

**To cite text:**

Dedić, Nikola (2023), "Towards a Theory of Theoretical Formations: From Althusser to Lenin", *Philosophy and Society* 34 (3): 399–423.

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## TOWARDS A THEORY OF THEORETICAL FORMATIONS: FROM ALTHUSSER TO LENIN

### ABSTRACT

In his theoretical efforts, Lenin made two excursions into philosophy – first in the book *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* and then in *Philosophical Notebooks*. There are obvious differences between these two works, which are reflected in the attitude towards Hegel (first rejection and then enthusiasm and acceptance of Hegel's dialectical method), but also significant similarities. The paper points out that what links Lenin's two books is the concept of theoretical formation. We derive the term theoretical formation from Lenin's concept of socio-economic formation: in every society, a large number of modes of production coexist, which are overdetermined by one mode as dominant. Society is thus not a complete and rounded form, but a contradictory overdetermined formation. The main thesis of the paper is that Lenin applies the concept of overdetermined formation to the reading of philosophy. Philosophical discourse is never whole but is split between two irreconcilable tendencies – materialism and idealism. Philosophical work is nothing but a struggle for the theoretical dominance of one tendency over another. This struggle between philosophical tendencies is, as Louis Althusser points out, an extension of the class struggle in theory and takes place both in the entire history of philosophy and within each individual philosophical text. The philosophical text is thus a contradictory formation of unequal and combined development.

### KEYWORDS

Lenin, Althusser, Hegel, dialectical materialism, socio-economic formation, theoretical formation, unequal and combined development, contradiction

### From the Concept of Social to the Concept of Theoretical Formation

The unity of Marxist science – historical materialism and Marxist philosophy – dialectical materialism is the guiding idea of the entire theoretical work of the French philosopher Louis Althusser. Historical materialism is the science of history, that is, of historically specific modes of production. By the mode of production, Marx meant the combination of production forces and relations of production in which relations of production are in dominant position.



Production forces concern the degree of technological development in the interaction of man and nature, i.e. transformation of nature through labor; the concept of relations of production implies the modalities of appropriating surplus labor, and as such it does not concern the relationship between people and nature but the relationship between people, i.e. different social groups, that is, classes. Marx hinted at the possibility of the existence of many modes of production in human history, and in different types of human societies – he mentioned modes from primitive communism, through Asian, slave-owning, feudal, to capitalist and developed communist modes of production, but he elaborated exclusively the theory of the capitalist mode of production. In any case, according to Althusser, historical materialism, as a scientific theory of different modes of production, imposes itself as a theory of history, that is, as a theory of a certain type of totality, which we otherwise call the social formation. Society is a totality in the sense that each social formation consists of a combination of many relatively autonomous instances or levels such as the economic base, the political-legal superstructure, and the ideological superstructure (Althusser 1990: 6). Theory of history, i.e. historical materialism is the science of the specific nature of this totality, i.e. the science of how certain relatively autonomous instances are bound and determined in the last instance by the dominant mode of production.

Another aspect of Marxist theory is Marxist philosophy, that is, dialectical materialism. Dialectical materialism is not identical with historical materialism since they do not share the same theoretical object: historical materialism is the theory of modes of production, dialectical materialism is the theory of knowledge (Althusser 1990: 8). This is a problem that is traditionally also dealt with by non-Marxist philosophy. However, Althusser claims, while traditional philosophy approaches knowledge from an atemporal and formal angle, i.e. as a theory of the *cogito* (Descartes, Husserl), as a theory of *a priori* forms of the human mind (Kant) or as a theory of absolute knowledge (Hegel), from Marx's point of view, philosophy can only be a theory of the history of knowledge, i.e. a theory of conditions (either external, i.e. material and social, or internal, i.e. conditions specific to philosophical or scientific practice as such) on which the knowledge production process rests. Marxist philosophy thus deals with the demarcation between scientific knowledge and ideological practice. Like any other science, Marxist philosophy also consists, according to Althusser, of theory and method. The theory of Marxist philosophy is materialism (a doctrine that rests on theses about the distinction between the real object and knowledge, and the primacy of the real object over knowledge, the primacy of being, i.e. phenomena in relation to thinking), the method of this philosophy is dialectic (dialectic concerns the relationship between theory and object where this is not a relationship between two separate entities, but a relationship of mutual transformation and thus a relationship of production). Both materialism and dialectic are the ancient heritage of philosophy, but what separates dialectical materialism from traditional philosophy is that its materialism is dialectical, and that its dialectic is materialistic (9).

Precisely in his attempt to build the unity of historical and dialectical materialism, Althusser kept returning to the work of Lenin. Namely, Lenin was the only one in his generation of Marxist authors (i.e. authors from the era of the Second International) (Anderson 1985) to make an excursion into philosophy – first in his early book *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* and then in his own notes, unpublished during his lifetime, which were published after his death under the title *Philosophical Notebooks*. The main concept that Althusser takes from Lenin is that of social formation. The place where Lenin originally, even before his two philosophical books, articulated his thesis on social formations is his book *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Lenin 1977, vol. 3). It is originally a historical materialistic, scientific and not philosophical work. Nevertheless, in spite of that, Althusser also sees in it the elements of a philosophical theory: in Lenin's concept of social formation there is already a philosophy in its still rudimentary state, a philosophy that has not yet appeared in the form of a philosophical system, but in the form of a philosophical practice. Lenin's *The Development* thus stands in continuity with his explicit excursions into philosophy, which he realized in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* and *Philosophical Notebooks*. If we start from the assumption that dialectical materialism is a theory of knowledge, two elements of this dialectical materialism can be recognized in Lenin's book, according to Althusser: the first is the thesis about the dominance of the abstract over the concrete in philosophical and scientific knowledge; the second is the thesis about unequal and combined development of philosophical and scientific knowledge.

