

## The Abstract as an Expression of the Concrete

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We have thus established that knowledge reflecting an individual fact, though it may be a frequently recurring one, but failing to grasp its internal structure and internally necessary links with other such facts, is extremely abstract knowledge even if it is direct and sensually perceived. That is exactly why 'the general law of the change of form of motion is much more concrete than any single "concrete" example of it' [Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, Notes and Fragments], and even the most graphic examples cannot make a meagre thought poor in definitions into a concrete one.

Graphic examples illustrating a meagre abstraction can only camouflage its abstractness, creating merely an appearance or illusion of concrete consideration. Regrettably this procedure is often resorted to by persons who restrict theoretical consideration to amassing examples. The interpretation of concreteness as sensual tangibility of knowledge is naturally more convenient for them than Marx's definition, for the latter requires further analysis of the facts.

Actually this position has nothing in common with that of Marx. To be more precise, there is something 'in common', of course – the words 'abstract' and 'concrete'. Yet these identical words cover up completely opposed concepts of the abstract and the concrete, an opposition of a genuine and imaginary comprehension of the role and place of both in thinking, in processing contemplation and notion.

Wherein lies, according to Marx, the really abstract consideration of the object? Abstractness as such is, in his view, one-sidedness of cognition, the kind of knowledge of a thing which reflects only that aspect of it which is similar or identical in many other things of the same kind.

An abstraction expressing the concrete specific nature of a thing is quite a different matter. In its logical characteristics, such an abstraction is something diametrically opposed to a simple abstraction, to the abstract as such.

What does it mean, to make a genuine generalisation, to create an objective concrete abstraction of a phenomenon?

It means considering a quite particular recurring fact with respect to its own immanent content, it means considering it 'in itself', as the familiar phrase has it, ignoring everything that this fact owes to the entire totality of the external influences of the broader sphere of reality in which it exists.

That is the path Marx follows in *Capital* in studying the phenomena of simple commodity exchange. He obtains the real objective characteristics of value 'abstractly considered, that is, apart from circumstances not

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immediately flowing from the laws of the simple circulation of commodities ...' [[Capital, Volume I, Chapter 5](#)].

Of paramount importance here is the fact that Marx from the very outset has in view **reproduction of the concrete in thought** as the overall objective in the light of which each separate logical procedure, each separate act of forming abstraction is measured. Each particular phenomenon is regarded in *Capital* directly with respect to its place and role in the whole, in the concrete system within which and through which it acquires its specific definiteness. Each concrete abstraction registers this definiteness, which is not characteristic of each separate phenomenon if it exists outside the given concrete system and is acquired by it as soon as it forms part of the system. In actual fact Marx considers the universal interconnection of the whole, that is, of the entire totality of the interacting particular phenomena, through abstract analysis of a particular phenomenon, consciously ignoring everything that the given phenomenon owes to other phenomena interacting with it.

At first sight, this appears to be paradoxical: the universal connectedness of phenomena is established though its opposite – a rigorous abstraction from everything that one phenomenon possesses due to its universal interconnections with others, from everything that does not flow from the immanent laws of the given particular phenomenon.

The point is, however, that the very right to consider the given particular phenomenon **abstractly** presupposes comprehending its specific role and place in the whole, within the universal interconnection, within an ensemble of mutually conditioning particular phenomena; exactly the fact that simple commodity exchange, commodity and form of commodity are considered abstractly is the logical expression of the quite specific role played by commodity in the given and no other whole.

The fact that commodity is considered abstractly, independently from all other phenomena of capitalist production, expresses logically (theoretically) its concrete historically unique form of dependence on the system of production relations as a whole.

The point is that the commodity-form of connection proves to be the universal, elementary form of interconnections between men only within the developed system of capitalist production and in no other system of production relations. In no other concrete historical system of production relations, commodity and exchange of commodities have played, are playing or can play such a role.

This specific role and significance of the simple commodity form within developed capitalism is also theoretically expressed in the circumstance that the purely abstract consideration of commodity and its immanent laws reveals at the same time the **universal** theoretical definition of **the system as a whole**, an expression of its concrete universal regularity. Had any system of social production relations other than the capitalist one (socialism or feudalism, the primitive communal system or the slave-owning formation) been theoretically studied as the subject-matter, nothing would have been more erroneous, in Marxian logic, than to

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consider the commodity form abstractly, as it is considered in the economic theory of capitalism.

Abstract consideration of the commodity form would be useless for a theoretical understanding of the universal connection of a system if this system had developed from some other basis. In that case, in considering commodity in the abstract, thought will not make a single step forward in the concrete consideration of the economic system under study, will not abstract a single concrete theoretical definition of the object.

While the theoretician has not merely a right but even an obligation to consider the commodity form in abstraction within the capitalist system, he has no logical right to consider just as abstractly any other form of economic connection in the same capitalist organism, e.g., profit or rent.

Such an attempt will not result in working out a concrete theoretical understanding of the role and place of profit within the overall interconnection. This is in general impossible to do unless surplus-value, money and commodity have been first analysed. If we single out the phenomenon of profit at the outset, without previously analysing commodity, money, surplus-value, etc., and begin to consider it in the abstract, that is, leaving aside all the circumstances that do not flow from its immanent laws, we shall understand nothing in its motion. At best we shall obtain a description of the phenomena of profit motion, an abstract notion of them rather than a concrete theoretical concept.

Thus the right to abstract consideration of a phenomenon is determined by the concrete role of this phenomenon in the whole under study, in a concrete system of interacting phenomena. If the starting point of the development of a theory is taken correctly, its abstract consideration happens *to coincide directly* with a concrete consideration of the system as a whole. If abstract analysis deals with some phenomenon other than that which objectively constitutes the universal, simplest, elementary form of the being of the object as a whole, its real 'cell', then abstract consideration remains abstract in the bad sense of the word and does not coincide with the path of concrete cognition.

Taking the phenomena of profit, one may form an abstract generalised notion of them. But one cannot obtain a concrete concept of profit on this path, for a concrete conception of the place and role of profit in the motion of the system of capitalist relations assumes an understanding of their real proximate substance, surplus-value, that is, of a different economic phenomenon, and the latter in its turn presupposes cognition of the immanent laws of motion of the commodity-money sphere, an understanding of value as such, irrespective of profit or surplus-value. In other words, abstract consideration of profit is itself possible only when phenomena independent from it are previously analysed. Profit may be understood through surplus-value only, through 'something different', whereas surplus-value may and must be understood 'by itself', and in analysing it one should strictly leave aside all circumstances that do not directly follow from its immanent laws; first and foremost, one must leave alone profit. One cannot do anything of the kind in analysing profit, however, one cannot leave alone circumstances following from the

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immanent laws of a different phenomenon, one cannot consider profit abstractly.

This, abstract consideration of a phenomenon comprises in itself a concrete approach to this phenomenon and directly expresses its role in the given concrete historical system of phenomena as a whole.

