

A Comparison of Marxist and Hegelian Dialectical Form

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Introduction

Our aim in this paper is to exhibit the formal differences that distinguish the Marxist dialectic from its Hegelian predecessor. In sum, whereas in Hegel's system identity has primacy over contradiction and, what comes to the same thing, self-identity has primacy over mutability, Marxism reverses this bias and insists on the primacy of contradiction and mutability. This transition in form is to be seen as necessitated by the transition from an idealistically conceived to a materialistically conceived content. The point here, which we shall assume rather than argue, is that a true materialism, certainly a dialectical materialism, must take plurality, difference and change to be ultimately real, and must reject the idealist reduction to an ideal or essential unity underlying the appearances. Dialectical idealism marks itself as dialectical by modelling opposition and process as essential, but nevertheless it reduces them to the self-differentiation and self-development of a single ideal subject. Now, as a dialectical materialist might expect, the development of a new form has not been so quickly, and not everywhere so thoroughly carried through as the transition in content. It is for this reason that we believe this paper will prove useful. For the same reason it will not be surprising that the position we shall counterpose to that of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* will be based on a comparatively late Marxist text, Mao's essay *On Contradiction*.

I Hegel

Our plan is to bring out the characteristic form of the Hegelian dialectic as it appears in a single movement or pulse-beat of the method, and in the system as a whole.

The two most basic features of Hegel's philosophy of dialectical idealism are idealism and self-determination - self-determination being nothing but the essential feature and fully realised form of the dialectical process. It is a philosophy of the self-determination of the Idea, which process is thought to encompass and inform the whole of reality. Reality appears as the process of the Idea externalising and estranging itself as the objective world only to return to itself by realising itself in the objective

world and recognising the objective world as nothing but itself. This process is circular, but also progressive, for in traversing its circular path the at first merely abstract Idea creates itself as an objective being; indeed, an objective being that is at once fully subjective and conscious - a concrete subject. Having established the progression we must re-emphasise the circularity. In creating itself as an objective being the Idea progresses within an all-encompassing but self-enclosed circle, merely becoming explicitly what it already is implicitly. Moreover, the true subject of this progression is shown to be not the implicit but the explicit Idea, which as concrete subject creates itself by first positing itself in and then unfolding itself from its own abstract form. So in becoming an objective being the Idea becomes determinate, but it is determined not from without - which would render it finite and un-free - but from within, through the process of its own self-becoming or self-unfolding. The Idea is thus true infinitude and freedom, and reality is nothing but the self-determination of the Idea.

This is first spelled out in abstract terms in the first part of the *Encyclopaedia, the Logic*, which consists in an extended deduction of categories or pure concepts. The *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Philosophy of Spirit*, the later parts of the *Encyclopaedia*, continue to use the method developed and made use of in the *Logic*, but are concerned not with deducing further pure concepts, but with disclosing how the logical categories are expressed in the realm of actual concrete existence, in Nature and Spirit. The step from the abstract logic to the concrete existences of Nature and Spirit is seen as a deduction, as are the developments within Nature and Spirit.

The beginning of the whole progression, the first idea of the *Logic* - which is 'being' - is therefore linked through a series of steps, all regarded as deductions, with the final actual existence - an idea which as a concrete existence is termed 'Absolute Spirit'. To accept this progression as a series of deductions is to accept that the whole system is grounded in the first idea. Further, Hegel's specific deductive method is intended to make what is initially implicit at last explicit in such a way that the final idea contains and grounds the whole series of ideas from which it is itself deduced. Only in this way can the system be truly self-

grounding.

Hegel's deductive method differs from the more familiar 'mathematical' method in two basic respects. First, it is not axiomatic in the sense of beginning from concepts, propositions, laws, etc., which are themselves undeducible and thus prior to and outside the deductive system itself. Second, his method does not proceed purely in accordance with the law of non-contradiction as the basic principle of formal logic, but develops the rhythm of contradiction and resolution as the engine of its own dialectical logic.

Dialectical logic starts with a posited idea, the thesis, which leads to another idea precisely because, as it stands on its own so as to present a stable significance, it necessarily reveals that its meaning can only be grasped if another concept is brought into play. But this concept turns out to be its contradictory, and reason, unable to rest in such a contradiction, must entertain a third concept, a 'synthesis', in which the two opposite ideas are contained in a unity. This unity depends for its content on the continued opposition of the ideas it contains, and when it too is taken as a thesis reveals its own abstraction ('one-sidedness') of content. So the new thesis passes over to its own opposite in order to overcome its abstraction, and the whole process repeats itself until a synthetic category is reached which is fully concrete and contains all significance in itself. The succession of thesis and synthetic categories thrown up in this way is considered by Hegel to be a series of increasingly adequate definitions of what is, the Absolute or truly infinite, while the corresponding series of opposing or antithetic categories is taken to define reality as only finite.

However, the dialectical movement along the series of increasingly adequate determinations of what is, is conceived by Hegel to fall short in itself of infinitude and freedom. Each deduction is necessitated and in this way unfree, and while each deduction leaves behind some finite determination through a transition into and reflection with its opposite, it merely arrives at a new finite determination, which reveals itself as a more adequate but less than absolute definition of what is. 'Dialectical Thought', the ceaseless appearance and resolution of contradiction, must, for Hegel, be superseded by 'Speculative Thought'.