Let's start from the difference between Marx's *Capital* and *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, from Althusser's perspective: while the subject of Marx's book is the mode of production, the subject of Lenin's book is a certain social formation. Althusser's approach to Lenin constantly emphasizes that distinction – while *Capital* belongs to the abstract-formal level of analysis, *The Development* belongs to the real-concrete level. With that distinction, Lenin already emphasizes a fundamentally philosophical thesis concerning dialectical materialism (fully developed not in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* but in *Philosophical Notebooks*): in Marxist theory, the abstract-formal plane always prevails over the real-concrete.<sup>1</sup> The primacy of the abstract over the concrete leads to the conclusion that only theoretical discourse provides knowledge about the empirical object. This is the basic distinction that separates dialectical materialism from other systems of knowledge – empiricism as a form of vulgar materialism starts from an object, a phenomenon, where

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1 As we will show later, Althusser treats the dominance of the abstract over the concrete as the basis of dialectical materialism, but at the same time he considers this to be a feature of all scientific knowledge. The inability of scientists to base their scientific practice on the principles of this relationship indicates the penetration of ideology into the given scientific practice (for example, penetration of empiricist ideology). This is precisely why the intervention of dialectical materialism in scientific practice ensures the scientific basis of this practice. Althusser marks this intervention as an epistemological break that marks the separation of science from ideology.

knowledge, that is, consciousness functions as an ‘image’ of the real object; on the other hand, idealism denies the possibility of a final insight into the real object (Kant’s thing-in-itself), i.e. a real object is a product of consciousness. Dialectical materialism does not deny the existence of phenomena, nor does it deny the decisive importance of consciousness, but it believes that consciousness, i.e. concept, i.e. theory are necessary in order to gain insight into the real object: knowledge is always knowledge about a concrete object, but this knowledge is always the result of the process of knowledge production (Althusser 1990: 47). Lenin’s book thus works, like every work of historical materialism, with two elements of knowledge: a theoretical concept, on the one hand, and an empirical concept, on the other. The theoretical concept is the already mentioned abstract-formal determination of the object, while the empirical concept is the singularity of the concrete object. These are exactly the two levels of analysis that Lenin works with in his analysis of Russia at the end of 19th century: the mode of production is a theoretical concept developed by Marx in *Capital*, while the social formation is a complex, space- and time-specific combination of different modes of production that are only overdetermined by the capitalist mode as the dominant mode of production.<sup>2</sup> In that way, social formation is an empirical concept. Neither the theoretical nor the empirical concept are simply given *a priori*, as empiricism thinks – the empirical concept (the social formation of Russia) was produced by the intervention of the theoretical concept (Marx’s mode of production) (48). The relationship between theoretical and empirical concepts is not a relationship of exteriority, deduction or substitution, quite the opposite – knowledge is a synthesis of theoretical and empirical concept.<sup>3</sup> The combination of these two is a unique feature of Marxism. Abstract-formal discourse is a theory in the strong sense of the word, and its importance lies in the fact that it enables a real-concrete object to be visible. This actually means that, even in real-concrete works of Marxist analysis such as Lenin’s *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, the general principles are actually always theoretical (abstract). Theoretical labor is necessary to understand concrete objects, i.e. theoretical

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2 For example, in a capitalistic social formation, the capitalist form of production supersedes other forms of production such as, for example, small-scale artisanal or small-scale agricultural production, i.e. small commodity production. Lenin showed this on the example of Russia in the 19th century: in the complex social formation that Russia was at that time, feudal production, petty peasant (i.e. small commodity) production, and capitalist industrial production existed in parallel, but these modes of production were superordinated by the capitalist mode as dominant mode of production.

3 It should be emphasized that the relationship between theoretical and empirical in this case is not a relationship of simple deduction. Rather, it could be said that the relationship between the theoretical and the empirical is a dialectical relationship, which actually means that the two planes are interconnected, that there is a constant transition from one plane to another, and that knowledge represents a dialectical unity of opposites - a concept and a real object. We elaborate on this in the last section of this essay, where we discuss Lenin’s reading of Hegel’s *Logic*.

labor, i.e. the production of theory is a condition for translating Kant's 'thing-in-itself' into a 'thing-for-us', i.e. a condition for our knowledge of the world.

On the other hand, even when the work of dialectical materialism enables insight into the ways in which knowledge about the world is constituted, this does not mean that this knowledge about the world, and about concrete empirical objects that make up this world, is guaranteed in advance. What we always see in front of us are mostly real-concrete objects and not formal-abstract objects. The theoretical object (i.e. theoretic concept) can thus very easily be reduced and destroyed by the penetration of common sense 'obvious facts', i.e. by the penetration of spontaneous everyday ideology or more precisely – empiricist ideology. Ideology, in the form of empiricism, humanism or in the form of some other idealistic and spontaneous doctrine, constantly threatens to destroy the theoretical object. Precisely because of this, the task of dialectical materialism is to continuously fight against the influence of ideology in scientific knowledge and, through theoretical labor, to highlight the specific materialistic aspects of Marx's system and eliminate the idealistic aspects that are foreign to his system. This is precisely the method that Marx himself implemented: he started from various idealistic, philosophical ideologies such as the one about the authentic essence of man and his nature, and the alienation of this essence; as Althusser points out, by conducting a self-criticism of his own theoretical system, Marx realized a kind of epistemological break in his youthful system in which idealism still dominated over materialism, and thus he succeeded, by inventing the concept of the mode of production, to build the materialistic element as a dominant, hegemonic element in his system. This actually shows that no philosophical or scientific system is an absolutely pure system: in every system there are both materialistic and idealistic elements. The essence of knowledge production is the struggle against idealism in order to establish the materialistic element as the dominant element within the theoretical system. That, among other things, is the essence of the thesis about unequal and combined development that Lenin elaborates in his *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*: in a certain social formation there are multiple modes of production that are overdetermined by one mode as dominant, just as there are multiple ideologies where one dominates as hegemon. The revolution is only the initial, necessary step in order to transform a given social formation. The revolution must be followed by a long struggle in the sphere of politics and ideology in order to establish and consolidate a new society. In that way, a new ideology (communist) would become hegemonic in a new type of social formation while elements of the old order continue to exist and operate. These elements constantly threaten to overthrow the revolution and implement a counter-revolutionary restoration. It is similar in the domain of theory: after Marx established a theoretical revolution, a long and persistent theoretical work is necessary, i.e. the fight against idealism that still exists even in Marxist theoretical discourse is needed, in order for materialism to maintain a permanently dominant position within theory. Theoretical labor is a struggle (Kant's *Kampfplatz*) between different theoretical tendencies

that strive to establish a hegemonic position within theory. This points to the fact that theory is never a neutral field, nor is it a harmonious, rounded and complete *form*; on the contrary, theory is a contradictory *formation* in which the struggle for hegemony is constantly taking place. In other words, a theory, just like Lenin's social formation, is actually a formation of unequal and combined development.