An abstract consideration of the subject, leaving aside all circumstances that do not follow directly from the immanent laws of the given phenomenon, concentrates on the immanent laws, on the analysis of the phenomenon 'in and for itself', to use a Hegelian phrase. Analysis of the laws of motion of the commodity-money sphere in Marx's *Capital* is a model of such study. The phenomenon is here considered 'by itself', in strict abstraction from all the influences of other, more complicated and developed phenomena connected, first of all, with the production of surplus-value. That also means that the phenomenon is considered abstractly.

This conception and application of abstract consideration is not metaphysically opposed to concrete consideration but rather a real coincidence of the abstract and the concrete, ***their dialectical unity***. Concrete consideration appears as one where the circumstances that do not follow from the immanent laws of the given phenomenon are taken into account rather than left aside. Concrete understanding of the phenomena of the commodity-money sphere coincides with taking into account all those influences exerted upon it by all the developed and increasingly complicated forms of economic relations within capitalism.

In other words, a concrete conception of commodity that was originally considered only in the abstract, coincides with the theoretical understanding of the entire totality of the interacting forms of economic life, of the entire economic structure of capitalism. This conception is attained only in the overall system of the science, in the theory as a whole.

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## The Dialectical & the Eclectic-Empirical Conception of Comprehensive Consideration

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If we insist that the demand for comprehensive consideration of all facts, of all the elements of interaction alone can ensure genuinely concrete knowledge, that is only true on condition that the requirement of 'all round consideration' itself is interpreted dialectically. This point is important, because this requirement is most frequently and willingly exploited in the speculations within one of the anti-scientific forms of thought – creeping empiricism posing as theoretical thought.

Lenin, a genius at applying revolutionary dialectics, many times warned, following Marx, against confusing the dialectical conception of concreteness with its eclectic parody, the more so that this confusion often acquired direct political meaning.

'In falsifying Marxism in opportunist fashion, the substitution of eclecticism for dialectics is the easiest way of deceiving the people. It gives an illusory satisfaction; it seems to take into account all sides of the process, all trends of development, all the conflicting influences, and so forth, whereas in reality it provides no integral and revolutionary conception of the process of social development at all.' [Lenin, [State & Revolution](#)]

These words clearly refer – not only to social development but to any field of knowledge or activity, thereby containing a universal logical requirement.

One of the most widely used arguments of the enemies of scientific communism fighting against the theory of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, is accusation of this theory and the political line following from it, of 'stubborn one-sidedness', 'abstractedness', 'lack of flexibility', etc.

A characteristic example of eclectic falsification of dialectics is Bukharin's opportunist position in the discussion on the trade unions at the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). Assuming the posture of an arbiter in the controversy between the Party and the [Trotsky](#) group, [Bukharin](#) made an attempt at a philosophical substantiation of his position. In his arguments against Bukharin's position, Lenin showed brilliantly the deep essence of the dialectical interpretation of the concreteness of the truth. This episode is very instructive for logic as a science.

Let us briefly recall the circumstances of this philosophical controversy. The debate concerned the principles of Party policy on trade unions. The Party's position on this point, recorded in a number of documents, was as

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follows: Soviet trade unions are a 'school of communism'. This short formula assumed that trade unions by their place and role in the system of the proletarian dictatorship, are a mass organisation whose goal is the education and enlightenment of the masses in the spirit of communism, and preparation of the masses for conscious participation in the management of the national economy. This conception was opposed by Trotsky, who formulated his own platform, regarding trade unions, first and foremost, as an 'administrative technical apparatus for production control'. That was a conflict of two clear-cut positions, two political lines – the Leninist policy, of the Party and the leftist policy of Trotskyism, the notorious policy of 'tightening the nuts'.

In this situation Bukharin made an excursion into the field of philosophy trying to find in it a substantiation of his political position, a position that allegedly reconciled the opposing extremes.

The formula of the Leninist Party defined trade unions as 'the school of communism', Trotsky's formula, as 'administrative technical apparatus of control', while Bukharin reasoned thus:

'I see no logical grounds for proof that either proposition is wrong; both, and a combination of both, are right.'

Lenin sharply condemned this 'logical' argument: 'When Comrade Bukharin speaks of "logical" grounds, his whole reasoning shows that he takes – unconsciously, perhaps – the standpoint of formal or scholastic logic, and not of dialectical or Marxist logic.' [Lenin, January 25 1921]

Taking up the elementary example used by Bukharin during the polemics, Lenin gave a brilliant demonstration of the difference between the dialectical interpretation of 'comprehensive consideration' and its eclectic variant.

A 'logical argument' of the 'on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand' type, an argument more or less accidentally isolating various aspects of the objects and placing them in more or less accidental connection, was rightly ridiculed by Lenin as argument in the spirit of scholastic formal logic.

'A tumbler is assuredly both a glass cylinder and a drinking vessel. But there are more than these two properties, qualities or facets to it; there are an infinite number of them, an infinite number of "mediacies" and inter-relationships with the rest of the world. A tumbler is a heavy object which can be used as a missile; it can serve as a paperweight, a receptacle for a captive butterfly, or a valuable object with an artistic engraving or design, and this has nothing at all to do with whether or not it can be used for drinking, is made of glass, is cylindrical or not quite, and so on and so forth.'

Reasoning gliding from one abstract one-sided definition of the object to another, just as abstract and one-sided, is endless and does not lead to anything definite. If the Party reasoned about trade unions according to this principle, there could be no hope for any principled, scientifically

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worked-out political line. It would have been tantamount to a complete rejection of a theoretical attitude to things in general.

The position of the Party, clearly expressed by Lenin, in no way rejects the fact that under different social conditions and at different stages in the development of society, trade unions can play different roles and be used for different purposes, and that the forms of their Organisation and methods of work may vary accordingly.

But a concrete formulation of the problem proceeding from a realisation of the role which trade unions play or may play objectively, irrespective of someone's desires or aspirations, in the system of the organs of proletarian dictatorship during the transition from capitalism to socialism, leads to the conclusion that trade unions are not one thing, on the one hand, and another thing, on the other, but, ***looked at from all sides, are a school of communism and a school of communism only***, a school of unity, a school of solidarity, a school of the defence of the proletariat's interests by the proletariat itself, a school of management and administration.

Lenin stresses this point particularly, pointing out that in the polemics against the erroneous platform propounded by Trotsky, trade unions have to be regarded as a school and in no other way. For that is their only objective role, their goal prompted by their position in the system of proletarian dictatorship.

If anyone should use a tumbler not the way it ought to be used – say, as a missile rather than a drinking vessel, there is no great harm in that. But when such an 'object' as trade unions is involved, the whole thing may end in a disaster. That was why the RCP(B) reacted so strongly to Trotsky's platform according to which trade unions are an 'administrative technical apparatus for production control', and to Bukharin's attempt to justify this interpretation as a 'one-sided' one.

Lenin stands by the view that this platform cannot be accepted either as an exhaustive definition or as an abstract one-sided definition of the essence of trade unions.