In 'Speculative Thought', the Absolute Idea is no longer conceived simply as one more finite determination albeit comparatively concrete, but as the unity of the whole system, and as a thought with itself as its own content. Of course, 'being', as Hegel conceives it, is just such a thought, but is devoid of concrete content. What Hegel intends is to show that everything that is in all its concreteness unfolds out of the emptiness of 'being' while remaining a thought, or a system of thought, which has only itself as its content. The Absolute Idea is thus supposed to encapsulate the whole system, freely taking up into itself all contradictions as its own development as a determinate being, while it in turn cannot conceivably be encapsulated or limited by something outside it. The Absolute Idea has the circularity of total self-consciousness, and as a totality whose only premise is that thought is - a premise which the Cartesian tradition accepts as self-validating - is absolutely and freely self-determining.

Hegel's dialectic thus has a creative, self-grounding character, which is exemplified in each single triad, and which, in a sense, contains the whole of Hegel's philosophy of the self-determining Idea. However, while each triadic movement of deduction more or less clearly exhibits the universal form of the dialectic, the immediate or directly given aspect of the deductions becomes richer as we progress from the abstract to the concrete.

At the most abstract level of the concepts of Being, the most characteristic aspect is the 'transition' or passing over of each concept into a different concept. This characteristic form is bound up with the content of Being, in which the major triad is Quality, Quantity, Measure. These categories signify the immediate reality accessible even to 'sense', which is seen as the most primitive form of thought. In both Quality and Quantity any given determination is shown to pass over with logical inevitability into a further determination, so that we must expect unlimited qualitative and quantitative wealth in reality. The two orders of Quantity and Quality are also shown to involve each other, in that a change in quantity beyond a certain point manifests itself as a change in quality which in turn gives way to a new quantitative development. For Hegel the endless progression inherent in these categories is the 'wrong' or spurious infinity, for it consists in the capacity of the mind to pass from any given finite determination to a further finite determination without ever coming to rest in an actual infinity. The characteristic movement of 'transition' which Engels (in *Dialectics of Nature*, article headed 'Dialectics') sums up as the law of Quantity into Quality and vice versa, concerns the succession of states in time, and is seen as a relatively poor expression of the dialectic.

In the Doctrine of Essence categories that are apparent to 'Understanding', the next highest form of thought, are dealt with. These categories involve a fundamental duality of the 'mediate' and the 'immediate', or of the essential and the apparent. The understanding insists on the rigid distinction between the opposed categories, but they are shown during the section to be totally inter-dependent, to have meaning only in terms of each other. They do not merely 'pass over' into each other, as do the categories of Being, they 'reflect' each other. The resulting dialectical identity of Essence and Appearance in Actuality may be conceived as a more fully realised identity than that of Quality and Quantity in Measure. And the richer dialectical process of this section gives rise to a law which is richer and more adequate to describe it - that of Interpenetration of Opposites.

In this second section understanding gives way before 'Dialectical Reason'. In the final section, the Doctrine of the Notion, Dialectical Reason develops into the highest form of thought, 'Speculative Reason', which is the realised 'truth' of all the lower forms. Hegel characterises the dialectical process of this section as follows:

The onward movement of the notion is no longer either a transition into, or a reflection on something else, but *Development*. For in the notion, the elements distinguished are without more ado at the same time declared to be identical with one another and with the whole, and the specific character of each is a free being of the whole notion.

[*Logic*, p.224]

The Idea does not merely pass over into or reflect on its opposite, thus seeming to be alienated in and determined by the other; it is clear from the beginning that in becoming its opposite the Idea as Subject is becoming only its own objective self so that through its opposite it is freely developing and determining itself. The Idea thus reveals itself as what is, the essence that appears. The resultant dialectical identity of the Idea, which in its fullest form is the Absolute Idea, is perfect self-identity, the 'true infinitude' of 'self-mediation'. The law to which this section gives rise, and which alone can bring out the fully realised character of the dialectical process, is Negation of the Negation.

Negation of the negation has a two-way teleological

movement which brings out how the Absolute Idea is not simply another idea, but encapsulates the whole system. To begin with, Being as the implicit Notion differentiates and negates itself as Essence only to negate this negation in realising and returning to itself as the explicit Notion or Absolute Idea. It is through this process that the Notion reveals and creates itself as a concrete or self-objectified subject, or as the truth that knows itself as the truth - 'for truth can only be where it makes itself its own result' [*Logic*, p.274]. By the same token, the concrete subject has deduced itself only through its own activity. It deduces itself in the form of the essence of thought, a deduction which reflects back on all previous deductions, determining them as the work of the very concrete subject that is being deduced. Every transitional and imperfect category is shown to be a mere aspect of the whole which the whole abstracts from itself and grants a provisional immediacy or independence, an immediacy which must display its inadequacy or finitude by setting itself aside and rendering explicit the infinite Notion that is implicit within it. The negation of the negation that moves from the preceding to the succeeding categories is itself taken up into a negation of the negation moving from the ultimate category to its predecessors. The earlier categories as apparent presuppositions and thus external limitations or negations of the Absolute Idea are in turn negated in the revelation that in reality they presuppose the Absolute Idea and are nothing but the moments of its self-unfolding. In sum, what is apparently a result declares itself to be the 'absolute prius' - it is the resultant truth that 'makes itself its own result'.