### Specifics of Philosophical Theoretical Formation

In this way, the central contribution of Lenin in constituting dialectical materialism as a Marxist philosophy, i.e. theory of knowledge, more precisely the theory of conditions, both exogenous (material, social) and endogenous, for the constitution of knowledge, is that he showed that knowledge is never complete, rounded, but that this knowledge, like any social formation, is imbued with internal contradictions. That means that knowledge is not a *form* but a *formation*. However, it should be determined what the difference is between two types of theoretical formations – philosophy (i.e. philosophical theoretical formation), on the one hand, and science (i.e. scientific theoretical formation), on the other. In mapping this difference, we particularly rely on Lenin's early excursion into philosophy, which he made in his book *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* (Althusser 1971: 23–70). According to Lenin, the characteristic of philosophy is that, unlike science, it has neither object nor history; philosophy is the theoretical practice of drawing the dividing line, the difference between the two traditions that constitute philosophy as a formation since its inception – idealism and materialism.

Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* is a polemical book, conceived as a critique of idealistic revisions within Marxist philosophy, which came at the beginning of the 20th century mainly under the influence of the Austrian physicist and philosopher Ernst Mach (Lenin 1977, vol. 14). The central argument of the book is directed above all against Alexander Bogdanov, at that time an important protagonist of the Bolshevik party who, under the influence of Mach, published in 1904–06 his central work *Empiriomonism*. Lenin's intervention thus concerns the criticism of deviations within Marxist theory – his key argument is that Machists, that is, empirio-critics, under the influence of neo-Kantianism, destroy the materialist core of Marx's thought. Lenin singles out Kant's concept of 'thing-in-itself' as a key concept in his argument: empirio-critics basically accuse materialists of believing in a thing-in-itself, that is, in the possibility of discussing matter outside of human experience. Precisely at the point of the question about the thing-in-itself, Lenin points out that the entire philosophy can be divided into two camps: materialism is a tradition whose advocates claim that phenomena (the thing-in-itself) exist outside of human thought, consciousness and experience, and that despite this, phenomena, through the scientific process, can be known (objects exist outside the mind, ideas are a reflection of objects). Idealism is a philosophical tradition that believes that 'pure' phenomena can never be reached, and that there

is a fundamental split between things-in-themselves and our representations, that is, our awareness of things; therefore, what science works with are not things-in-themselves, phenomena as such, but constructions of our consciousness. For idealists, what we refer to as ‘things’ are entities that are structured in our experience through sets of ideas and, therefore, one cannot talk about the absolute existence of things independently of someone perceiving them (objects do not exist outside the mind). Lenin speaks in the name of defending materialism and addresses empirio-critics as disguised Kantian idealists with two significant remarks concerning the status of knowledge: firstly, idealism is a form of solipsism and, secondly, idealism is a form of skepticism. Namely, if my consciousness, as the empirio-critics claim, is the absolute source for knowing the world, then there can be nothing else but I/Myself (42–43). Since the whole world is my representation, one cannot come to the existence of other people but oneself; if in our feelings and sensations we perceive the constructions of our consciousness, therefore we cannot feel anything other than our feelings – the world consists only of my feelings and sensations. This is the solipsistic trap of empirio-criticism. The ultimate consequence of this is doubt about the possibility of knowledge: materialism is a true theory of knowledge since materialists start from the thesis that external sensations turn into facts of consciousness; through this, materialists come to know about the phenomenon that is the cause of sensation. Contrary to this, for idealists, sensations are not a connection with the world, but a kind of partition, a wall from the world (49). If consciousness is not a connection with the world but a kind of barrier, if there are no phenomena but only our constructions about phenomena, how is it possible to gain knowledge about the world?<sup>4</sup> Idealism is thus nothing more than a form of scientific skepticism. Lenin’s philosophical intervention thus consists in demarcating materialism and idealism as decisively as possible by emphasizing the theoretical superiority of materialism. In other words, Marxism must rid itself of all remnants of idealistic, neo-Kantian solipsistic doctrine and fully build a materialistic worldview.

Lenin, therefore, conceives Marxist philosophy, that is, dialectical materialism as a philosophical practice based on drawing the line of demarcation between materialism and all forms of idealism. Althusser will draw far-reaching theoretical consequences from this thesis. The first is the claim that philosophy is not a science. The basic difference between philosophy and science lies in the fact that philosophy does not have an object, that is, it does not rest

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4 As an idealist who accepted the possibility of science and scientific progress, Kant was aware of this contradiction, that is, of the skeptical danger behind idealistic philosophical systems. In order to resolve this contradiction, Kant introduced the concept of transcendental subjectivity in his *Critique of Pure Mind*, which he used to denote access to knowledge that goes beyond pure sensory experience. This is precisely why Lenin marks Kant as an agnostic regarding real objects – Kant does not deny the possibility of the existence of a material object, but doubts the possibility of ‘pure’ knowledge regarding the existence of this object. We will return to this issue in the final section of this essay.

on the aforementioned synthesis between theoretical and empirical concept. Unlike science, philosophy is the practice of constructing concepts without their empirical object, which can also be labeled as philosophical theses or propositions. A philosophical thesis, that is, a proposition cannot be true or false, it can only be correct or incorrect; as such, it cannot be demonstrated in a strictly scientific way or proven in a scientific way (Althusser 1990: 74). This is precisely why philosophy does not have a scientific object, but only 'objects' that are inherent to philosophy as such: we are talking about philosophical objects. Philosophy constructs these philosophical objects because it consists of words that are organized into the already mentioned philosophical theses; these theses are interconnected in larger and organized systems. It is precisely in this sense that philosophy is practice – the category of truth is attached to an empirical object and as such it belongs to the order of science; the category of correctness is linked to philosophical objects and as such belongs to the order of (philosophical) practice. Philosophical theses or propositions have always had the potential to cause various 'critical' distinctions within philosophy as a system: their function is to separate ideas (theses, propositions and even entire philosophical systems) from one another. In this sense, the practice of philosophy consists in that philosophy divides and traces the lines of division and makes these lines of division visible (75).