The concrete historical role, purpose, and place of trade unions in the system of organs of proletarian dictatorship are only expressed in the Party position: Soviet trade unions, any way you look at them, are a ***school***. All other definitions are derivative from this basic, principal, and determining one. This definition expresses the specific nature of trade unions, the reason why they can play their role as an organ of proletarian dictatorship side by side with the Party and state and in close cooperation with them.

That was why Lenin, continuing the ironic analogy with the tumbler, defines Trotsky's position as that of a man who wants to use the tumbler for its real purpose, as an instrument for drinking, but wishes that it should have no bottom. While regarding Soviet trade unions as an instrument of proletarian dictatorship, Trotsky rejects precisely that which enables them to play their specific and necessary role distinct from the role of the state. 'His (Trotsky's) platform says that a tumbler is a drinking vessel, but this particular tumbler happens to have no bottom.'

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As for Bukharin's position, Lenin describes it as dead and meaningless eclecticism, that is, senseless enumeration of one abstract definition of the object after another, an enumeration that does not stop at anything concrete and does not lead anywhere, merely disconcerting the Party.

To both these platforms Lenin opposes a clear, principled, and concrete position of the Party: Soviet trade unions are an instrument of communist education of the broad working masses, a school of communist unity, solidarity, defence of the interests of the proletariat from the bureaucratic elements in the state organs, a school of management and administration, it is an instrument for transforming the working people into conscious builders of communism.

This concrete definition expresses an objective role of trade unions in the system of organisations implementing the socialist transformation of society, that is, their essence and nature independent of someone's caprice or subjective goals.

Eclecticism, which has always served as the methodology of opportunism and revisionism, prides itself on its love for all-sided approaches. An eclectic will willingly hold forth on the 'harm of any one-sidedness – and on the need to take into account a thousand and one things. In his hands, however, the requirement for all-sided consideration becomes an instrument of fighting dialectics and the principle of concreteness in its real meaning.

The way to a concrete theoretical conception is here replaced by endless wandering from one abstraction to another in no way different from the first. Instead of ascending from the abstract to the concrete, an eclectic will move from the abstract to something just as abstract. And his occupation is just as easy as it is fruitless.

It is easy because even the smallest and most insignificant object indeed possesses an actually infinite number of aspects and links with the surrounding world. Each drop of water reflects the entire richness of the universe. Even apparently unconnected phenomena worlds apart will, through a billion intermediate links, prove to have something in common; even Napoleon's cold in the head was a factor in the Battle of Borodino. If one interprets the requirement of concrete analysis as a demand for taking account absolutely all, without exception, empirical details, facts and circumstances connected in some way or other with the object under study, the concreteness (just as any metaphysically interpreted category) will prove to be a mere naked abstraction, a kind of unattainable ideal existing merely in imagination but never realised in actual knowledge. The theoretician professing this conception of concreteness finds himself in the position of the Maeterlinck's hero pursuing the Blue Bird, which ceases to be blue the moment he touches it.

Here, in the problem of the relation of the abstract to the concrete, metaphysics proves to be that bridge by which thought inevitably arrives at agnosticism and in the final analysis at liquidation of theory as such, at the view that theory is forever doomed to move in the sphere of more or less subjective abstractions, never grasping objective concreteness.

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The metaphysical interpretation of concreteness as taking into account absolutely all available circumstances, inevitably makes the person professing it extremely susceptible to the arguments of subjective idealists and agnostics.

The argument 'from the infinite complexity and confusion' of the world is probably worked harder than any other argument by contemporary bourgeois philosophers in their struggle against the Marxist-Leninist theory of social development. [Karl Jaspers](#), the existentialist, frankly begins his attack on Marxism with the statement that Marx's whole theory is based on the belief in the one and only and is in nature of a total outlook. This belief in the ability of thought to grasp the object in the entirety of all its necessary aspects and to perceive it as 'unity in diversity' is, according to Jaspers, an obsolete philosophical prejudice given up by 'modern science'. 'The real modern science... as opposed to the Marxist science of the integral, is particularist,' says Jaspers; it has long given up its pride, being modestly content with 'particulars'. 'Unity of knowledge' is an unattainable ideal or myth, according to Jaspers.

Jaspers expresses rather openly the cause of his dislike for 'Marx's total view'. He resents 'the unity of theory' and 'the unity of theory and practice', namely the practice of communist transformation of the world: 'And this policy believes in its ability, based on this understanding, to do what no previous policy was able to do. Having a total view of the past, it can make total plans and realise them.'

Henri Niel, a French supporter of Jaspers, echoes the latter's views. He rejects the dialectical materialist conception of concreteness for the same reasons, writing that whether in Hegelian or Marxist form, dialectics is based on man's ability to grasp mentally the totality of existence and therefore inevitably becomes a religion of the plan.

Existentialists believe that the form of knowledge was borrowed from Hegel and applied, by a *tour de force*, to the specifically modern content.

In actual fact, Marx's and Lenin's conception of concreteness of theory is hostile and alien to any 'superimposition of the form of knowledge' upon its material, upon the real diversity of phenomena.

To think concretely means 'to build a reliable foundation of precise and indisputable facts that can be confronted to any of the "general" or "example-based" arguments now so grossly misused in certain countries'. [Lenin, *Statistics and Sociology*]

Precisely established and indisputable facts in their proper total interconnection, facts taken as a whole, as concretely and historically conditioned – that is what Lenin insists on, first of all, in expounding the Marxist principle of 'concreteness of thought'. The whole point of the principle is that 'we must take not individual facts, but the **sum total** of facts, without a **single** exception, relating to the question under discussion'.

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That is the principle attacked by Jaspers as he makes a virtue of the 'particularism' allegedly inherent in modern science, that is, of that very trick of arbitrarily isolating facts from their objective interconnection to be further interpreted outside their connection, outside a whole, outside their interdependence, which is extremely characteristic of bourgeois thinking in these days.

Here is another tirade of the same sort. 'Reality is very confused. But neither thought nor experience are in a position to present reality in its unity and entirety. We cannot conceive reality or grasp it empirically; we can only experience it in its entirety.'

As for cognition, the reasoning is as follows. 'Any mental cognition of infinite reality by the finite human spirit is founded on the silent assumption that each time only a finite part of the same can be the subject of scientific perception and that this is the only "essential" part in the sense that is worth knowing.' [Max Weber] The question of what we should be interested in and what we may neglect, what is 'worth knowing' and what is not, 'is a question of value and can only be solved on the basis of subjective assessments'.

In other words, and objectively (i.e. on an objective basis) circumscribed whole can never form the subject-matter of science – only a particular area of facts whose boundaries any scientist is free to draw anywhere he likes.

'Choice is always of necessity subjective. Making choices is the business of each individual man of science. No one can prescribe or even advise him, for choice is always linked with value. But one cannot prove values.'

When it is a question of the subject-matter of political economy, this view comes to mean the following: the subject-matter of political economy is 'the field of interest of all those who designate themselves as economists or of those who are called so by others'. The subject-matter of political economy thus comprises everything that is so referred to by 'all educated persons'. 'The unity of the object ... is not the logical structure of problems ... ; it is the conceptual connections of the problems that constitute the working area of a science.'