We are now in a position to sum up the dialectical method as it appears in a single movement or pulse-beat of the system, thus showing how, while the method is enriched and made explicit as the current unfolds, the whole method is implicit nevertheless even in the first triad of Being.

According to Hegel we have the transition of 'being' into 'nothing', and of both into 'becoming', the quantitative development of each term determining its supersession by a qualitatively new term. This onward movement also appears as the oscillation of reflection, the opposites 'being' and 'nothing' depending on each other and actually interpenetrating to sustain each other in the dialectical identity of 'becoming'. In sum, each concept by itself is shown to be inadequate and unstable in meaning - whether we think of it as a pure conception or as a definition or description of reality as a whole or in any part - and to require other concepts to be brought into play if we are to grasp its full significance. From the higher perspective of development or negation of the negation we see that the concept in thus setting itself aside and reflecting into another effects the uncovering of its own significance or 'truth'. Or, better still, the ultimate concept is exhibiting the structure and necessity of its own meaning and truth in the form of its abstracted elements with their logical connections. Thus the concept of 'becoming' differentiates itself into and reconstructs itself from the concepts of 'being' and 'nothing'. But this is really true and comprehensible only if seen as a moment in the self-development of the Absolute Idea, which as the real subject of the whole process is here starting to unfold its truth, beginning with the concept of 'being' as the pure form and barest characterization of its thought-activity.

We have seen how the deduction from abstract 'being' of the concrete existence of thought with itself as its content is identical with the self-determination of the Idea, and how Negation of the Negation most adequately shows the infinitude and freedom of the Absolute Idea. We may now consider

the progression of the system in its entirety as the overarching triad of Logic, Nature and Spirit, and how the moments of Hegel's dialectic determine, and are determined by the whole progression.

As we have seen, *the Logic* presents the Idea as a universal, or pure category. Nature further realises the Idea as a particular, and Spirit is the synthesis of the universal and particular in the Idea. Alternatively, the Logic presents the essence of the Idea, the Nature the outward appearance, and Spirit its actual existence as a concrete self-determining subject. Or again, the Logic presents the Idea as an immediately given subject, Nature is the estrangement of the Idea from itself, or its self-objectification, and Spirit is the return of the Idea to itself from estrangement, negating Nature as such, but affirming Nature as itself. In all these respects the transition from the Idea to Nature is dialectically necessary, although Hegel presents the transition to Nature and ultimately to Spirit as a free development of the Idea. Hegel, however, considers *the Logic* to have shown that the free development of the subject is the essence of objective logical transition. So he says:

... the Idea does not merely pass over into Life, or as finite cognition allow life to show in it: in its own absolute truth it resolves to let the moment of its particularity, or of the first characterization and other-being, the immediate idea, as its reflected image, go forth freely as Nature.

And Hegel adds,

We have now returned to the notion of the Idea with which we began. This return to the beginning is also an advance. We began with Being, abstract Being: where we now are we also have the Idea as Being: but this Idea which has Being is Nature.

[*Logic*, p.296]

The Idea in going forth freely into its otherness as Nature, goes forth into mediation, externality, alienation. It is the essence of Nature, but as Nature it ceases to exist as subject and as object of its own contemplation. The notions of Nature - and the same is true of the notions of Spirit - are developed in a sequence that parallels that of the Logic. The major triad of Nature is 'Mechanics', 'Physics', and 'Organics'. The first term of 'Mechanics' is totally abstract 'space'. The last term of 'Organics' is Man as free ego. This marks the return of Ideality, subjectivity, freedom, into the external necessity of Nature. It thus constitutes the transition from Nature, the Idea in its mediation or otherness, to Spirit, the Idea in its self-mediation or 'for-itself'.

The realm of the Spirit is the realm of human history, understood as the self-creation of the Idea in Nature. This is a gradual process of self-creation, a gradual process of return to self out of otherness. The major triad of Spirit is 'Subjective Spirit', 'Objective Spirit', and 'Absolute Spirit'. Subjective Spirit deals with the subjective side of human development. Here the more ideal expressions of human thought are deduced from the more sensuous, the several phases of thought and will accomplishing a progressive internalisation of the object, which presents itself as external and particular. The object is thus idealised, as the theoretical Idea confronts the given external world and attempts to conform itself to it, so as to arrive at 'the True'.

In Objective Spirit, the Idea in its free universality attempts to realise itself objectively in moral and social life, embodying itself in institutions such as the family and the state. Hence the 'Practical Idea' is progressively actualised as Spirit actively confronts the external world, and moulds it into conformity with itself so as to

achieve 'the Good'.

While Subjective Spirit expresses the universal implicit in the sensuous world of particular things in Nature, and Objective Mind realises the universal in the particular, forming rational human institutions, the objective world is still not fully identified with the subject, and remains somewhat external to it.

To overcome this contradiction the transition is made to Absolute Spirit wherein art, religion and philosophy are treated. In philosophy the Idea as Free Mind finally confronts an object which is adequate to it and does not limit it - itself. Free Mind realises that in both Theoretical and Practical Mind the subject, Spirit, conforms itself only to itself. The history of philosophy is presented as following a development that corresponds to that of *the Logic*; so, the first philosophy, that of the Eleatics, regards the Absolute as pure 'being', the first category of *the Logic*. It is only with the Hegelian system itself that the final philosophy comes into being. This is a philosophy which is in itself the Absolute Idea - as shown in *the Logic* - and contemplates the whole of objective reality as essentially nothing but the Absolute Idea - as the completed *Encyclopaedia* has now revealed.

