc., etc. For all these reasons everyday thinking is a very inconvenient object of logical analysis, a study aimed at establishing universal laws of thought in general. These laws operate here permanently, but it is much more difficult to study them in isolation from the effect of complicating circumstances than in the analysis of the scientific theoretical process. In the latter, the universal forms and laws of thought generally appear in much 'purer' aspect; here as everywhere the more developed form enables us to understand the less developed one in its genuine essence, the more so that the possibilities and prospects of development towards a higher and more advanced form can be taken into account.

Scientific theoretical thought is exactly in this kind of relation to everyday thinking: anatomy of man offers a key to the anatomy of ape, not vice versa, and 'rudiments of more advanced forms' may only be correctly understood when these more advanced forms are known by themselves. Proceeding from this general methodological assumption, we consider the laws and forms of thought in general mostly in regard to the way they appear in scientific theoretical thought. We thereby obtain the key to comprehending all other forms and applications of thought that are in a certain sense more complicated than scientific thought, than application of the ability to think to the solution of scientific theoretical, problems, of clearly and strictly delineated problems. It stands to reason that the universal laws of thought are the same both in the scientific and so-called everyday thinking. But they are easier to discern in scientific thought for the same reason for which the universal laws of the development of the capitalist formation could be easier established, in mid-19th century, by the analysis of English capitalism rather than Russian or Italian.