DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

- 1969: Heretics and Renegades and Other Essays.


dialectical materialism Dialectical materialism has been widely thought of as the PHILOSOPHY of Marxism, in contrast and relation to Marxist science, distinguished as historical materialism. The term was probably first used by Plekhanov in 1891. It was in that first generation after Marx's death that 'Diamat' (a shorthand term which became current especially in the USSR) emerged, as the work of Marx and Engels gave way to that of their followers. Marxism itself crystallized out of that transition, and dialectical materialism was constitutive of it (see MARXISM, DEVELOPMENT OF). The first generation of Marxists was dominated by the two most famous books of the founders, Marx’s Capital and Engels’s Anti-Dühring. The former represented the basic economic science of historical materialism. In was Engels in Anti-Dühring who was regarded as having presented in its 'final shape' (Plekhanov 1908, p. 23) the philosophy of Marxism. Dialectical materialism was a powerful force in the Second International, and following the Russian revolution it became essential to Communist party orthodoxy.

On its own understanding dialectical materialism is cross-bred from the union of two bourgeois philosophies: the mechanistic MATERIALISM of the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment, and Hegel’s idealist DIALECTICS. The mechanicism of the former, which is incompatible with dialectics, and the IDEALISM of the latter, which is incompatible with materialism, are rejected and opposed as ‘metaphysical’ and ‘ideological’. The result is a philosophy in the sense of a ‘world outlook’, ‘the communist world outlook’ as Engels calls it (Anti-Dühring, Preface to 2nd edn): a body of theory taken to be true of concrete reality as a whole, and conceived as in a sense scientific, as a kind of ‘natural philosophy’

generalizing and supported by the findings of the special sciences as they advance to maturity, including the social science of historical materialism. Thus, whereas Marx’s theoretical work is a study of society, Engels founded dialectical materialism by developing a ‘dialectics of nature’ (Dialectics of Nature), based on the claim that ‘in nature . . . the same dialectical laws . . . force their way through as those which in history govern . . . events’ (Anti-Dühring, Preface to 2nd edn). The central theories of dialectical materialism, then, are presented as scientific laws of a completely general kind, governing ‘nature, society, and thought’ (Anti-Dühring, pt. I, ch. XIII). The political point of such a theory, as of Engels’s distinctive contribution generally, is to argue the scientifi city of Marxism, recruiting for historical materialism the support of the cognitive authority enjoyed by NATURAL SCIENCE, and at the same time depriving of that support other political and cultural movements currently claiming it, like Dühring’s work, or ‘social Darwinism’ (Benton, in Mepham and Ruben 1979, vol. II, p. 101).

The combination of materialism with dialectics transforms both. Properly understood, the materialism of dialectical materialism is not, like its traditional ancestor, reductive. It does not reduce ideas to matter, asserting their ultimate identity. It holds, dialectically, that the material and the ideal are different, in fact are opposites, but within a unity in which the material is basic or primary. Matter can exist without mind, but not vice versa, and mind was historically emergent from matter and remains dependent on it. It follows that the mature special sciences form a unified hierarchy with physics at their base, though they are not reducible to physics. It follows also, in epistemology, that physics gives us knowledge of a mind-independent objective reality. What the component of dialectics asserts is that concrete reality is not a static substance in undifferentiated unity but a unity that is differentiated and specifi cally contradictory, the conflict of opposites driving reality onwards in a historical process of constant progressive change, both evolutionary and revolutionary, and in its revolutionary or discontinuous
changes bringing forth genuine qualitative novelty. It is as such an emergent novelty that the mind is understood by this materialist version of dialectics. At the most basic intellectual level of logic, the contradictory nature of reality is taken to imply that contradictory statements are true of reality and consequently to require a special dialectical logic that supersedes formal logic, with its essential principle of non-contradiction (see CONTRADICTION; LOGIC).