Absolute Spirit, like the Logical Absolute Idea which it objectively realises, has the circularity of total self-consciousness. Thus Hegel says: 'The Eternal Idea, in full fruition of its essence, eternally sets itself to work, engenders and enjoys itself as absolute' [*Philosophy of Spirit*, p.315].

If we look again at the triad of Logic, Nature, Spirit, considering which aspects constitute a progression in time, a phenomenon, and which are essentially atemporal, we can remodel the whole system as the triad Logical Idea, (pre) History, Philosophical Idea, in which the first, the Logical Idea, sets out the logical necessity of the progression in History, and the last, the Philosophical Idea, reveals its purpose in the absolute self-determination of Spirit. From this standpoint, History appears enclosed like a kernel in two shells - the Logical Idea and the Philosophical Idea.

In any case, the major triad of the whole system, Logic, Nature, Spirit, conforms to the laws or general characteristics of the method generated and displayed in the Logic, where the whole presents itself in its abstract or implicit form. We will here set out the movements of Negation of the Negation from the standpoints of the Logical Idea and the Philosophical Idea respectively. The Logic as the implicit Idea, or the Idea in itself, puts itself forth as Nature, and thereby apparently loses sight of itself as concrete subjectivity. But Nature as the negation of the Idea is at once implicitly the Idea, and so develops by its own dialectic into the explicit Idea, which is Spirit. In Spirit as the unity of Nature and the Idea, the Idea rediscovers itself as concrete subjectivity, but now in actual existence, or in and for itself. It thus becomes evident - or rather, what had already become evident in the Logic and in its transition to Nature is actually unfolded - that the Logical Idea, which is essentially self-mediation or self-manifestation, puts itself forth in its otherness and negation as Nature only to negate that negation by actualising itself in and for itself as Spirit. However, this movement of Negation of the Negation represents the movement of Ideas as a process in time, from preceding to succeeding terms, which is ultimately only an 'appearance' or moment.

And in the same way, this first movement of Negation of the Negation represents the Idea and Nature as essence and appearance, with Spirit reflecting into the Logic on the one hand and Nature on the other as its apparently independent presuppositions.

We must therefore pass on to the second and superior movement of Negation of the Negation. The Idea of philosophy as the highest expression of Spirit realizes itself as the final cause and absolute prius of the whole development. It contemplates its abstracted essence in the Logic, which defines the Idea as dialectical process, or thought thinking itself. It traces its actual unfolding in Nature and Spirit, which reveal themselves as dialectical process, the self-creation of the Idea. On the one hand it sees itself to be the outcome and truth of an objective and necessary process, all preceding stages, in actuality as in Logic, having inevitably put themselves aside. On the other hand it knows this whole development as its free subjective activity, for as concrete subject it performs the extended deduction that reveals actual existence as the self-creation of its own philosophical Idea. It is itself just this process of self-exhibiting truth, and thus the earlier stages that are its presuppositions are taken up into itself as 'vanishing elements'. It negates itself by putting itself forth as these presuppositions only to negate that negation by revealing these presuppositions to be nothing but its free unfolding of its own truth. This revelation at once determines that the original negation is immediately the Negation of the Negation. And, by the same token, this second movement of Negation of the Negation absorbs the first movement of Negation of the Negation, which proceeds from the Logical Idea as the appearance of itself in time.

So, Hegel's whole philosophy can be summed up and expressed in terms of Negation of the Negation, or, equally well, of self-mediation, true infinitude, and so on. Hegel also conveys the movement of his dialectic in an apt metaphor: philosophy, and therefore reality, is a 'circle of circles' [*Logic*, p.20], a 'circle which closes with itself' [*ibid.*, p.23]. It is also true that, not only each component circle, but the all-encompassing circle, precisely in its completion, 'bursts' out beyond itself. But in becoming other it is becoming only itself - contradiction or mutability is secondary to, is no other than, identity or self-identity - so that the perpetual bursting out of the circle is at once, and more properly, its perpetual closing with itself.

II Marx and Mao

We want here to bring out the characteristics of the mature Marxist dialectic, at first in abstract terms, and then in a concrete example. We then look at how the 'unity of opposites' comes to displace the Hegelian 'Negation of the Negation' as the quint-essential moment of the dialectic.

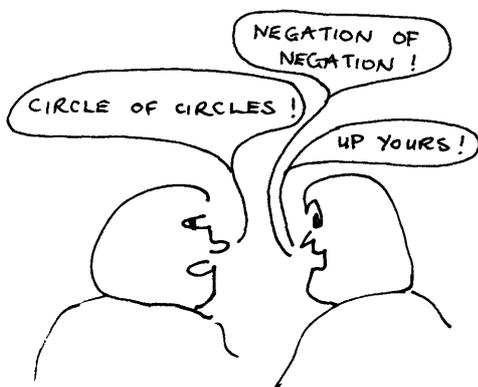
In the transition from the Hegelian to the mature Marxist dialectic, the initial step is from an ideal to a material content, from the Idea to (material) labour, from Spirit to Society, which in early Marx is conceived in its fruition as the union of humankind with nature in free, conscious self-determination.