These arguments are taken from the works of most diverse authors – contemporary bourgeois economists, existentialist philosophers, [Neopositivists](#), and representatives of the 'sociology of knowledge'. They differ in many respects, yet they form a united front against the materialist conception of 'concreteness of knowledge'. The line of reasoning is everywhere the same: since no single whole can be grasped by thought because of its infinite complexity, one must, be satisfied with 'particularist knowledge', with more or less arbitrarily selected groups of facts.

'The most widely used, and most fallacious, method in the realm of social phenomena is to tear out *individual* minor facts and juggle with examples,' wrote Lenin. Contemporary bourgeois philosophy makes a virtue of this sharp practice. It is of course much easier to select examples and minor facts to suit a previously chosen and completely unproven

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proposition concerning 'values' than to study facts with the same thoroughness as Marx did in collecting materials for *Capital* in the space of more than 25 years. But science cannot be guided by the principle of 'ease' or economy of mental effort'. Science is hard work. the principle of concreteness of knowledge and truth.

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## Spiral-Like Character of Development of Reality & its Theoretical Reflection

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Thus materialist dialectics interprets concreteness of theory as a reflection of **all the necessary aspects** of the object in their mutual conditionality and **internal interaction**.

The mutual nature of conditioning typical of any dialectically divided whole imposes stringent demands on theory and at the same time gives theoreticians a clear criterion for singling out only internally necessary definitions from the sensually given multiformity.

In a more immediate sense that signifies that each of the concrete abstractions (whose totality constitutes a theory) reflects only that form of the existence of an object which is at the same time a universal necessary condition of all the others and just as universal and necessary **consequence** of their interaction.

This condition is satisfied, for example, by the earlier analysed definition of man as a being producing implements of labour. Production of labour implements, production of means of production, is not only a universal (both logically and historically) **prerequisite** of all the other forms of human life activity but also a continually reproduced result **or consequence** of the social development as a whole.

At each moment in its development mankind is necessarily compelled to reproduce, that is, posit as its product, its own universal basis, the universal condition of the existence of the social human organism as a whole.

Today, the production of labour implements, that have developed into fantastically complex machines and assemblies of machines remains, on the one hand, a universal objective basis of the rest of human development, just as at the dawn of mankind. But, on the other hand, it essentially depends on the level of development of science, its own remote offspring, on its own consequence, and the dependence is so strong that machines may be regarded (within a materialist framework) as '**organs of the human brain created by man's hand**' [[Grundrisse, p594](#)]. In like manner, commodities, money, 'free' labour force – all these are no less products of capital, consequences of its specific movement, than they are its historical premises, the conditions of its emergence. And these are the kind of products which capital reproduces on an ever increasing scale inconceivable before its emergence.

This dialectics of all real development, in which the universal necessary condition of the emergence of an object becomes its own universal and

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necessary consequence, this dialectical inversion in which the condition becomes the conditioned, the cause becomes the effect, the universal becomes the particular, is a characteristic feature of internal interaction through which actual development assumes the form of a circle or, to be more precise, of a spiral which extends the scope of its motion all the time, with each new turn.

At the same time there is a kind of 'locking in itself' here which transforms an aggregate of individual phenomena into a relatively closed system, a concrete integral organism historically developing according to its immanent laws.

Marx resolutely emphasised this nature of interaction within the system of capitalist production: 'If in a developed bourgeois system ... anything that is *posited* is at the same time a *premise, the same thing takes place* in any *organic* system. [*Grundrisse*, p189] The words italicised in the above directly express the fact that the 'circular' nature of interaction is by no means a specific law of the existence and development of capitalism but rather a *universal law* of dialectical development, a law of dialectics. That is exactly the law that underlies the logical law of coincidence of the abstract and the concrete and the dialectical materialist conception of theoretical concreteness.

However, the same law of spiral-like development of a system of interacting phenomena poses some specific difficulties for thought – difficulties that are not to be overcome without the dialectical method in general and without a clear conception of the dialectics of the abstract and the concrete in particular.

Bourgeois economists, as they came up in their studies against this circumstance, the spiral-like nature of the mutual conditioning of the diverse forms of bourgeois wealth, inevitably lapsed into circularity in defining the most important categories. Marx discovered this hopeless 'circularity' already in his first attempt at an analysis of English economic theories in 1844. In analysing Say's argumentation he discovers that the latter, just as other economists, everywhere substitutes the concept of value for an explanation of phenomena which are themselves silently assumed in explaining value, e.g., the concepts of 'wealth', 'division of labour', 'capital', etc.

'Wealth. Here the concept of *value*, which has not yet been developed, is already assumed; for wealth is defined as "the sum total of values", "sum total of valuable things" that one possesses.'

Fifteen years later, returning to this point, Marx reveals the mystery of this hopeless logical circle: 'In theory, the value concept precedes the concept of capital but, on the other hand, assumes a mode of production based on capital as a condition of its pure development, and the same thing happens in practice. Therefore, inevitably, economists now regard capital as creator of values, their source, and now assume values as premises for the formation of capital, representing capital itself as a sum total of values in a certain function.' [Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 163]

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This logical circularity in definitions inevitably happens for the reason that any object is in fact a product of dialectical development, owing to which the reality studied by science always appears as a system of **mutually conditioning** aspects, as a historically emerging and developing concreteness.

Assuming indeed both money and value **as premises** for its emergence, capital at its birth immediately transforms them into universal forms of its own movement, into abstract moments of its specific being. As a result, it emerges before the observer contemplating a historically established relation as the creator of value. The difficulty here lies in that it is only the emergence of capital that transforms value into a **real universal** economic form of all production, of the entire system of economic relations. Before that, before the emergence of capital, value is anything but the **universal** economic relation if only because it does not comprise such a significant 'particular' factor of production as labour force.

It is impossible to break up the logical circularity in the definition of value and capital by any sophisticated logical procedures or semantic manipulations with concepts and their definitions, for the circularity arises not from a fault in the definitions of concepts but from a failure to understand the dialectical nature of interaction between them, from a failure to implement a genuinely historical approach to the study of this interaction. It is only a historical approach that enables one to find a way out of the vicious circle, or rather a way into it. Insofar as bourgeois economists are alien to such an approach, the circularity is hopeless for them.

The failure of such attempts is determined by the inability to grasp concreteness is a historically developed system of internally interacting phenomena which undergoes further development, as a historically evolving 'unity in diversity'. But it was exactly this dialectical conception of concreteness that gave Marx a methodological key to the solution of the basic theoretical problems of political economy; in particular, it explains the fact that it was Marx who revealed the mystery of the fetishism of commodities. The, concreteness of the capitalist world comprises only those objective forms of motion which this world assumes as its prerequisites and, moreover, reproduces as its specific **product**, positing them as **its consequence**.