From the fact that philosophy does not have its object in the way that science has it, it follows that philosophy does not have a history either, at least not the kind that science has. Since science has an object, it can progressively move forward with regard to the knowledge of that object – for example, it can develop new methodologies, new experimental procedures (techniques) that lead to new knowledge about the object, etc. This progressive movement in relation to the object gives science its history. Contrary to this, since philosophy is only a set of propositions without object which are organized into a system, its only practice can be an intervention in the theoretical domain of philosophy itself. It actually means only the struggle of one set of propositions, that is, a philosophical system against another philosophical system, that is, the struggle of one philosophical tendency against another. And two, not dominant, but the only philosophical tendencies are idealism and materialism. Lenin thus in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*,

jettisons all the theoretical nuances, distinctions, ingenuities and subtleties with which philosophy tries to think its 'object': they are nothing but sophistries, hair-splitting, professorial quibbles, accommodations and compromises whose only aim is to mask what is really at stake in the dispute to which all philosophy is committed: the basic struggle between the tendencies of materialism and idealism. There is no third way, no half-measure, no bastard position, any more than there is in politics. Basically, there are only idealists and materialists. (Althusser 1971: 56)

In other words, materialism and idealism are the only real oppositions in the field of philosophy that are mutually exclusive. As we will see later, Lenin

somewhat corrects this attitude in his *Philosophical Notebooks* and analyzes the relationship between materialism and idealism in a much more sophisticated way – the relationship between materialism and idealism is the only true relationship in the history of philosophy, but it is far from being a relationship of absolute exclusivity; no philosophical discourse occurs in a pure form, every philosophical system has both materialistic and idealistic elements, but one of them is always dominant – this is because every philosophical system is not a form but a formation of unequal development. But regardless of this later deviation from the rigidity of *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, Lenin's basic thesis remains unchanged: philosophy essentially has no history, or if it does – nothing happens in it, except for the drawing of lines of demarcation, distinction and division (61). Or the same, only in other words – according to Althusser, there is a history *in* philosophy, but not a history *of* philosophy.<sup>5</sup> This history in philosophy is a constant repetition of one and the same struggle, a conflict between two tendencies that takes place within the system of philosophy as a kind of Kant's *Kampfplatz*.

However, all this does not mean that philosophical discussions, wars and mutual confrontations between philosophers take place in some kind of vacuum, a philosophical ivory tower – on the contrary, since ideas do not float in an empty, non-existent space, philosophical discussions have concrete social implications. This is because philosophy, as a relatively autonomous theoretical formation, is nevertheless only one part of a wider, more complex totality that we can label as a socio-economic formation. As we have already seen, a social formation is a complex and contradictory set of instances or levels that are ultimately overdetermined, in a given historical conjuncture, by the ruling mode of production. In this sense, according to Althusser, the three dominant levels of every social formation are the economic level, the political-legal level and the ideological level. These three instances form the structural totality of a given social formation. The ideological and political level as forms of 'superstructure' not only passively reflect the economic level, i.e. 'base', but

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5 As we already said, philosophy has no history since, according to Althusser, philosophy has no object, that is, philosophy is not a science. From this comes another difference between science and philosophy – in science there is a possibility of cumulative progress in the knowledge of its object. Since there is no object in philosophy, it is not possible to talk about cumulative progress regarding this object. Therefore, unlike scientific knowledge, philosophical knowledge *does not become obsolete*. Classical humanities also knew this – a certain philosophical school of thought can be temporarily treated as 'overcome', so that in a certain context, i.e. at a certain historical 'conjuncture' it reappeared with new force (just think of Plato's philosophy and its various incarnations, from Christianity to various Neoplatonisms). Since the history of philosophy can be reduced to the conflict of materialism and idealism, it follows that the history of philosophy is a continuous struggle for the hegemony of one tendency over the other – therefore, there is a history of philosophical trends, schools, doctrines, but not a history of philosophy in the strong sense of the word, at least not in the way to which there is a history of a certain science. In other words, the history of philosophy is cyclical while the history of science is linear-cumulative.

together with 'base' actively participate in the process of social reproduction of the given formation. Ideology participates in social reproduction, and in the reproduction of the dominant mode of production by functioning as a system of representations, a system that actually prevents true knowledge about the political and economic structures of a given society. In this sense, ideology is a representation of the world that people start adopting as soon as they are born, it permeates all human activities and as a kind of cement ensures social cohesion by concealing antagonisms that are ultimately generated at the economic level. Ideology is inseparable from people's 'lived' experience and that is why these people do not see it – individuals are in ideology like fish in water, they live in it but do not perceive it as ideology. From Althusser's determination of ideology as a system of representations of the world that prevents subjects from recognizing the objective conditions of their own existence, two significant theses can be drawn.

#### A.

*Ideology is a system of representations that can appear in diffuse, unsystematic and compact, systematized form – systematized ideology has the potential to structure scattered, diffuse ideological representations.*

Namely, ideology consists of representations, images, signs, etc. Although different forms of representations function as relatively autonomous systems (religious, moral, ethical, artistic, family and other representations), they do not exist in isolation from each other. What makes an ideology an ideology is the systemic connection of these different forms of representation, i.e. ideology is a way of arranging and combining ideological representations that gives them meaning (Althusser 1990: 26). In this way, ideology is also an overdetermined structure – in ideology there are autonomous areas of that ideology, where one area dominates over others. For example, as it was in the Middle Ages, Althusser claims, religion can dominate other ideological representations and structure them in a certain way. Precisely because ideology is a structure or formation with a dominant element, different areas of ideology can appear in different forms: ideology can function extremely diffusely, but it can also appear in an ordered, systematized form, for example in a theoretical form. What's more, systematized ideology, ideology in its theoretical form can structure, as a kind of dominant element, the entire ideological field, that is, it can structure ideological representations that appear in an unsystematized, diffuse form. The most typical example would be the relationship between theology and religion: theology as an organized system of concepts directs religious practices in a given society which can appear in the most diverse forms of representation – in the form of images, rituals, ceremonies, habits, texts, etc. The theoretical ideological form thereby structures the ideological field and achieves real ideological effects. The same applies to moral, political and aesthetic ideologies: these ideologies can function as a set of unsystematized beliefs, customs,

tastes, trends, etc. but this unsystematized set of representations can also take on an orderly, structured form in the form of ethical theory, political theory, aesthetic theory, etc. Or to be more precise: ideology can function both in its diffuse and in its systematized form, *but* in order for a certain ideology to be ruling ideology, it must *in the last instance* be organized in a systematic, theoretical form (otherwise there would be no coherent ideology in the aforementioned sense of ‘systematic connection’ of scattered ideological elements). The highest form of this theorization of ideology occurs in philosophy: precisely because of this, Althusser claims, philosophy is a laboratory for the theoretical abstraction of ideology (27).