Thus the fundamental laws of dialectical materialism are: (1) the law of the transformation of quantity into quality, according to which gradual quantitative changes give rise to revolutionary qualitative changes; (2) the law of the unity of opposites, which holds that the unity of concrete reality is a unity of opposites or contradictions; (3) the law of the negation of the negation, which claims that in the clash of opposites one opposite negates another and is in its turn negated by a higher level of historical development that preserves something of both negated terms (a process sometimes represented in the triadic schema of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis).

There is no doubt that Marx's theory of society is both materialist and dialectical, and claims to be scientific. If it is justified in claiming the cognitive advantage of scientificity it must have important continuities with the established natural sciences. But it may be that there are other and more reliable continuities than the one argued for by Engels and by dialectical materialism, namely a shared content constituting a very general theory about reality as a whole, 'the communist world outlook'. In any case, there is a problematic tension in the union of dialectics and materialism, especially the materialism of the natural sciences with its strong tendencies towards mechanistic reductivism and detached objectivism. It is that emphasis on the natural sciences and on historical materialism as a natural science of society that is distinctive, within Marxism, of dialectical materialism. In consequence, dialectical materialism has pressed historical materialism towards ECONOMISM, the supposition that, as the material base of society, only the economy, and even perhaps only its 'most material' aspect, productive technology, has real causal efficacy, the political and theoretical superstructure being epiphenomenal. Lenin and Mao Tse-tung, both committed exponents of 'the communist world outlook', resisted economism, but its anti-revolutionary effects were present in the Marxism of the Second International and later Communist Party orthodoxy.

In the 1920s and '30s, as the Russian revolution degenerated into Stalinist tyranny and party bureaucracy, the general domination of Marxist philosophy by dialectical materialism began to crumble outside the USSR and give way to a second Marxist philosophy, Marxist humanism. Its leading theorists were Lukács and Korsch, and their rejection of the materialism of the natural sciences and their Hegelian emphasis on dialectic seemed to be confirmed by the rediscovery of Marx's early philosophical writings. These Hegelianizing tendencies have themselves been heavily attacked by the schools of Althusser and della Volpe in the last two decades. In contrast to this Western Marxism, SOVIET MARXISM has in general continued to adhere to 'Diamat', though there has been a recent tendency to reject the conception of a special dialectical logic superseding formal logic.

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dialectics Possibly the most contentious topic in Marxist thought, raising the two main issues on which Marxist philosophical discussion has turned, viz the nature of Marx's debt to Hegel and the sense in which Marxism is a science. The most common emphases of the concept in the Marxist tradition are as (a) a method, most usually scientific method, instancing epistemological dialectics; (b) a set of laws or principles, governing some sector of the whole of reality, ontological dialectics; and (c) the movement of history, relational dialectics. All three are to be found in Marx. But their paradigms are Marx's methodological comments in Capital, the philosophy of nature expounded by Engels in Anti-Dühring, and the 'out-Hegeling Hegelianism' of the early Lukács in History and Class Consciousness - texts which may be regarded as the founding documents of Marxist social science, dialectical materialism, and Western Marxism respectively.

There are two inflections of the dialectic in Hegel: (a) as a logical process; and (b) more narrowly, as the dynamo of this process.

(a) In Hegel the principle of idealism, the speculative understanding of reality as (absolute) spirit, unites two ancient strands of dialectic, the Eleatic idea of dialectic as reason and the Ionian idea of dialectic as process, in the notion of dialectic as a self-generating, self-differentiating and self-particularizing process of reason. The first idea begins with Zeno's paradoxes, moves through the differing Socratic, Platonic and Aristotelian dialectics, on via the practice of medieval disputation to Kantian critique. The second typically assumes a dual form: in an ascending dialectic, the existence of a higher reality (e.g. the Forms of God) is demonstrated; and in a descending dialectic, its manifestation in the phenomenal world is explained. Prototypes are the transcendent dialectic of matter of ancient scepticism and the immanent dialectic of divine self-realization of neo-Platonic and Christian eschatology from Plotinus and Eriugena onwards. Combination of the ascending and descending phases results in a quasi-temporal pattern of original unity, loss or division and return or reunification; or a quasi-logical pattern of hypostasis and actualization. Combination of the Eleatic and Ionian strands results in the Hegelian Absolute - a logical process or dialectic which actualizes itself by alienating itself, and restores its self-unity by recognizing this alienation as nothing other than its own free expression or manifestation; and which is recapitulated and completed in the Hegelian System itself.