The sun, commodities, natural resources, money, free labour force, availability of machines – all of these are equally objective premises and conditions in the absence of which capital can neither emerge nor exist. But neither the natural circumstances of its origin, nor the technical parameters of machines, nor man's anthropological features, and his ability to work, form the universal and necessary immanent forms of the existence of capital.

Marx's analysis singles out, as the concrete theoretical characteristics, only those universal and necessary conditions of the being of capital which are reproduced by the movement of capital itself. Capitalism does not reproduce labour force as such or natural resources and other material components but rather labour force as commodity, that is, as that social

form in which labour force functions within the developed system of capitalist relations.

Labour force as such, as a sum total of psychological or physiological abilities, is produced and reproduced by other process or processes. Capitalism does not produce it, just as it does not produce sunlight or natural resources or air, etc., but it does produce those social forms within which and through which all these things are involved in its specific movement and move within its organism as its forms.

The criterion Marx applied here for distinguishing – immanent forms of the object's motion is essentially a universal, logical criterion. That means that any individual object, thing, phenomenon, or fact is given a certain concrete form of its existence by the concrete process in the movement of which it happens to be involved; any individual object owes any concrete form of its existence to the concrete historically established system of things within which it emerged and of which it forms a part, rather than to itself, its own self-contained individual nature.

Gold taken by itself is not money. It becomes money in the circulation of money and commodities in which it is involved. 'A chair with four legs and a velvet canopy is, under certain circumstances, a **throne**; therefore this chair, a thing that serves as a seat, is not a throne through the nature of its use-value', that is to say, by its immanent nature, 'in and for itself', taken in abstraction from those specific conditions which alone make it a throne, it is not a throne at all.

It thus becomes apparent what enormous significance the dialectical conception of the concreteness of theoretical abstractions had for the overcoming of naturalist fetishist illusions veiling the nature of value as well as of all its derivative forms including interest, rent, etc.

In its nature, gold is no more money than coal is fuel for a locomotive, the moon a protectress of lovers, and man is slave or patrician, proletarian or bourgeois, philosopher or mathematician.

There is a fine point here, however, that dialectics has to take into account. Gold, coal, and man in themselves have to possess certain features and qualities owing to which the process wherein they are involved can transform them into forms of its own movement, of its existence.

It is gold rather than clay or bits of granite that proves to be the natural material in which the universal form of value is realised. Here the natural physical-chemical qualities do play a role. But these natural properties are of no consequence when we are dealing with the **essence, the nature** of the money form of value as such. This form develops in commodity circulation irrespective of the natural properties of gold. It is the sphere of circulation that develops the 'pure economic form' which later 'finds' the most flexible material for its implementation appropriate for its aims. As soon as gold proves to be an insufficiently flexible and plastic means or substance for expressing newly developing traits of the money form, it is replaced by paper, bank-notes, written-order clearing, etc.

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This discussion shows what objective reality was mystified by the Aristotelian (and later Hegelian) dialectics in the shape of the teaching of entelechy, of the 'pure form' existing outside and independent of 'matter' in which it is subsequently embodied, and which it moulds after its own fashion, in accordance with the requirements contained in it. That is the **real objective concreteness as a system of interacting things** where the individual thing, once it gets into the system, conforms to its requirements and acquires a form of existence previously unknown to it.

The dialectical materialist conception of concreteness thereby destroyed the last refuge of intelligent, dialectical idealism, as it gave a rational solution to the mystery of entelechy, the mystery of the universal as the 'goal cause', as 'pure form' developing outside and independently of the world of individual things and subordinating these things to its specific motion.

Reality which is expressed in an idealist and mystified manner in the notion of concept as a goal cause, as an active form, is nothing but real objective concreteness, that is a historically emerging and developing system of mutually conditioning phenomena, a complex dialectically divided whole which includes each individual thing and conditions the concrete nature and form of the things.

The materialistically interpreted category of reciprocal action reveals the mystery of the 'goal cause': 'reciprocal action is the true *causa finalis* of things" is the way Engels formulates, this proposition. [*Dialectics of Nature*, Notes and Fragments]

The above requires an essential qualification. Each science obviously reflects in its categories only specific forms and laws of a concrete system of interacting phenomena constituting its special subject-matter, making abstraction from everything else, despite the fact that without this 'everything else' its subject-matter is impossible and inconceivable.

For example, political economy reveals in a systematic form the concrete totality of social production relations between men, leaving aside the technological aspects of communication and the biological relations between individuals, despite the fact that men do not and cannot exist without either.

It is quite apparent that all those changes which take place within the system of production relations, the entire evolution of the system of production relations and forms of economic connection depend in actual fact on the development of man's productive force and, moreover, are determined by this development.

Nevertheless Marx considers in *Capital* the system of capitalist relations as a 'self-developing system', as a concreteness closed within itself, in its internal contradictions, in the immanent contradictions of the economic form. But, strictly speaking, the actual motive forces of the evolution of a system of production relations are not contained within the system itself but rather in the development of productive forces. Unless the productive forces develop, no 'internal' dialectics of the system of economic relations

will produce an evolution. However, Marx studies the mode of production as a whole and therefore registers a dialectical mutual conditioning of the productive forces and production relations. The development of productive forces is here taken not by itself, not only as a cause, but also as a consequence, result, and product of the reverse action of the system of production relations on the productive forces.

For instance, *Capital* shows the mechanism owing to which the emergence of the economic form of relative, surplus-value causes a growth in labour productivity inducing the capitalist to replace manual labour by machine labour and to develop the technical basis of the production of surplus-value.

It is clear, however (and it is shown by Marx himself), that in actual fact it is the appearance of machines that is the real cause of the absolute form of surplus-value being ousted out by its relative form.

Relative surplus-value clearly becomes the dominant form of surplus-value exactly for the reason that it is in better conformity with machine labour than absolute surplus-value, which is increased by a simple lengthening of the working day, labour productivity remaining unaltered.

The whole point is, however, that the correspondence itself between the economic form of a stage in the development of a productive, force is, in its turn, a dialectical correspondence. Relative surplus-value conforms to machine production exactly because it does not remain a passive form within which machines work but rather becomes in **active** form exerting a very strong reverse effect on machine production, that is, on its own basis that gave rise to it developing this basis and thereby creating a new incentive for its own movement.

Here, the transformation of cause into effect takes place that is characteristic of any real development. This circumstance is extremely important for understanding the paths chosen by Marx in his research.

Marx considered the evolution of the system of production relations based on wage labour. He was mostly concerned with those changes that take place within the system of production relations, within the economic structure of society. As for the development of productive forces as such, independent from any form of production relations, it is not considered in *Capital*. That is the subject matter of another science, the science of technology.

Marx takes as given the fact that the productive forces as such develop independently from a certain concrete historical form of relations between men, assuming it to be fact that is not to be studied specially within political economy.

Does that mean that the development of production relations is in general considered by him as unrelated to the development of productive forces? On the contrary. Actually, exactly those changes are considered within the system of economic relations that are caused by the development of productive forces. Moreover, precisely because politically

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economy does not consider the development of productive forces *in itself* ('*an und für sich*', '*an sich*', '*für sich*'), the effect of this development on the system of economic forms, its interaction with the latter is conceived in a concrete historical manner, that is, exactly in that form in which this effect works in the world of private capitalist ownership.