## B.

*In a given social formation, there is a large number of ideologies, but only one is ruling.*

In other words, just as in a certain social formation there exists in parallel a large number of different modes of production that are overdetermined by one mode of production as a hegemonic mode, so in a given formation there is also a large number of ideologies that are overdetermined by a single ideology as a hegemon.<sup>6</sup> The ruling ideology is always the ideology of the ruling class, while beyond it there are scattered elements of the ideologies of the oppressed classes. We say ‘elements’, because oppressed ideologies often exist only in a diffuse, unsystematized form and are therefore structured by the ruling ideology (for this reason, workers’ political movements have often in their history adopted ideological concepts and political principles from the ruling bourgeois ideology). A social formation is a set of ideological tendencies that represent different class interests. If philosophy is a systematized and ordered ideology, i.e. ideology in a theoretical form, divisions and splits within philosophy become clear. Divisions, splits, separations between philosophical tendencies are nothing more than the division and separation of different ideologies, one of which is always hegemonic in relation to the others. If we say that different ideologies represent different class interests, we will get a clear answer to the question of what philosophy is – philosophy is an extension of the class struggle in theory. The philosophical tendency (materialism) that draws a line of separation in relation to the dominant philosophical tendency (idealism) has

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<sup>6</sup> At this point we must be precise: the claim that “a large number of ideologies that are overdetermined by a single ideology as a hegemon” *does not* mean the same thing as “a large number of unsystematized elements of one ideology that are systematized by the theoretical form of that ideology”. Namely, each individual ideology is systematized in a similar way as the entire ideological field – for example, religion in the Middle Ages overdetermined other ideologies, but at the same time it was internally differentiated into systematized, theoretically elaborated theology and into different, diffuse, unsystematized elements of religious practice. This gives us a kind of fractal picture of how ideology works.

the ability to theoretically articulate, systematize, and structure the scattered elements of the oppressed ideology.

This is the essence of Lenin's argument in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*: the errors of the Machists are not just intellectual errors that take place in the domain of pure thought, they are errors that prevent, block the possibility of separating proletarian ideology from bourgeois ideology as a hegemonic ideology. The mistakes of empirio-criticism prevent the diffuse and unsystematized elements of the proletarian ideology from being abstracted, condensed, systematized and thereby given a theoretical form, that is, from the proletarian movement making a decisive and final break in relation to the ruling bourgeois ideology. The 'deviations' of empirio-critics are not only philosophical but also political deviations that have the potential to direct the course of the class struggle – in the direction of bourgeois reformism instead of a true proletarian revolution. Therefore, for Lenin, the question of all questions is how to intervene in the field of philosophy and draw a line of demarcation in that field, i.e. separate Marxist materialism from neo-Kantian idealism.

### Philosophy as an Overdetermined Theoretical Formation

As we have already pointed out, Lenin made two significant excursions into the field of philosophy – one in the book *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* from 1909, and the other a few years later in notes that were not published during his lifetime, nor written as a book, which are available to us today under the title *Philosophical Notebooks* (Lenin 1977, vol. 38). While the first book is still written in the spirit of the general positions of the Second International, *Philosophical Notebooks* are marked by its deep crisis, which was caused by the outbreak of the First World War and the abandonment of the policy of proletarian internationalism by most left parties in Europe. Lenin wrote his notes in exile in Bern in 1914–15 and what fundamentally distinguishes them from *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* is Lenin's attitude towards Hegel. In this sense, *Notebooks* are Lenin's long transcripts and commentaries on Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Unlike his early works, in which Lenin expressed an openly anti-Hegelian attitude, in *Notebooks*, Lenin seems to be fascinated by Hegel's dialectic, and in that context he makes the famous claim that it is impossible to understand Marx without first understanding Hegel and especially his *Science of Logic*. The historical significance of Lenin's philosophical notes is recognized today – he is apparently the first significant author of Marxist orientation who devoted himself to the systematic study and commentary of Hegel's philosophical system. Authors from the time of the Second International did not have any special interest in Hegel or in philosophy in general; instead, they sought the basis of Marxist theory in the critique of political economy. Even when they made references to Hegel, like Georgi Plekhanov, those references were marked by an empiricist and scientific approach, without significant study of Hegel's *Logic*. Lenin's excursion into Hegel's *Science of Logic* thus, in retrospect, places him practically as the 'founder' of the Hegelian tradition

within Marxism. Only after Lenin, thanks to György Lukács, Hegel will become the central author for the so-called Western Marxism (at the time when Lenin wrote his *Notebooks*, Lukács had not yet discovered Marx – that would happen only after 1917). Nevertheless, perhaps precisely because of the fragmentary way of presentation that was intended for self-education and not for publication, the theoretical significance and meaning of these notes remained without a final consensus of later interpreters. Is there a split and a theoretical turn in *Philosophical Notebooks* in relation to *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*? Do *Notebooks* offer fundamentally new insights into the conception of philosophy offered by the early Lenin, which rests on the thesis of the conflict between idealism and materialism as the only relevant conflict within the field of philosophy, which further causes the thesis that philosophy has neither an object nor a history? In the answer to these questions, we will refer to two opposing readings of *Philosophical Notebooks*, which were offered, on the one hand, from Hegelian positions, by the central authority on this question, Kevin Anderson, and on the other, from anti-Hegelian positions, by Louis Althusser.