As Marxism develops, it effects no radical alteration of the materialist content, although it does render it radically more concrete. However, the developing Marxism effects a radical change in dialectical form, and later in its formulation of the dialectical process. In terms of Hegel's metaphor of the circle, there is a change from an emphasis on the circle 'closing on itself', to an emphasis in mature Marxism on 'bursting-out' if the circle, which while completing, more fundamentally brings to dissolution one process and begins another. Whereas Hegel sees a 'circle of circles', that is, every 'bursting out' as in turn a circle enclosed in the all-embracing circle of the Absolute, mature Marxism sees an endless progression, a spiral movement (i.e. a 'bursting-

out' of a circle) which does not close on itself, but is open-ended.

By an emphasis on self-enclosure we mean, to begin with, the encompassing of all otherness within the subject that is supposed to ensure the true infinitude and freedom of the subject. Thus, in early Marxism, the conclusion of social 'prehistory', itself a part of nature and natural history, is Society brought to fruition, and this is after the Hegelian manner conceived as in turn encompassing (practically and theoretically) nature and natural history. In mature Marxism society is conceived as a part of natural history which does not in turn enclose natural history. Rather, it is stressed that, both historically and laterally, and in depth as well as in breadth, an endless progression of processes exists beyond human history - and for that matter any other particular process - and that therefore there must always be an infinity of processes beyond those that we have come to know in practice.

If, then, Hegelian idealism is ultimately a dialectical monism, in that all processes are ultimately taken up and grounded in the single process of Spirit, as a diversity within a unity, mature Marxism is ultimately a dialectical pluralism, where reality is seen as an interlocking whole of separate aspects or processes, as a unity within a diversity.



The Hegelian process is characterised by a distinctive kind of triad. The first term is mere or immediate identity, the subject-in-itself. The second term is mediation, the subject-for-itself, or confronted by otherness. The third term is mediated identity, the subject-in-and-for-itself, being and completing itself in and through otherness.

In mature Marxism the dialectical process may still be conceived as triadic, but the triad takes a form different from the Hegelian. Each process begins with a mutual transformation of opposites, develops through dialectical contradiction, and ends with a further mutual transformation of opposites. Alternatively, and more fundamentally, we can focus on the aspect of mutability by conceiving another triad spanning the transition from one process to another, a progression from dialectical contradiction, through a transformation of opposites, to a new dialectical contradiction. But whichever way we look at it, we have here neither an initial mere identity, nor a final self-mediated identity.

The point of transition from one process to another, the mutual transformation of opposites, might be thought to represent a transitory synthesis, or fusion of two into one, but this is not the case. This transitional moment constitutes a transitory dialectical contradiction - a dialectical contradiction of a special kind, characterised by a balance of opposing terms. So, the whole progression consists of nothing but dialectical contradiction, the qualitative transition from one particular dialectical contradiction to another taking effect through a special moment of dialectical contradiction, when opposing terms momentarily balance as they change

places from principal to subordinate, and thus precipitate the dissolution of the old contradiction and the emergence of a new.

We will now outline a single movement of the mature Marxist dialectic as presented by Mao Zedong, whose formulation is, as far as we know, the most correct and simple. After considering its application to the process of knowledge, we will then elaborate the contrast of the Marxist and Hegelian conceptions of the kernel of dialectics, and sum up the distinctive character of the Marxist conception.

For Hegel there is one all-encompassing dialectical process whose content and form may, indeed must, be expounded simultaneously. For Mao there is a multiplicity of processes, and the unique content of each determines its form. Nevertheless, we may abstract and generalise a certain universal form, although we must study individual processes if we are to flesh out this schema into particular models. Our exposition, then, begins with the universal form and goes on to the particular form of the epistemological process, as the unity of objective and subjective processes.

Mao sets forth the universal form of dialectical processes in *On Contradiction*. He defines dialectic as the 'law of the unity of opposites' (p.71), or as the law of dialectical contradiction. For Mao, *all* terms are opposed, although only in an abstract way. In certain cases, or 'in given conditions' (p.67), however, the opposition between two terms is also concrete, and this opposition contains a concrete identity or unity. It is this concrete unity of opposites that constitutes dialectical contradiction. (We are to understand that all terms exist in dialectical contradiction - no term could exist in and by itself, in mere identity - but any particular term is not necessarily in dialectical contradiction with any other particular term.)

The existence of a dialectical contradiction constitutes a 'thing', and its development constitutes a process. A process may (perhaps must) contain secondary contradictions alongside its 'principal contradiction', but this is only to say that it contains other processes. In the principal contradiction one of the two terms will constitute the 'principal aspect' of the contradiction. This principal aspect is the dominant term, and plays the major role in determining the character of the process.

The principal contradiction develops through the mutual interaction or 'struggle' of its terms. The terms are mutually exclusive opposites, but they only exist as such insofar as they mutually interact. Thus the struggle of mutually exclusive terms constitutes the unity of opposites, or dialectical contradiction. In that it consists of disequilibrium and struggle, the dialectical contradiction necessarily develops. This development culminates in the resolution of this struggle of the terms, and thus of the contradiction or process. But the resolution is essentially transitory, for a new contradiction or process necessarily arises to replace the old - 'the old unity with its constituent opposites yields to a new unity with its constituent opposites' (p.34).