The nature of a change introduced by a new accretion of the productive forces to the system of production relations entirely depends on the specific features of the system in which this change is introduced.

Any new accretion of the productive forces does not automatically create an economic relation or socioeconomic form directly conforming to it, but rather determines the **direction** in which the already existing historically formed system of economic relations evolves. The situation is 'not affected by the fact that the earlier formed system of economic relations is in its turn, from beginning to end, a product of the entire preceding development of the productive forces.

A concrete historically formed system of economy is always a relatively independent organism producing a reverse effect on its own basis – the sum total of productive forces, and refracting any effect of the latter through its own specific nature. The totality of economic forms woven into a single system developing out of an identical basis, constitutes the specific nature of an economic organism which thereby acquires a relative independence with regard to the productive forces themselves.

Political economy as a special science has for its subject-matter exactly those forms which express the relative independence of the system of production relations. The determining effect of productive forces on production relations is revealed in a concrete historical manner precisely because the development of productive forces as such is not considered; what is considered is only the internal logic of the evolution of the system of production relations, the internal logic of the formation and development of this system. Thereby the process in which productive forces create appropriate production relations is traced quite **concretely**. Otherwise the study would remain abstract verbiage.

All of this has a bearing not only on political economy but on any theoretical science. Every science is required to develop a systematic conception of precisely those forms of the existence of an object which express its relative independence, rather than of those abstract features it has in common with others.

The productive forces do not create anything each time anew from scratch (this is an actual possibility only at the dawn of human development); they determine the type and character of changes taking place within an already established system of production relations. The situation is the same in the development of all forms of spiritual culture, law, political institutions, philosophy, and art.

'Here economy creates nothing anew, but it determines the way in which the body of thought found in existence is altered and further developed, and that too for the most part indirectly,' stressed Engels, considering this point to be a most, important' trait distinguishing the theory of historical

materialism from the abstract deliberation of vulgar economists who reduced the entire concrete complexity of the actual process of spiritual development, to the abstract insistence on the primacy of economy and the derived nature of everything else.

Thus historical materialism fully takes into account the fact that economy always prevails 'within the terms laid down by the particular sphere itself', that is, one and the same economic shift produces a certain effect in the sphere of art and quite a different one, unlike the former, in the sphere of law, and so on.

The difficulty is never in reducing a certain phenomenon in the sphere of law or art to its economic cause. That is not so difficult to do. But that is not historical materialism. In general, Marxist philosophy takes the standpoint of deduction rather than reduction, requiring that in each concrete case it should be understood why the given shift in the economy was reflected in politics or art in the given rather than some other way.

This task assumes, however, a theoretical understanding of the specific nature in which the economic shift is reflected and transformed. Each of the superstructural spheres or the activity of social man must be understood and explained as a system of historically established concrete forms, specific for this sphere, of reflecting economy, man's social being.

All the philosophical and logical principles applied by Marx to the study of the system of capitalist relations as a historically established system of interaction, are applicable to any natural or social science.

Let us consider only one example – the origin of legal norms. A necessary and universal condition for the emergence of any legal norm is the 'factual relation', a term applied by jurists to a non-legal, purely economic fact. This fact, taken by itself, is outside the competence of a law scholar, referring to the sphere of political economy.

The point is, however, that, it is not any economic relation, any 'factual relation' that engenders an appropriate legal norm, but only one which objectively needs legal protection, that is, requires a forcible subjugation of the will of individuals. In other words, only that economic relation needs protection which, with the aid of a legal norm, is later asserted as **the result of the fiction of law**. Under communism, for instance, the need for law and for a system of legal norms itself will wither away exactly because the form itself of economic relations, the communist form of ownership (as a 'factual relation') will assume a character that will no longer need a legal form for its assertion.

It follows that only such an economic relation, a non-legal fact, which requires a legal form for its assertion, constitutes a real premise and condition of emergence of a legal norm. In other words, only that non-legal fact will become a real condition of a legal norm which is **actively** (that is, in consequence of applying law) asserted and protected by the entire system of functioning law. If a certain 'factual relation' does not need legal protection and assertion, if it is not a **consequence** of applying law, then neither is it the **cause** of law. In this case a legal norm does not emerge at all: a moral or some other norm does.

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Accordingly, only that economic relation between men constitutes a real premise and condition of the emergence of a legal norm, which is asserted by the legal norm as a **product**, a **consequence** of its application, and appears on the surface as a **consequence** of law, and not as its cause. In this case we deal again with a dialectical transformation of cause into effect, which stems from the spiral-like character of any real development of mutually conditioning phenomena. It is this real fact, being comprehended and elucidated in a one-sided manner, only from the standpoint of active reverse effect of social consciousness in all its forms on social being, on the sphere of economic relations between men and of men to nature, which gives rise to diverse idealist conceptions.

Abstract absolutisation of this aspect, of the active reverse effect of thought on all other spheres of activity, including economy and the field of relations between man and nature, formed the basis for the Hegelian conception, which ultimately declared man's entire social life and even nature itself to be a consequence or product of thinking in terms of concepts, an outcome of the logical activity of universal reason. It is this fact of relative independence of thought, of man's logical development, owing to which thought has an active reverse effect on all spheres of man's activity (including economy), that Hegel stresses one-sidedly. This, one-sidedness coincides with the objective-idealist, view of the relation of thought to being.

Rejecting the thesis concerning **absolute** independence of the logical process, of the system of logical categories, Marxist-Leninist logic takes into account **relative** of the sphere of social man's logical activity, activity of logical categories in the perception and analysis of sensual data. Thought is not a simple passive replica of the 'general forms' of sensually given facts, it is rather a specific mode of spiritual activity of a socially developed subject. The universal forms in which this activity is realised (logical categories) is not merely an accidental aggregate of the most general abstractions but a system within which each category is concretely defined through all the others.

The system of logical categories implements the same subordination that the system of concepts of any science does which reflects a dialectically divided whole. This subordination is not of the genus-to-species nature: the category of quantity, for instance, is neither a species of quality nor a genus with regard to causality or essence. A logical category cannot therefore be in principle defined by inclusion in a higher genus and indication of its own specific feature. This confirms once again the fact that a real concept exists only in a **system** of concepts and through it, becoming outside a system an empty abstraction without any clear definition – a mere term or designation.

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## Scientific Abstraction (Concept) & Practice

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Practice, social man's sensual objective activity, has always been and still is a universal prerequisite and condition on the basis of which the entire complex mechanism of man's cognitive abilities, actively transforming sensual impressions, emerges and develops. Having emerged and, still more so, having developed to a high level, a system of forms of logical activity (categories) has a very considerable reverse effect on practice itself. On this basis Marxist-Leninist philosophy solves the problem of the relation of empirical abstractions to the abstractions of theoretical thought.