(b) The motor of this process is dialectic more narrowly conceived, which Hegel calls the 'grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative' (1812–16 (1969), p. 56). This is the method which enables the dialectical commentator to observe the process by which categories, notions or forms of consciousness arise out of each other to form even more inclusive totalities, until the system of categories, notions or forms as a whole is completed. For Hegel truth is the whole and error lies in onesidedness, incompleteness and abstraction; it can be recognized by the contradictions it generates, and remedied through their incorporation in fuller, richer, more concrete conceptual forms. In the course of this process the famous principle of sublation is observed: as the dialectic unfolds no partial insight is ever lost. In fact the Hegelian dialectic progresses in two basic ways: by bringing out what is implicit, but not explicitly articulated, in some notion, or by repairing some want, lack or inadequacy in it. 'Dialectical', in contrast to 'reflective' (or analytical), thought grasps conceptual forms in their systematic interconnections, not just their determinate differences, and conceives each development as the product of a previous less developed phase, whose necessary truth or fulfilment it is; so that there is always a tension, latent irony or incipient surprise between any form and what it is in the process of becoming.

The most important phases in the development of Marx's thought on Hegelian dialectic are (i) the brilliant analysis of its 'mystified' logic in the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State, resumed in the final manuscript of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, where Hegel's idealist concept of labour moves centre-stage; (ii) in the immediately following works, The Holy Family, The German Ideology, and The Poverty of Philosophy the critique of Hegel is
subsumed under a ferocious polemical assault on speculative philosophy as such; (iii) from the time of the Grundrisse on, a definite positive re-evaluation of Hegelian dialectic occurs. The extent of this re-evaluation remains a matter of lively controversy. Two things seem, however, beyond doubt: that Marx continued to be critical of the Hegelian dialectic as such and yet believed himself to be working with a dialectic related to the Hegelian one. Thus he says à propos of Dühring: 'He knows very well that my method of development is not Hegelian, since I am a materialist and Hegel is an idealist. Hegel's dialectics is the basic form of all dialectics, but only after it has been stripped of its mystified form, and it is precisely this which distinguishes my method' (letter to Kugelmann, 6 March 1868). And in the Afterword to the 2nd edn. of Capital I he writes: 'The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general forms of motion in a comprehensive manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.' These two metaphors - of the inversion and of the kernel - have been the subject of almost theological speculation. The kernel metaphor seems to indicate that Marx thought it possible to extract part of the Hegelian dialectic against both (i) the Young Hegelian and Engelsian view that a complete extraction of the dialectical method from Hegel's system is possible and (ii) the view of positivistically-minded critics from Bernstein to Colletti that no extraction at all is possible, that the Hegelian dialectic is totally compromised by Hegel's idealism. Unforunately Marx never realized his wish 'to make accessible to the ordinary human intelligence, in two or three printer's sheets, what is rational in the method which Hegel discovered and at the same time mystified' (Marx to Engels, 14 January 1858).

Whatever Marx's debt to Hegel, there is a remarkable consistency in his criticisms of Hegel from 1843 to 1873. (a) Formally, there are three principal targets of attack - Hegel's inversions, his principle of identity and his logical mysticism. (b) Substantively, Marx focuses on Hegel's failure to sustain the autonomy of nature and the historicity of social forms.