Unlike Althusser, who, as we have seen in our discussion so far, drew far-reaching theoretical conclusions from *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, Anderson rejects the theoretical relevance of Lenin's first excursion into philosophy (Anderson 1995: 17–23). According to him, *Materialism* is not a very original book, and as such it takes over the basic Marxist theses from the time of the Second International, especially the ideas of Georgi Plekhanov and Friedrich Engels, which are based on the scientization and thus the vulgarization of Marx's thought. Lenin's attack on the Machists is based on empiricism, according to which theory is only a reflection of objectively given material reality – consciousness is the image of the world, everything else is mystification. According to Anderson, this is a positivist and vulgarly materialistic attitude, later further deepened by the Stalinist elevation of *Materialism* to the level of standard, mandatory Marxist reading. In that context, Lenin rejects any possibility of reconciling or combining idealism and materialism: there are only two tendencies – the first starts from nature and matter and treats consciousness as epiphenomenal, the second tendency goes the opposite way. Reconciling materialism with idealism only leads to a fall back into idealism. For Anderson, *Philosophical Notebooks* are an example of Lenin's break with the early Marxist, positivist and empiricist orthodoxy. With the discovery of Hegel, Lenin intuitively returns to the positions of early Marx, and especially to Marx's interpretation of Hegel, which he gave in an unfinished text in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts from 1844* under the title "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole" (Marx 1989: 141–170) (Lenin's return to this essay is intuitive since Marx's early works were not known to the authors of the Second International). In this essay, Marx gives an ambivalent assessment of Hegel's system. What stands out as particularly significant in Hegel is the negation of the negation – Hegel's dialectic is not an evolution that leads to the final reconciliation of contradictions, but a system of interruptions, breaks that progressively moves forward through the always open and never

completed model of inner negation. This is a positive contribution of Hegel's thought; what needs to be criticized in Hegel, according to Marx, is Hegel's naive belief that this process takes place in the domain of pure thought. Hegel's mistake lies in the fact that he believes that the alienation of man can be overcome in the domain of thought. Anderson believes that in this essay Marx does not propose any scientifically based materialism, but that, by reading Hegel, Marx proposes a kind of synthesis of materialist and idealist systems:

Despite this seeming dismissal of Hegel's idealism, however, Marx writes a bit further in the same paragraph of the positive features of this same idealism. Marx here stresses the unity of idealism and materialism rather than the positivist scientific materialism found in the writings of so many of his followers. He writes of 'a thorough-going Naturalism or Humanism' that 'distinguishes itself both from idealism and materialism, and is, at the same time, the truth uniting both'. Such a notion of the unity of idealism and materialism contrasts sharply with the scientific materialism of orthodox Marxism. (Anderson 1995: 9)

Anderson believes that the essence of Lenin's return to Hegel lies precisely in this synthesis of idealism and materialism, and in overcoming narrowly understood, positivist materialism from *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*.

Let us dwell only on Anderson's reading of Lenin's reading of Hegel's chapters on being and existence from the first book of his *Logic*, and the chapters on appearance and essence from the second book (Hegel 1969). In Lenin's readings, Anderson recognizes the criticism of formal logic and especially the natural sciences: while empirically based natural sciences start from the assumption of the separation of the world and thought, reality and the image of reality, and being and its appearance, Lenin, discovering Hegel, rejects this kind of split between objective and subjective, and between essence and appearance. Appearance and essence are separate but interwoven entities – what connects them is being, becoming. In other words, there is nothing in the world that is not mediatized in some way. This is particularly evident in the passage in which Hegel talks about the relationship between being and nothing:

*Pure being and pure nothing* are, therefore, the same. What is the truth is neither being nor nothing, but that being-does not pass over but has passed over-into nothing, and nothing into being. But it is equally true that they are not undistinguished from each other, that, on the contrary, they are not the same, that they are absolutely distinct, and yet that they are unseparated and inseparable and that each immediately *vanishes in its opposite*. Their truth is, therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: *becoming*, a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself. (Hegel 1969: 82–83)

This passage actually hides Hegel's remark about the relationship between the world of matter and the world of thought, which Lenin now understands no longer as the duality of matter and thought, but as a complex unity of opposites. This is a position that is in sharp contrast with vulgar materialism

and Lenin's positions in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*: the ideal and the real are not absolute opposites. Within Hegel's system, ideality is continuously transformed into reality and thereby they appear as one. Therefore, Lenin ends his reading of the first volume of Hegel's *Logic* with a radical attitude:

The thought of the ideal passing into the real is *profound*: very important for history. But also in the personal life of man it is clear that this contains much truth. Against vulgar materialism. NB. The difference of the ideal from the material is also not unconditional, not *überschwenglich*. (Lenin 1977, Vol. 38: 114)

Lenin applies this line of thinking to the reading of the second volume of *Logic*. One of the main ideas that Lenin takes from Hegel is that of the dialectical intertwining of form and essence, from which it follows that the dichotomy between things-in-themselves and appearances should be rejected. Among other things, Hegel asserts that the apparent world and the essential world are independent entities of existence – one should only be a reflected existence and the other an immediate existence. And yet, despite this look, each of these worlds is continuously extended into the other, so “it is therefore in itself the identity of both these moments”. First of all, both worlds are independent, but in the same time each world contains a moment of the other world. From this, therefore, it follows that it is not possible to talk about differentiation into appearance and content as believed by the natural sciences and formal logic: every concrete thing, every concrete something stands in different and often contradictory relations to everything else (136). Lenin writes:

that of the universal, all-sided, vital connection of everything with everything and the reflection of this connection – materialistisch auf den Kopf gestellter Hegel (Hegel materialistically turned upside down) – in human concepts, which must likewise be hewn, treated, flexible, mobile, relative, mutually connected, united in opposites, in order to embrace the world. (146)

How, then, to understand Lenin's formulation about Hegel materialistically ‘turned upside down’? As we have seen, Anderson believes that this is Lenin's attempt to synthesize a materialist and idealist system, i.e. to create a synthesis of Marx and Hegel. Althusser, however, gives a different reading of this remark: Hegel ‘turned upside down’ is not the result of synthesis but of theoretical extraction. This actually means that Lenin made a kind of revision of his earlier views in the following sense: while in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* he saw philosophy as an irreconcilable frontal conflict between two philosophical systems, materialism and idealism, in *Notebooks* he seemed to realize that no philosophical system appears in its pure form, that every philosophical discourse appears as a discourse of unequal development and that it contains both materialistic and idealistic elements, therefore that it appears as a philosophical *formation*. Since each formation is simultaneously a formation with a dominant element, it follows that in each philosophical system, in its combined structure, one element (usually Element 2 – idealism)

dominates over another (Element 1 – materialism). It is precisely because of this that it is possible to find a materialist core even in Hegel's idealist system – from Hegel's idealism, the materialist dialectic, hidden behind what is nine-tenths of it “chaff, rubbish” (154), should be peeled off.