In the phenomenon open to direct contemplation things mostly look quite different from what they are in essence expressed in a concept. If both coincided directly, science as special theoretical analysis of phenomena would not be needed at all.

And that is exactly why the mere reference to the fact that such and such 'general traits' may be recorded in a phenomenon open to direct contemplation, cannot as yet serve as a weighty argument either for or against the abstraction of concept. At the time when [Jean-Jacques Rousseau](#) formulated his historical thesis, 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains', most men indeed spent their lives virtually 'in chains', from the cradle to the grave. The thesis that all men from birth are essentially equal could not at that time be proved by referring to the empirical general state of affairs. And yet, historically and theoretically, the philosophical conceptions of the Enlightenment were true, and not those of their opponents.

Direct contemplation and the abstractions arising from it always and everywhere reflect phenomena of the world in the light of practical relations among men and of men to nature existing at the moment. Nature is contemplated by a living concrete historically definite individual woven into a network of social relations, that is, a being standing in an active practical objective relation to the world, rather than the imaginary, allegedly 'passively contemplation', subject. And that is exactly why socio-historical properties of things and of man himself begin to seem eternal properties bound with the very essence of things. These fetishist naturalist illusions (commodity fetishism is only an example) and the abstractions expressing them cannot therefore be refuted by mere indication of things given in contemplation. The things given in contemplation to an individual of bourgeois ('civil') society are superficially exactly the way they seem to him. These illusions and abstractions are formed not only in the consciousness of an individual of bourgeois society but in the reality itself of the economic social relations which he contemplates. That was why Marx pointed out that the contemplative viewpoint of the individual moulded by 'civil', that is, bourgeois, society, does not permit to see reality in its genuine light. From this standpoint (and that was, as Marx pointed out, the

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standpoint of the entire old materialism, including that of [Feuerbach](#)), things appear in contemplation too shrouded in a mist of fetishist illusions. In living contemplation the individual is always active: 'passive contemplation' which allegedly permits to see things as they are in actual fact belongs in the realm of fantasies of old philosophy. In real living contemplation things are always given in the light of existing practice.

That does not mean that things must appear in theoretical thought outside any connection with practice, being comprehended 'in a purely disinterested manner', as materialists before Marx believed. On the contrary. The difference here is that abstractions of theoretical thought are linked with practice in a less direct way than abstractions of living contemplation but, to make up for that, the links are deeper and more comprehensive.

Empirical abstractions born in the head of a practically active member of bourgeois society are criticised by Marx from the standpoint of practice itself. But practice is here taken in its entire real scope and, what is even more important, in a certain perspective.

Marx's principle of critically overcoming empirical abstractions of bourgeois consciousness is as follows: he proceeds from the fact that, if one takes the standpoint of a contemplative individual of bourgeois society, things will indeed look exactly the way they seem to him. Consequently, a critique of the abstractions of the individual's empirical consciousness must begin with the critique of the viewpoint, of the position from which he considers things, with showing up the narrowness of this viewpoint.

A wider view comprehending the phenomena in their entire actual content, coincides in Marx with the standpoint of practice taken in its necessary perspective mentally stretched into the future. Breaking through the narrow horizon of the existing (bourgeois) practice, a theoretical view of things breaks away not from practice (as it seemed to Feuerbach) but only with its given historically transient form. Thereby a theoretical view of things coincides with practice in its real meaning, in its revolutionary and revolutionising meaning, and thus with the standpoint of the class realising this practice.

Marx's epistemology is linked with this interpretation of the relations of abstractions to practice. The standpoint of practice, as Lenin indicates, is the starting point of epistemology. One should only bear in mind that what is meant here is the actual standpoint of revolutionary practice in its entire scope and perspective and by no means the narrow pragmatic viewpoint, as is slanderously asserted by some revisionists echoing the wishful talk of bourgeois ideologists.

This interpretation is also linked with the views of Marx and Lenin on concept, in particular their proposition that a mere correspondence to, the directly observable 'general features' of the phenomenon – is not – yet a criterion of the truth of a concept. It may come about, as a result of practical change, that those features of a thing which were observed as constantly recurring or general will disappear entirely, and what appeared to be exceptional in the phenomenon open to contemplation will prove to be the expression of the essence of the thing.

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To check whether our conception of the situation outside our consciousness is correct or incorrect (that is, whether our conception corresponds to the thing or not), it is enough to look at the thing carefully, comparing the notion with the actual situation, with the general in the facts. But to define whether or not these general elements are **necessarily** inherent in the thing, in its **concrete** nature, will require a different criterion. The criterion is practice which actively changes the thing, rather than passive contemplation, however thorough and attentive it may be.

The truth of a concept is not proved by comparing its definitions with empirical general features or facts, but rather in a more complicated and mediated manner including a practical transformation of empirical reality. Practice is the highest instance of verifying a concept. The correspondence of a concept to an object is fully proved only when a man succeeds in finding, reproducing or creating an object corresponding to the concept which he has formed.

Inasmuch as a concept expresses the essence of a thing rather than the abstract general features open to contemplation and expressible in notions, a concept can neither be confirmed nor refuted by reference to all individual facts available to contemplation possessing (or not possessing) given features at a given moment. Marx was never as contemptuous as in mocking the manner of theorising practised by vulgar economists, who believed that they could refute a theory by showing that things in phenomenal form looked different from what they appeared in essence expressed by concept. The vulgar economist thinks he has made a great discovery when, in face of the disclosure of intrinsic interconnection, he proudly states that on the surface things look different. In fact, he boasts that he sticks to appearance, and takes it for the ultimate. Why, then, have any science at all?

The essence of a thing expressed in a concept lies in the concrete system of its interaction with other things, in the system of objective conditions within which and through which it is what it is. Each individual separately taken thing comprises its own essence potentially, only as an element of some concrete system of interacting things, rather than in the form of an actually given general feature. This essence is not implemented in the thing in reality (and therefore not in contemplation either) as the directly observable general, and if it is, that does not happen all at once but only in the process of its motion, change, and development.

The significance of this point may be well illustrated by considering the history of the concept of the proletariat, a most important category of the Marxist-Leninist theory.

When Marx and Engels worked out the concept of the proletariat as the most revolutionary class of bourgeois society, as the grave-digger of capitalism, it was in principle impossible to obtain this concept by considering an abstractly general trait inherent in each separate proletarian and each particular stratum of the proletariat. A formal abstraction which could be made in the mid-19th century by comparing all individual representatives of the proletariat, by the kind of abstracting recommended by non-dialectical logic, would have characterised the

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proletariat as the most oppressed passively suffering poverty-ridden class capable, at best, only of a desperate hungry rebellion.

This concept of the proletariat was current in the innumerable studies of that time, in the philanthropic writings of the contemporaries of Marx and Engels, and in the works of utopian socialists. This abstraction was a precise reflection of the empirically general. But it was only Marx and Engels who obtained a **theoretical** expression of these empirical facts, a conception of what the proletariat was as a 'class in itself' (*an sich*), in its internal nature expressed in the concept, what it was not yet 'for itself' (*für sich*), that is, in empirical reality directly reflected in a notion or simple empirical abstraction.