(a) (1) Hegel is guilty, according to Marx, of a three-fold inversion of subject and predicate. In each respect Marx describes Hegel's position as an inversion, and his own position as an inversion of Hegel's - the inversion of the inversion. Thus Marx counterposes Hegel's absolute idealist ontology, speculative rationalist epistemology, and substantive idealist sociology, a conception of universals as properties of particular things, knowledge as irreducibly empirical, and civil society (later modes of production) as the foundation of the state. But it is unclear whether Marx is merely affirming the contrary of Hegel's position or rather transforming its problematic. In fact, he is usually doing the latter: his critique is aimed as much at Hegel's terms and relations as his 'inversions'. Marx conceives infinite mind as an illusory projection of (alienated) finite beings and nature as transcendentally real, and the Hegelian immanent spiritual teleology of infinite, petrified and finite mind is replaced by a methodological commitment to the empirically-controlled investigation of the causal relations within and between historically emergent, developing humanity and irreducibly real, but modifiable nature. Nor does Marx clearly differentiate the three inversions which are identified in Hegel. Their distinctiveness is however implied by Marx's second and third lines of criticism, pinpointing Hegel's reductions of being to knowing (the 'epistemic fallacy') and of science to philosophy (the 'speculative illusion').

(2) Marx's critique of Hegel's principle of identity (the identity of being and thought as thought) is duplex. In his exoteric critique, which follows the line of Feuerbach's transformative method, Marx shows how the empirical world appears as a consequence of Hegel's hypostatization of thought; but in his esoteric critique, Marx contends that the empirical world is really its secret condition. Thus Marx notes how Hegel presents his own activity, or the process of thinking generally, transformed into an independent subject (the idea), as the demarcation of the experienced world. He then argues that the content of the speculative philosopher's thought actually consists in uncritically received empirical
data, absorbed from the existing state of affairs, which is in this way reified and eternalized. The following diagram illustrates the logic of Marx's objection.

![Diagram]

Marx's analysis implies (i) that conservatism or apologetics is intrinsic to the Hegelian method, not as the left Hegelians supposed, a result of some personal weakness or compromise, and (ii) that Hegel's logical theory is inconsistent with his actual practice, in that his dialectical steps turn out to be motivated by non-dialectical, unreflected, more or less crudely empirical considerations.

(3) Marx's critique of Hegel's 'logical mysticism', and the parthenogenesis of concepts and ideological conjuring tricks it allows, turns on a critique of the notion of the autonomy or final self-sufficiency of philosophy (and ideas generally). But here again it is unclear whether Marx is advocating (i) a literal inversion, i.e. the absorption of philosophy (or its positivistic supersession) by science, as is suggested by the polemics of the German Ideology period; or rather (ii) a transformed practice of philosophy, viz as heteronomous, i.e. as dependent upon science and other social practices but with relatively autonomous functions of its own, as is indicated by his (and Engels's) own practice.

(b) Marx's critique of Hegel in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts locates two conceptual lacunae: (1) of the objectivity of nature and being generally, conceived as radically other to thought, i.e. as independently real and neither causally dependent upon nor teleologically necessitated by any kind of mind; and (2) of the distinction between objectification and conceptual pre-empts the possibility of a truly human, non-alienated mode of human objectification. More generally, in contrast to Hegel for whom 'the only labour . . . is abstract mental labour' (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, end of Third Manuscript) labour for Marx always (1) presupposes a material substratum . . . furnished without the help of man' (Capital I, ch. 1, sect. 2) and (2) involves real transformation, entailing irredeemable loss and finitude and the possibility of genuine novelty and emergence. So any Marxian dialectic will be objectively conditioned, absolutely finitist and prospectively open (i.e. unfinished).

One possibility raised by Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophy of identity is that the dialectic in Marx (and Marxism) may not specify a unitary phenomenon, but a number of different figures and topics. Thus it may refer to patterns or processes in philosophy, science or the world; being, thought or their relation (ontological, epistemological and relational dialectics); nature or society, 'in' or 'out of' time (historical v. structural dialectics); which are universal or particular, trans-historical or transient etc. And within these categories further divisions may be significant. Thus any epistemic dialectic may be metaconceptual, methodological (critical or systematic), heuristic or substantive (descriptive or explanatory); a relational dialectic may be conceived primarily as an ontological process (e.g. Lukács) or as an
The possibility of a real mode of human reality, in contrast to labour... is abstract and philosophical. If the primary concern is readily accommodated with a relational dialectic; a relational identification as an ontological critique (e.g. Marcuse). Such dialectical modes may be related by (a) a common ancestry and (b) their systematic connections within Marxism without being related by (c) their possession of a common essence, kernel or germ, still less (d) one that can be read back (unchanged) into Hegel. Marx may still have been positively indebted to Hegelian dialectic, even if in his work it is totally transformed (so that neither kernel nor inversion metaphor would apply) and/or developed in a variety of ways.