The transition from the old contradiction or process to the new is basically characterizable as a mutual transformation of opposites. More properly, the moment of mutual transformation, the essence of which is that the secondary term of the initial contradiction gains primacy and reduces the principal term to secondary status, signals the point or phase of resolution and dissolution of the initial contradiction, and at once conditions, sometimes more or less directly constituting, the emergence of a new contradiction. In their concrete particularity the terms of the old contradiction will necessarily die out and those of the new will necessarily be novel. If the old and new contradictions constitute stages

of the development of an over-arching or ongoing process, however, then taken in their more universal, ongoing aspect, there will be a more or less direct continuity between the old and new terms, especially between the old secondary and the new principal term and between the old principal and the new secondary term. Whatever continuity there may be between the stages of its development, an ongoing process will itself also reach a point of dissolution, thus historically conditioning radically novel contradictions.

To illustrate this movement of the Marxist dialectic, in an example as close as possible to the central dialectic of Hegel's system, we may sketch the dialectic of a subject knowing an object, the identity of subject and object, or the epistemological-practical process, following more or less the position outlined by Mao in *On Practice*.

First we need to conceptualise exactly the subjective and objective processes whose interconnection is to be sketched. From the standpoint of materialism, the subjective process is itself (immediately) objective. Provisionally, the objectivity of the subjective may be viewed as consisting in the intersubjectivity of all the processes involved in knowledge, as well as in the fact that the knowledge process itself can be known in a natural epistemology.

The objective process in principle can be any natural process anywhere, anytime, but a process becomes properly *objective*, a reality-for-us, only when it is that to which some subjective activity is directed. The objective process is thus immediately subjective.

At the furthest limit of opposition or separation of the objective and subjective, the subjective process appears as the grasping of an abstract concept, which can even seem a product simply of imagination (Hume), or as *a priori* (Kant), and the objective process can appear as the matter of nature, which is seen in different ways as a 'beyond' in Magic or Religion. Considered from its extremities, the relation of objective and subjective processes appears as the dialectic of concept and object. However, object and concept are mediated by practice, so that their connection divides into two moments, one the relation of concept (theory) to practice, the other the relation of practice to the object.

If we are to comprehend the objective and subjective processes, not as they are 'in themselves', but in their interconnection, we may regard the subjective process as reaching out, as it were, to include the side of practice which relates it to the object, and vice versa with the objective process. The subjective process then appears as including the practice of learning and applying theory, and we may term it 'theoretical practice'. The objective process is seen as including the practice which transforms it, that is, it merges with, in essence, the labour process. (The labour process, or human industry, is the activity transforming nature, the objective world, into products necessary to life, and so is the focal point of the objective process insofar as it is subject to human activity.) The labour process includes perception considered as an activity compelling reality to affect the subject: 'If you want to know the taste of a pear you must change the pear by eating it yourself' (Mao, *Four Essays*, p.81). But perception as an object-transforming practice extends beyond the labour process proper, and must be separately conceived as an element of the objective process. Nevertheless, the centrality of the labour process to the transformation of the objective justifies our speaking of the labour process in most contexts as though it were coextensive with the objective process.

It is worth emphasising before we continue, that the shift we have gone through in modelling the dialectic of object and subject is an example of the

possible, and necessary, multiplicity of ways of modelling complex processes, which undergo internal development and articulation, and exist, not only in themselves, but in relation to other processes. Thus, from what is initially an apparently wider perspective on the dialectic of subject and object (reality-for-us), we arrive at a modelling close to the dialectic of theory and practice, knowing and doing, which is the object of Mao's discussion in *On Practice* and in a narrow sense, constitutes only one side, theory-practice, of the relation between the subjective and objective as a whole. Our modelling which focusses on theoretical practice and the labour process has both sides (i.e. theory-practice, practice-object) of the relation between subject and object explicit.

Now from our new perspective, practice appears in its two-sidedness, as having subjective and objective moments reflecting the determination of the objective by the subjective, and vice-versa. It is with the latter determination that the dialectic between an inadequate theoretical practice and a developing labour process commences. It is the labour process which sets the problem for theory to solve by moving (extensively or intensively) beyond its former limits, and by providing the means whereby theoretical practice may solve the problem of providing effective control over the labour process. Initially, the subject cannot fully develop and control the labour process, but in struggling to do so acquires perceptual experience.

As perceptual knowledge accumulates and is analysed a more-or-less adequate concept is formed in theoretical practice through which the labour process may be consciously directed. If the concept is initially less adequate, the process of accumulating perceptual experience continues until it culminates with an adequate concept of the object. Here the stage of quantitative change of theoretical practice and the labour process is succeeded by a process of qualitative change as the labour process comes under conscious control with respect to a given object. The determination of the subject by the object in perception gives way to the determination of the object by the subject in the application of conceptual knowledge. Object and subject change places, the object is adequately idealised, and the subject adequately realises its concept, and thereby establishes the at least provisional adequacy of its concept as a basis for further knowledge. The criterion of knowledge is not fulfilled, and the theoretical practice itself is not fully completed, until the concept is realised in the objective process, which is the very opposite of regarding, as do the empiricists and *a priori* rationalists, the adequate idealisation of the object as the criterion of knowledge.