This is exactly the problem with Anderson's otherwise extremely sophisticated readings of *Philosophical Notebooks*: Anderson offers a detailed exegesis of Lenin's transcripts and comments that is unparalleled in the literature, *yet* he offers an extremely simplified, i.e. non-dialectical view of philosophy. For him, philosophy is always a whole and complete system, a kind of totality. That totality appears either as idealism or as (vulgar) materialism. The revolutionary nature of Marx lies in the fact that already in his early works he drew a sketch for the synthesis of the two systems – Marx set this system in a rounded form already in his early works, which readers from the time of the Second International, with the exception of Lenin, failed to take into account. In his system, idealism and materialism stand in a symmetrical, non-antagonistic relationship of mutual synergy. Althusser, contrary to Anderson, however, shows that materialism and idealism cannot coexist peacefully in any philosophical system, moreover, in any philosophical text – they are always in a relationship of mutual struggle for hegemony, where this hegemony depends on the class position. In this sense, the thesis of philosophy as an extension of the class struggle in theory, which manifests itself through the clash of materialism and idealism, is still present with the difference that this struggle is no longer only frontal, external to the philosophical text, but also internal – the philosophical text is a contradictory, non-whole structure. Lenin thus reverses Hegel not only by placing matter in the place of ideas but also by taking a certain class position (Althusser 1971: 114). This is the only way Lenin can ‘uncover’ Hegel.

In his *Essays in Self-Criticism*, Althusser pointed out in the most direct way this Leninist thesis about philosophy, but also every single philosophical text as a contradictory formation, and thus every philosophical discourse as a field of class struggle, i.e. the struggle for the hegemony of one Element over another (say, as in Lenin's reading of Hegel, as a field of struggle for the hegemony of materialism – Element 1, over idealism – Element 2). Philosophy, according to Althusser, is not a whole of mutually agreeable parts subject to the exclusive duality of truth and error. Rather, it is a system of propositions through which philosophy takes a position in the theoretical class struggle, whereby this position is directed against theoretical opponents (Althusser 1976: 143–144). But in that struggle, the opponent is not unique either: philosophy, therefore, is not a reproduction, in the form of opposing systems, of a simple rationalistic difference between truth and error. There is no single field of the good, on the one hand, and the field of the bad, on the other, writes Althusser. Opposing viewpoints are intertwined with each other. Both opposing sides have within their system elements that originally belong to the opposite system: even in the most idealistic philosophies an element of materialism can be found, just as in materialistic philosophies one can recognize a grain of idealism that threatens to destroy the entire materialistic construction from within. Therefore,

it is about tendencies and not absolutely separate trench positions. Among these tendencies one is always the main and the other one is secondary, one is dominant, overdetermining, the other is subordinated, i.e. overdetermined. In other words, idealistic and materialistic tendencies are never realized in a pure form in one philosophy:

That is why both in order to talk about and in order to judge a philosophy it is correct to start out from Mao's categories on contradiction. Now Mao talks above all about politics, even in his philosophical texts – and in this he is correct, more so than might be imagined – and he gives reasons for believing what Engels and Lenin suggested, which is the theoretical foundation of the Leninist 'materialist reading' not only of Hegel, the absolute idealist, but of *all* philosophers without exception (including Engels, Lenin and Mao themselves): that in every philosophy, in every philosophical position, you must consider *the tendency in its contradiction*, and within this contradiction the *principal* tendency and the *secondary* tendency of the contradiction, and within each tendency the principal aspect, the secondary aspect, and so on. But it is not a question of an infinite and formal Platonic division. What must be understood is how this division is fixed in a series of *meeting-points*, in which the political-theoretical conjuncture defines the *central meeting-point* ('the decisive link') and the secondary meeting-points; or, to change the metaphor: the principal 'front' and the secondary 'fronts', the main point of attack and defence, the secondary points of attack and defence. (145)

Philosophizing is not (only) a frontal conflict of two tendencies, as the early Lenin thinks, nor a peaceful coexistence, a synthesis of these tendencies as Anderson thinks, but, as the mature Lenin shows, a theoretical practice of extraction and thus the real transformation of one system (idealistic) into the new system (materialistic). That is precisely what Lenin does with Hegel in his *Philosophical Notebooks*: he finds the materialist core of Hegel's thought and, through the process of elaboration, transformation and theoretical production, builds a new materialist philosophical system. That shows that in every philosophical system there is also what that system does not say directly and that something should be reached through the process of separation, i.e. derivation. Precisely because of this, what already exists in a practical form in the given, old system should be converted into a new system. That does not mean just giving an appropriate form to the already existing content – on the contrary, it is a real transformation, a completely new theoretical elaboration. New elaboration does not begin by introducing into the old system the settings of a system that is external to the previous one; the philosopher must start from the existing theoretical universe in order to reverse it, i.e. he must apply the process of application of the more advanced, hidden elements of that system to the visible, manifest, and more backward elements of that same system. Specifically, such operation consists of applying more elaborated concepts of a certain philosophical system to its less elaborated concepts. That leads to the correction and complete transformation of the given system (Althusser 1990: 60–61). In other words, in the process of transforming a system, the subordinated

tendency within that system (materialism) should be extracted and applied to the dominant tendency of that same system (idealism) and thus the given system ‘turned upside down’: through the process of elaboration, transformation and production, the subordinated tendency of the old system becomes the ruling tendency, which changes the entire given philosophical field.

The question remains: where does Lenin find this materialist core of Hegel’s philosophy that he then applies against that same Hegel? The answer is: in the last, third book of his *Science of Logic*.

## Lenin’s Transformation of Hegel

Lenin begins his reading of the third book of *Logic* precisely with the thesis about the theoretical transformation of a philosophical system which, like any theoretical system, is a non-whole, non-totalizing system, and as such contains within itself both opposing, mutually negating philosophical tendencies – materialism which is, in Hegel’s case, in the embryo, and thus the overdetermined tendency and idealism, which is the hegemonic, ruling and overdetermining tendency. To carry out a critique of Hegel’s idealism does not mean to refute his philosophical system, to reject it, but to develop it further, it does not mean “replacing it by another, one-sided opposed system, but incorporating it into something more advanced” (Lenin 1977, vol. 38: 167–168). The construction of this more advanced system begins by distinguishing those segments of Hegel’s system that can be used as a critique of classical philosophical idealism. These segments are, as Althusser perfectly notes: A. confirmation of the material existence of the object and thus of scientific knowledge, B. negation of the idealistic category of the (transcendental) Subject (Althusser 1971: 107–126). Both segments are related to Hegel’s criticism of Kant, which Lenin takes up wholeheartedly.