The most common positive theories of the Marxian dialectic are (i) as a conception of the world (e.g. Engels, DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM, Mao Tse-tung; (ii) as a theory of reason (e.g. Della Volpe, Adorno); and (iii) as essentially depending upon the relations between them (or thought and being, subject and object, theory and practice etc) (e.g. Lukács, Marcuse). There is little doubt that in Marx's own self-understanding the primary emphasis of the concept is epistemological. Often Marx uses 'dialectical' as a synonym for 'scientific' method. In the Afterword to the 2nd edn of Capital I he quotes the St Petersburg reviewer's distinctively positivistic description (see POSITIVISM) of his method, commenting 'when the writer describes so aptly... the method I have actually used, what else is he describing but the dialectical method?' However, it seems clear that Marx's method, though naturalistic and empirical is not positivist, but rather realist (see REALISM); and that his epistemological dialectics commiss his to a specific ontological and a conditional relational dialectics as well. In a letter to J. B. Schweitzer (24 January 1865), Marx observes that 'the secret of scientific dialectics' depends upon comprehending 'economic categories as the theoretical expression of historical relations of production, corresponding to a particular stage of development of material production'. Marx's dialectic is scientific because it explains the contradictions in thought and the crises of socio-economic life in terms of the particular contradictory essential relations which generate them (ontological dialectic). And Marx's dialectic is historical because it is both rooted in, and (conditionally) an agent of, the changes in the relations and circumstances it describes (relational dialectic). Corresponding to Marx's distinction between his empirically-controlled mode of inquiry and his quasi-deductive method of exposition, we can distinguish his critical from his systematic dialectics. The former, which is also a practical intervention in history, takes the form of a triple critique - of economic doctrines, agents' conceptions, and the generative structures and essential relations which underly them; and it incorporates a (historicized) Kantian moment (first stressed by Max Adles), in which the historical conditions of validity and practical adequacy of the various categories, theories and forms under attack are meticulously situated. Marx's critical dialectics may perhaps best be regarded as an empirically open-ended, materially conditioned and historically circumscribed, dialectical phenomenology.

Marx's systematic dialectics begins in Capital I, ch. 1, with the dialectics of the commodity and culminates in Theories of Surplus Value with the critical history of political economy. Ultimately, for Marx, all the contradictions of capitalism derive from the structurally fundamental contradictions between the use-value and the value of the commodity, and between the concrete useful and abstract social aspects of the labour it embodies. These contradictions, together with the other structural and historical contradictions they ground (such as those between the forces and relations of production, the production and valorization process, wage-labour and capital etc.) are (i) real inclusive oppositions, in that the terms or poles of the contradictions existentially presuppose each other and (ii) internally related to a mystifying form of appearance. Such dialectical contradictions violate neither the principle of non-contradiction - for they may be consistently described; nor the law of gravity, for the notion of a real inverted (mis)-representation of a real object, generated by the object concerned is readily accommodated with a non-empiricist, stratified ontology, such as that to which Marx is committed (see CONTRADICTION). Marx conceives these fundamental structural contradictions as themselves a historical legacy of the separation of the immediate producers from (i) the means and materials of production, (ii)
each other, and hence (iii) the nexus of social relations within which their action on (and reaction to) nature takes place. It is undeniable that there is more than a trace here of a modified Schillerian schema of history as a dialectic of original undifferentiated unity, fragmentation, and restored but differentiated unity. Thus Marx says: 'It is not the unity of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature, which demands explanation, or is the result of a historical process, but rather their separation from these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence, a separation which is completely posited only in the relation of wage-labour and capital.' (Grundrisse, 'Chapter on Capital', Notebook V). He may have regarded this as empirically established. But in any event it would be unduly restrictive to proscribe such a conception from science: it may, for instance, function as a metaphysical heuristic, or as the hardcore of a developing research programme with empirical implications, without being directly testable itself.