At this stage, our model of a single movement of the epistemological-practical process exhibits, at least implicitly, the triadic pattern of dialectical contradiction, transformation of opposites, dialectical contradiction. The movement from object to concept necessarily includes as its secondary aspect the opposite movement from concept to object, and together these constitute the development of the contradiction between concept and object. The transformation of opposites occurs when theory guides the labour process on the basis of an adequate, established concept, and actualises the movement from concept to object as the principal aspect, with the opposite movement still present but now secondary. The resulting transformation of both the labour process and theoretical practice leads to a new contradiction, which we have suggested is usually a new epistemological problem set on the basis of the resolution of the old.

Our modelling, both in abstract and particular

terms, brings out clearly the unity of opposites, conceived as having two moments, mutual dependence and mutual transformation. Thus, without theoretical practice nothing could be an object of conscious activity, and without the objective process (in essence, without the labour process) there could be no theoretical practice. Moreover, theoretical practice and the labour process each in realising itself passes over into, becomes the other. The labour process thus emerges as the essence of the epistemological-practical process with theoretical practice as its reflection in the subjective. The unity of subject and object is thus asserted, in materialism, to be essentially objective.

If the Hegelian categories of Being, the law of transition of quantity into quality and vice-versa, and the Negation of the Negation are not immediately evident in our modelling of the Marxist dialectic, they are, nevertheless, present, although, as we shall see, with a different significance, and in the case of Negation of the Negation, with less than complete universality.

In Hegel, transition of quantity into quality and vice-versa establishes the cumulative evolution of the Idea, considered as having temporal existence. In mature Marxism, while the significance of the law must be different, it is somewhat similar nevertheless.

Quantity into quality is clearly already implicit in the unity of opposites in its two moments. The quantitative development of a contradiction, the existence and working out of the struggle between dependent terms, culminates in a qualitative leap to a new principal contradiction which then undergoes its own development. The terms of a contradiction reflect the same transition: each undergoes a quantitative development which leads to a qualitative transformation of its position, and a further quantitative change in that new position. Thus in our example, the quantitative development of theoretical practice as the subordinate aspect of the process leads to its becoming principal, and passing into a new (different) phase of quantitative change. The movement thus encompasses the gradual formation of a concept, the qualitative leap to a potentially adequate content, and then the gradual application and extension of the concept as it is used to master objective reality. However, the transition is not necessarily from less rich to more rich processes, and it exhibits regress as well as progress. In our example, the process does exhibit an overall cumulative evolution, in that ignorance becomes knowledge, and knowledge in turn opens the door to a new specific ignorance, revealing unknown and unappropriated nature as such in ever new instances. But, while the epistemological-practical process is not the sole instance of cumulative evolution, not all processes exhibit the same features.

If Quantity into Quality establishes the cumulatively evolutionary character of the Hegelian dialectic, Negation of the Negation, as the most definitive moment of Spirit, further establishes the transition as closing on itself so that it proves to be subjective and teleological.

It is important to emphasise that Negation of the Negation cannot have the same meaning in Marxism. In material processes the end is the beginning, not of itself and as its own purpose, but of a new and different process. We do not have an ultimate synthesis which unites subject and object in a concrete actualised subject. Opposed terms necessarily appear in a pair, as a dialectical contradiction, and necessarily give way to a further pair, a new contradiction. Thus the unity of subject and object is a process of metabolism between human beings and nature in which theoretical practice and the labour process are interconnected, interpenetrating but irreducibly

different, aspects. It is true that a particular process such as the epistemological-practical process has a somewhat subjective and teleological character, though even here it is seen as a succession of events in time (Hegel's 'wrong infinity') and the knowing and acting subject does not freely put itself forth as objective reality, but confronts it as primarily given and other.

Nevertheless, there is a limited exemplification of Negation of the Negation in the mature Marxist dialectic, which we can explain with our example. In the case of an ongoing process, such as the epistemological-practical process, we have seen how one dialectical movement initiates another essentially similar movement. The problem of ignorance in practice is resolved only to return to a (new) problem of ignorance in practice; each cycle of knowledge, mutual transformation of object and subject, gives way to a new cycle of knowledge, a new mutual transformation of object and subject, and so, from this standpoint constitutes a *repetition*. The ongoing epistemological-practical process exhibits an alternating opposition between theoretical practice and the labour process, with now one term dominant and the other secondary. Such repetition appears explicitly in an (apparently) exact reproduction of alternating contradictions, e.g. day-night; night-day; etc. This repetition is modelled in the Daoist form of the dialectic, which has a characteristic emphasis on mutual transformation of opposites: 'Misery, alas! is what happiness rests upon. Happiness, alas! is what misery is hidden in.... What is upright becomes again treacherous and what is good becomes again unpropitious' (*Lao Zi*). Through this emphasis it sets up a pattern of alternation, implying a cosmology of eternal recurrence. This kind of conception, dialectical but cyclical, is traditional in China, and seems to have influenced *On Contradiction*.



However, it must be emphasised that a series of processes, e.g. of cycles of knowledge, appears merely repetitious only because it is viewed as a series of stages constituting a more universal contradiction. Terms thus undergo a see-saw repetition only insofar as they are regarded more universally, as terms of an ongoing contradiction, which, however, must itself develop in stages with each, considered as a particular stage, in its own right constituting a novel process.

It is in affirming the evolutionary character of such ongoing processes that Negation of the Negation transcends Quantity into Quality, and secures a residual significance in the Marxist dialectical form. The ongoing terms of an ongoing process such as the epistemological-practical process are themselves necessarily developing, since they constitute a more universal contradiction that is itself inevitably characterised by disequilibrium and struggle, and in which one ongoing term, whether it appears in its particularity as the primary or secondary term of any stage, must constitute the initial primary ongoing determinant. This ongoing determinant may then be regarded as the 'subject' of Negation of the Negation.