This conclusion, this concept expressing the real objective nature of the proletariat as a class was obtained through studying the entire totality of conditions in which the proletariat is inevitably formed as the most revolutionary class called upon to destroy to the very foundation the whole system of social conditions which gave rise to it. The concept of the proletariat, as distinct from the empirical general notion of it, was not a formal abstraction here but a theoretical expression of the objective conditions of its development containing a comprehension of its objective role and of the latter's tendency of development.

The truth of the concept of the proletariat worked out by Marx and Engels could not be proved by comparing it with the feature empirically common to all proletarians. This feature rather fits in with the abstraction current among philanthropists and utopians. The truth of this concept was shown, as is well known, by the real transformation of the proletariat from a 'class in itself' into a 'class for itself'. The proletariat developed, in the full sense of the term, towards a correspondence with 'its own concept', with the concept that was worked out by the classics of Marxism on the basis of analysing the objective conditions of its formation, the entire concrete totality of the social conditions of its being as the proletariat. Ceasing to be a mass of oppressed and downtrodden labourers scattered throughout the country and divided by competition, it becomes a monolithic class realising its world-historical mission – revolutionary abolition of private ownership and of the class form of the division of labour in general.

The same practice refuted the 'correct notion' which reflected quite precisely the trait that was common in direct empirical experience to each individual proletarian. It should be stressed in particular that taking into account this most fundamental requirement of materialist dialectics must form the basis of working out all the scientific concepts of the development of society.

It is ignoring (or conscious distortion) of the standpoint of practice as the starting point of theory that serves in the epoch of imperialism as the – basis of revisionist and opportunist trends that do so much harm to the international working-class movement.

The policies of Right opportunists have always been marked by a failure to understand the course of the world-historical development of the revolutionary practice of the workers of the whole world.

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Already before the October 1917 Revolution, which ushered in the practical transformation of the world on the principles of scientific communism, the opportunist Karl Kautsky forsook the path of revolutionary Marxism for the path of adaptation to the forces of world imperialism. He started with a little thing like assuming the abstract hypothesis of 'ultra-imperialism'. The foresight of Lenin, who diagnosed quite precisely the danger of this disease in the international working-class movement, was here shown in full measure. Kautsky's abstract theoretical construction proceeded, at first sight, from entirely Marxist propositions. In the 20th century, Kautsky argued, capitalism develops towards uniting the barons of capital in one single super-trust. In [Kautsky's](#) view, the struggle and competition of isolated state capitals must be extinguished in this imperialist super-trust. The world system of imperialism would thus become an integral socialised economy which would merely have to be formally 'nationalised' to become socialism. Neither revolution nor proletarian dictatorship would be needed but merely a formal legal sanction to deprive the last owner of its private property in favour of the whole of society.

Hence the policy which Kautsky recommended to the international working-class movement already at that time: to wait until imperialism would socialise world economy by its own means, and to help it in this enterprise rather than hamper it. Lenin unerringly pointed to the deepest roots of this injurious theory and policy: divorcing theoretical thought from the actual development of revolutionary proletarian practice, and **abstract** reasoning.

Lenin pointed out that an ultra-imperialist stage in the development of world capitalism could well be imagined in abstract reflection. 'Such a phase can be imagined. But in practice this means becoming an opportunist, turning away from the acute problems of the day to dream of the unacute problems of the future. In theory this means refusing to be guided by actual developments, **forsaking** them arbitrarily for such dreams.'

If it was merely a matter of 'dreams', one could well ignore it. The thing is, however, that dreams in politics inevitably become a practical political platform.

Under no circumstances can theory, due to its nature and enormous role in social life, become divorced from practice in general. It can only keep aloof from certain forms of practice. But in this case, too, it is immediately employed by a different kind of practice. Theory is too valuable a thing to remain long without an owner.

In continuing his critical analysis of Kautsky's views, Lenin made a conclusion which was later borne out with literal accuracy by the course of events – precisely for the reason that Lenin always held the real revolutionary practice of millions of working people transforming the world to be the highest criterion of theoretical constructions.

'There is no doubt that the trend of development (of capitalism in the 20th century – *EVI.*) **is towards** a single world trust absorbing all enterprises without

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exception and all states without exception. But this development proceeds in such circumstances, at such a pace, through such contradictions, conflicts and upheavals – not only economic but political, national, etc. – that inevitably imperialism will burst and capitalism will be transformed into its opposite **long before** one world trust materialises, before the "ultra-imperialist", world-wide amalgamation of national finance capitals takes place.'

What features distinguish Lenin's theoretical thought from Kautsky's abstract reasoning? First and foremost, its **concreteness**. And that means the following. Kautsky's theoretical constructions take into account the practice of imperialism, its forces and representatives, the ways this practice is going to take. But Kautsky completely ignores a little thing' like the practical activity and struggle of the oppressed masses. His constructions disregard them.

Lenin did not negate the fact that imperialism developed in the direction on which Kautsky discoursed, that the development of modern capitalism did indeed contain the abstract possibility of imperialist 'socialisation' of world economy, but he resolutely opposed to this abstract scheme the fundamental principle of revolutionary Marxism-the standpoint of revolutionary practice of the working classes. This example shows clearly that only this standpoint coincides with the concrete view of capitalist development under imperialism. And another thing becomes also apparent: Kautsky's abstract viewpoint inevitably leads to a rejection of dialectics. In the name of his abstract theoretical scheme he refuses to see the growing acuteness of class struggle. But the growing acuteness of class antagonism is precisely the form which capitalist 'socialisation' of world economy takes. In Kautsky, this 'socialisation' appears as a purely evolutionary process of reconciliation of class contradictions. Materialist dialectics of Marxism is discarded in favour of the typically Hegelian idea of reconciliation of opposites in the name of 'higher', above-class goals of mankind.

In the final analysis, Kautsky's abstract scheme leads to a conception that is entirely false in its theoretical content, to direct apology of imperialism, to a position hostile to existing socialism. The abstract scholastic non-revolutionary conception of the theory of Marxism proved to be the bridge by which Kautsky inevitably arrived at a complete betrayal of Marxism both in theory and in politics.

Lenin's concrete theoretical analysis of the same problem is quite different. Its starting point is the standpoint of the revolutionary practice of the working classes, of the masses. This principle throws light directly on the real, concrete dialectics of the actual process in its contradictions and tension. It also explains the fact that Lenin's theoretical forecast came true with literal accuracy two years after: in 1917 world imperialism burst at its weakest link, and the entire subsequent history took the form of more and more links in the world system of imperialism breaking down.

The dialectics of history is such that, replacing the weak links of the imperialist system, links of a new economic and political system emerge

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and gain strength from day to day, the links of the community of socialist countries. That is the way the modern world is transformed, in exact agreement with the concrete theoretical forecast of Lenin, that great master of dialectics.

Therein lies the lesson for Marxist theoreticians endeavouring to bring out in a scientific manner the laws of social development and to evolve theoretical concepts of it.