It is not Marx's so-called 'dialectical' definitions or deviations, but his dialectical explanations, in which opposing forces, tendencies or principles are explained in terms of a common causal condition of existence, and critiques, in which inadequate theories, phenomena etc. are explained in terms of their historical conditions, which are distinctive. Why does Marx's critique of political economy take the apparent form of an Aufführung (sublation)? A new theory will always set out to save most of the phenomena successfully explained by the theories it is seeking to supersede. But in saving the phenomena theoretically Marx radically transforms their descriptions, and in locating the phenomena in a new critical-explanatory ambit, he contributes to the process of their practical transformation. Is Marx indebted, in his critical or systematic dialectics, to Hegel's conception of reality? The three keys to Hegel's ontology are (1) realized idealism, (2) spiritual monism and (3) immanent teleology. In opposition to (1), Marx rejects both the Hegelian absolute and the figure of constellational identity, conceiving matter and being as irreducible to (alienations of) spirit and thought; against (2), Althusser has correctly argued that differentiation and complexity are essential for Marx, and Della Volpe has rightly stressed that his totalities are subject to empirical, not speculative, confirmation; as for (3), Marx's emphasis is on causal, not conceptual, necessity — teleology is limited to human praxis and its appearance elsewhere 'rationally explained' (see Marx to Lassalle, 16 January 1861). Most important of all, for Marx initiating a science of history, ontological stratification and becoming are irreducible, whereas in Hegel, where they are treated in the logical spheres of Essence and Being, they are dissolved into actuality and infinity respectively (and thence into the self-explanatory realm of the Notion). In all philosophically significant respects, Marx's ontology is as much at variance with Hegel's as it is with that of the atomistic empiricism, which is the target of Engels's later philosophical works, which Marx in his youthful critique had shown that Hegelian idealism tacitly presupposes.

The three most common positions on dialectics are that it is nonsense (e.g. Bernstein), that it is universally applicable, and that it is applicable to the conceptual and/or social, but not the natural, domain (e.g. Lukács). Engels stamped his immense authority on the second, universalist, position. According to him, dialectics is 'the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought' (Anti-Dühring, pt. I, ch. 13); laws which can be 'reduced in the main to three' (Dialectics of Nature, 'Dialectics'). (1) the transformation of quantity into quality and vice-versa; (2) the interpenetration of opposites, and (3) the negation of the negation. There are ambiguities in Engels's discussion: it is unclear whether the laws are supposed to be more or less a priori truths or super-empirical generalizations; or indispensable for scientific practice or merely convenient expository devices. Besides the notorious arbitrariness of Engels's examples, the relevance of his dialectics for Marxism, conceived as a putative social science, may be questioned, especially as Engels is opposed to
any reductive materialism. While the evidence indicates that Marx agreed with the general thrust of Engels's intervention, his own critique of political economy neither presupposes nor entails any dialectics of nature, and his critique of apriorism implies the a posteriori and subject-specific character of claims about the existence of dialectical or other types of processes in reality. The relations between the Marxian, Engelsian and Hegelian positions can be represented as follows:

1. Dialectical contradictions in reality
2. Universal
3. Empirical generalization
4. Specific (e.g. to capitalism)

Hegelian positions can be represented as (social forms presuppose natural forms, but follows: not the reverse); so that any epistemological

The very supposition of a dialectics of nature has appeared to many critics, from Lukács to Sartre, as categorically mistaken, in as much as it involves anthropomorphically (and hence idealistically) reprojecting onto nature categories, such as contradiction and negation, which only make sense in the human realm. These critics do not deny that natural science, as part of the socio-historical world, may be dialectical; what is at issue is whether there can be a dialectics of nature per se. Patently there are differences between the natural and social spheres. But are these specific differences more or less important than their generic similarities? In effect the problem of the dialectics of nature reduces to a variant of the general problem of naturalism, with the way it is resolved depending upon whether dialectics is conceived sufficiently broadly and society sufficiently naturalistically to make its extension to nature plausible. Even then one should not expect a unitary answer – there may be dialectical polarities and inclusive oppositions in nature, but not dialectical intelligibility or reason.