In our example, the labour process initially appears as the principal ongoing aspect. Thus the labour process, as a given reality which sets objective problems, may be viewed as a thesis, the subsequent attainment of mastery and control by the subject over the labour process as the negation of an

objective problem and the re-emergence of the labour process as a given reality as the Negation of the Negation. There is another aspect to the ongoing process, knowing and acting humanity in theoretical practice, which equally, but secondarily from the standpoint of materialism, may be taken as the 'subject' of Negation of the Negation. Here ignorance is the negation of knowing and acting humanity, and the subsequent acquisition and use of knowledge the Negation of the Negation. Consequently, from the standpoint of materialism, the Hegelian subject appears as a mystified inversion of the real subject of the epistemological-practical process, the labour process.

The 'reaffirmation' of the labour process as objective in the Negation of the Negation is identical with the mode of production and reproduction of the labour process through its opposite. This self-production or reproduction is at the same time development and self-mutability. Ultimately, if it is not deflected from its path by external causes, the ongoing process will go through a transformation of opposites in which the objective labour process becomes secondary and the secondary aspect, knowing and acting humanity in theoretical practice, becomes principal. This Mao conceives as the character of achieved communism in which 'all mankind voluntarily and consciously changes itself and the world' (Mao, *Four Essays*, p.20).

However, this process, while evolutionary, is neither primarily subjective nor teleological. Human knowledge and capability are perpetually appearing as ignorance and impotence with respect to particular objective processes, and the knowledge growing successively greater with each successful solution of problems is the product and reflection of the objective labour process, not its prior condition and reason for existence.

In documenting the evolutionary path of ongoing, more universal processes, Negation of the Negation appears as a mere moment of the unity of opposites, specifically, as a direct consequence of the unity and struggle of *ongoing* terms in relation to particular stages of the ongoing process.

The Marxist unity of opposites thus inverts the truth of the Hegelian dialectical form. As subsumed under the Negation of the Negation, identity rather than opposition must be viewed as ultimately primary. With the Negation of the Negation itself subsumed, the Unity of Opposites reveals contradiction as ultimately primary. Mao concludes, on the basis of the primacy of contradiction, that self-identity is conditional, relative, secondary, whereas mutability is unconditional, absolute, primary.

There are, in fact, three aspects of disequilibrium in the Marxist dialectical movement. We have the primacy of one term over another in any contradiction, the primacy of contradiction over identity, and the primacy of mutability over self-identity. If we may imagine, for the sake of argument, an alternating repetitive process that is non-evolutionary - a process exhibiting the 'Daoist' form - it will be seen that such a process would exhibit equilibrium throughout. Its two aspects would be equal as ongoing determinants, so that the ongoing process would exhibit no developmental bias. The ongoing process would therefore be inherently sempiternal, capable of repeating itself endlessly. This means that the unity and opposition of the terms would be in equilibrium, as their continued unity in the form of the enduring process would be as unconditional as their continued struggle. And this is to say that

self-identity would be in equilibrium with its mutability, the perpetual transition to new contradictions being just as much the perpetual reproduction of old contradictions. Conversely, in the dialectical form established by Mao, there is disequilibrium throughout.

Hegel goes beyond the Daoist dialectic in recognising endless nonrepetitious becoming-other, but he subordinates the objective necessity of becoming-other, which he sees as the wrong infinite, to the subjective teleology of self-identity, seen as the true infinite. He recognises disequilibrium, but gives weight to the subjective and conservative aspect. It is only with mature Marxism that objective evolution becomes truly primary, truly absolute.

If the Hegelian form can be summed up in a single term, 'self-determination', Mao can still express the essence of the dialectical materialist outlook in the same or a similar term, e.g. 'self-movement'. For 'internal and necessary self-movement' (Mao, *Four Essays*, p.26) distinguishes the dialectical outlook as such from the metaphysical outlook, defined as a 'vulgar evolutionism' which recognizes development as quantitative increase and decrease only. Only the dialectical outlook, which grasps internal contradiction as the essence of each thing, can explain not only quantitative development but also qualitative transition, and thus account for otherness and becoming-other, or the existence of many different things and the changing of one thing into another. Now, the self-movement of the mature Marxist dialectic must of course be distinguished from the self-determination of the Hegelian dialectic - and this distinction will contain all the distinctions made in this part. But the fact that the mature Marxist dialectic is a self-movement at all does make it possible to assert that there is a kind of free subjectivity - that of dialectical contradiction itself - in all its processes, whether human or merely natural. In all cases, however, this subjective freedom is more properly understood as objective necessity.

Author's postscript

At the time of publication, Part II appears to us as provisional in that there are certain implications of the Marxist-Maoist dialectic which are not explored here and which point to further formulations that modify Mao's model in certain significant respects, but also as relatively final in that it elaborates the position of *On Contradiction* in such a way as to be compatible with all its important statements and at once correct, if in certain cases only by omission or ambiguity, from a further developed standpoint. We feel that if nothing else this exposition represents a properly formed and placed stepping-stone from which we, and hopefully others, can now begin to reach forward.

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References for Part II

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