Some apologists for Engels (e.g. P. Ruben) have argued that (1) the epistemic interrogation of nature by man and (2) man’s historical emergence from nature presupposes Schellingian ‘points of indifference’ (or dialectical identity) to sustain the intelligibility of the ‘transcategorial’ links. Yet both epistemic homogeneization or equating (in measurement or experiment) and historical emergence (in evolution) presuppose the praxis-independence of the relevant natural poles. Any dialectical relation between humanity and nature takes the un-Hegelian aspect of an asymmetrically internal relation (social forms presuppose natural forms, but not the reverse); so that any epistemological

In the short run the paradoxical outcome of Engels’s intervention was a tendency, in the evolutionist Marxism of the Second International, to a hypernaturalism and monism in many respects comparable to the positivism of Haeckel, Dühring et al. that Engels had been consciously opposing. But in the longer run certain formal consequences of Engels’s appropriation of the Hegelian dialectic (in which reflectionism acted as an epistemic surrogate for the principle of identity, and a processual world-view underpinned a homology of form) asserted themselves: the absolutization or dogmatic closure of Marxist knowledge, the dissolution of science into philosophy, even the transfiguration of the status quo (in the reconciling Ansicht of Soviet Marxism).

If Engels had unwittingly established the naturalized process of history as a ‘new absolute’, Lukács attempted to show that the goal of history was the true realization of that very absolute which Hegel had vainly sought in contemplative philosophy, but which Marx had finally found in political economy: in his discovery of the destiny and role of the proletariat as the identical subject-object of...
history. In both Engels and Lukács 'history' was effectively emptied of substance – in Engels, by being 'objectivistically' interpreted in terms of the categories of a universal process; in Lukács, by being 'subjectivistically' conceived as so many mediations or moments of a finalizing unconditioned act of self-realization, which was its logical ground.

Despite these original flaws, both the dialectical materialist and Western Marxist traditions have produced some notable dialectical figures. Within Western Marxism, besides Lukács's own dialectic of historical self-consciousness or subject-object dialectics, there are Gramsci's theory/practice, Marcuse's essence/existence and Colletti's appearance/reality contradictions, all of more or less directly Hegelian provenance.

In Benjamin dialectic represents the discontinuous and catastrophic aspect of history; in Bloch it is conceived as objective fantasy; in Lefebvre it signifies the goal of de-alienated man. Among the more anti-Hegelian Western Marxists (including Colletti), the Della Volpean dialectic consists essentially in non-rigid, non-hypostatized thinking, while the Althusserian dialectic stands for the complexity, pre-formation and overdetermination of wholes. Poised between the two camps, Adorno emphasizes, on the one hand, the immanence of all criticism and, on the other, non-identity thinking.

Meanwhile, within the dialectical materialist tradition, Engels's third law was unceremoniously dropped by Stalin and the first law relegated by Mao Tse-tung to a special case of the second, which from Lenin onwards increasingly discharged most of the burden of the dialectic. Certainly there were good materialist credentials (as well as political motives) for these moves. The negation of the negation is the means whereby Hegel dissolves determinate being into infinity. On the other hand, as Godelier has pointed out, dialectical materialists have rarely appreciated the differences between the Marxian unity and the Hegelian identity of opposites. Within this tradition Mao is noteworthy for a potentially fruitful series of distinctions – between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions, principal and secondary contradictions, the principal and secondary aspects of a contradiction etc. – and for stressing, like Lenin and Trotsky, the 'combined and uneven' nature of their development.

In its long and complex history five basic threads of meaning of dialectic, each of which is more or less transformed within Marxism, stand out. (1) From Heraclitus, dialectical contradictions, involving inclusive oppositions or conflicts of forces of non-independent origins, are identified by Marx as constitutive of capitalism and its mode of production. (2) From Socrates, the elenchus or dialectical argument is on the one hand transformed under the sign of the class struggle, but on the other continues to function in some Marxist thought as, under 'ideal conditions' (in Gramsci, a communist society; in Habermas, an 'unconstrained consensus') a norm of truth. (3) From Plato, dialectical reason takes on a range of connotations from conceptual flexibility and novelty – of the sort which, subject to empirical, logical and contextural controls, plays a crucial role in scientific discovery and development – through enlightenment and demystification (Kantian critique) to the depth rationality of materially grounded and conditioned practices of collective self-emancipation. (4) From Plotinus to Schiller, dialectical process of original unity, historical diremption and differentiated unity, remains, on the one hand, as the counterfactual limits or poles implied by Marx's systematic dialectics of the commodity form, and acts, on the other, as a spur in the practical struggle for socialism. (5) From Hegel, dialectical intelligibility is transformed in Marx to include both the causally generated presentation of social objects and their explanatory critique – in terms of their conditions of being, both those which are historically specific and praxis-dependent and those which genuinely are not. (See also DETERMINISM; KNOWLEDGE, THEORY OF; LOGIC.)

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gnostic and non-s, principal and the principal and introduction etc., in and Trotzky, of nature of their history five basic ctc, each of which I within Marxism, actius, dialectical inclusive oppo- rers of non-inde- ered by Marx as and its mode of tes, the eluents or in the one hand ign of the class her continues to thought as, under rso, a communist in 'unconstrained h. (3) From Plato, on a range of ual flexibility and which, subject to textual controls, stific discovery and mtement and critique) to the ally grounded and f collective self- loneliness to Schiller, al unity, historical ted unity, remains, interfactual limits marx's systematic ty form, and acts, t practical struggle Hegel, dialectical ed in Marx to usually generated objects and their n terms of their those which are un-dependent and are not. See also age, THEORY OF,

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dialectics of nature One of the most striking legacies of the prestige of nineteenth-century science was its influence on the Marxism of the Second International and on SOVIET MARXISM. Engels, in a series of polemical and exploratory ruminations on science and nature from the point of view of Marxism, attacked Dühring's 'revolution in science' in Anti-Dühring and made numerous notes and speculations on the Dialectics of Nature. These involved an attempt to integrate certain conceptions of historical materialism into the philosophy of nature—to show, in effect, that Marxism could formulate laws of nature and that a single ontology could embrace nature and humanity. Analytic tools which can be used to gain insight into natural and social processes were thereby reduced to dialectical laws. Engels appeared to be exploring the fit between nineteenth-century scientific findings, theories and debates on the one hand, and dialectical conceptions on the other; e.g., in his reflections on 'The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man'. Subsequent codifiers of this approach transformed it into a sclerotic form of MARXIST metaphysics which laid down the putative laws of being (see MARXISM, DEVELOPMENT OF). In particular, dialectics of nature offers three universal theorems: thesis — antithesis — synthesis, or 'negation of the negation' as the law of all development; the transformation of quantity into quality as an explanation of how evolutionary change becomes revolutionary change; the inter-penetration of opposites as a fundamental dialectical relationship (see DIALECTICS). As a philosophy of science dialectics of nature has found little favour in the West. In the Soviet Union, China and Eastern Europe it has been taken very seriously indeed, but it has the air of a catechism rather than a growing and deepening tradition (see PHILOSOPHY).

RMY

Reading

dictatorship of the proletariat This is a crucial concept in Marx's political thought, and also in Leninism. In a letter to J. Wedemeyer (5 March 1852) Marx denied that he had discovered classes or class struggles, but insisted that 'what I did that was new was to prove (1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular phases in the development of production; (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society...'

Nowhere, however, does Marx define precisely what he meant by the concept. In Class Struggles he speaks of revolutionary socialism and communism as involving the 'declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary intermediate point on the path towards the abolition of class differences in general...' (ch. 3); and in the Critique of the Gotha Programme he also said that 'between capitalist and communist society lies a period of revolutionary transformation from one to the other. There is a corresponding period of transition in the political sphere and in this period the state can only take the form of a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat' (sect. 4). But these and other references in Marx's writings to the dictatorship of the proletariat do not explain it any further.

There is, however, one major text of Marx which may be taken to constitute an