### A.

Lenin systematically and tendentially singles out precisely those parts of the third book of *Logic* in which Hegel criticizes Kant. It is possible that for Lenin himself there was a surprising similarity between Hegel’s and his early criticism of Kant, which the latter elaborated in his *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. Namely, one of the central arguments of the early Lenin against the Machists and their continuity with Kantianism, as we have seen, was the accusation that Kant’s philosophy ends in skepticism. This seems to be Hegel’s central argument – namely, by singling out categories as essentially unattainable to the human mind, Kant separates feeling and perception, on the one hand, and reason, on the other. Kant thereby degrades the importance of thinking by denying it the ability to arrive at the complete truth: Kant’s concept is completely separated from reality, it is a purely mental, i.e. rational category. With this, Kant enters into a kind of contradiction – he starts with a discussion about truth and defines truth as the matching of knowledge with the object, and then, in

a completely skeptical spirit, claims that mental knowledge is not capable of understanding things-in-themselves, and that the categories of the mind actually produce untrue representations of phenomena. Hegel's system comes from exactly the opposite positions – there is a unity of concept and reality, that is, a unity of phenomenon and reason. Therefore, according to Hegel, exactly contrary to the entire tradition of idealism, there is no division into abstract thinking and sensory material. Hegel's system, which Lenin tries to systematize, tends precisely to overcome the skeptical contradiction that Kant fails to resolve. In this approach, Hegel refers to logic in the sense that he posits logic as a kind of theory of knowledge.

Thus, there is certainly a continuity between Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* and *Philosophical Notebooks* – this continuity is reflected in the criticism of Kantianism as idealistic skepticism. What separates the two works is the way in which Lenin criticizes this skepticism. *Materialism* is dominated by the theory of reflection of reality, which Lenin now, discovering Hegel, labels as vulgar materialism (“Plekhanov criticizes Kantianism [and agnosticism in general] more from a vulgar-materialistic standpoint than from a dialectical-materialistic standpoint [...]”) (179). Following the structure of Hegel's argumentation in the third volume, Lenin carries out a critique of vulgar materialism by distinguishing the categories of subjectivity and objectivity and considers their mutual connection. The essence of this discussion is to show how Hegel explores the movements of the objective world in the movement of subjective concepts, where Hegel's main thesis is that the subjective and the objective are in a relationship with each other, that there is a continuous transition from one to the other, and that the subjective and the objective form a kind of the identity of opposites. Lenin thereby continuously emphasizes that Hegel investigates the movement of the objective world in the movement of concepts – the creation of (abstract) concepts already includes conviction, awareness about objective connections within the world. The creation of concepts alone already means a deeper human knowledge about the world. Marx showed this perfectly in his *Capital* – surplus value is not immediately visible, it is not a phenomenon in itself separated from thinking, on the contrary, it is a mental abstraction that reveals the objective contradictions of the capitalist mode of production by its very construction. In other words, with Marx, the empirical concept was produced by the intervention of the theoretical concept, that is, in Hegel's language, the objective was reached by the intervention of the subjective, which makes the objective and the subjective a unity of opposites. Hegel thus shows that logical forms, subjective concepts are not an empty shell separated from reality, i.e. objective world. Objective reality (nature) develops into a logical idea – idea is only idea through being mediated by Nature (182). This indicates an unbreakable connection between the world of nature and the world of ideas – the subjective/notion and the objective/nature are simultaneously the same and not the same (185). This actually means that the subjective (opinion) and the objective (object) are not strict opposites, but that their relationship is dialectical. Unlike Kant, for Hegel it

is not essential whether the principles are subjective or objective – external conditions (laws of nature) exist as such, but only man gives them purpose. This is precisely the decisive link between Hegel’s and Marx’s dialectic: the purposes of man are caused by the objective world and this purpose is realised through union with objectivity. With this, Hegel studies the matching of the idea with the object, which is reached through the practical, purposeful activity of man. This is the crucial materialist core of Hegel’s system – link between subjective purpose and objective truth is reached through practice, i.e. through the purposeful activity of man. This thought was already present in hints on the margins of Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, while now, with Lenin’s reading of Hegel, it becomes central: human knowledge is an active intervention in the world, the transformation of phenomena in themselves into phenomena for us. The practice of man is verification, the criterion of objectivity of knowledge (211).

The relationship between knowledge and the world is not a relationship of reflection, but a relationship of production, i.e. practice. Dialectic thus, unlike Kantianism, is not a closed structure of pure thinking separated from the world, but an active knowledge of the world through practice while both thinking and the world are transformed. In that way, Lenin found precisely in Hegel a mechanism for the theoretical elimination of the idealistic concept of thing-in-itself and its replacement by the dialectical identity of essence and appearance. In other words, Lenin used Hegel to criticize Kant from the aspect of science. He thus found in Hegel categories apparently completely foreign to Hegel’s initial idealistic project – the category of scientific objectivity, on the one hand, and the category of the material existence of the object, on the other (Althusser 1971: 119). Lenin’s Hegel is, therefore, as we have already stated, Hegel materialistically ‘turned upside down’.

## B.

Lenin seems to find another segment of the materialist core of Hegel’s system in his critique of Kant’s concept of transcendental subjectivity. The thesis about the transcendental Subject arises spontaneously from Kant’s above-mentioned idea about the separation of phenomenon and thought, objective and subjective, that is, essence and appearance. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant makes a distinction between the empirical and the transcendental plane. Kant introduces this division precisely because he believes that consciousness is an insurmountable obstacle and that this consciousness can never reach objectively given phenomena, at least not in an unmediated way. Knowledge refers to objects – unmediated knowledge Kant designates as perception. However, this perception exists only insofar as the object is given to us “but this in turn, is possible only if it affects the mind in a certain way” (Kant 1998: 155). Therefore, objects are given to us through sensibility, and this sensibility is the only one that gives us perceptions, and with the help of reason, objects are synthesized and concepts arise from it. The point is, however, that without concepts

we cannot understand perception. Precisely because of this, the thesis about the transcendental Subject necessarily follows from Kant's assumptions – this thesis is actually a response to empirical theoretical formulas according to which the self is reduced to a network of perceptions. Since phenomena are separated from thinking, that is, our perception is mediated by concepts, there must necessarily be a unifying principle through which the subject achieves a relatively coherent picture of the world. The transcendental Subject belongs to the transcendental plane, which refers to the claim that the human experience of the world exists above and beyond sensory experience, and that it is necessary to know the internal laws of the mind in order to discuss sensory evidence at all. Kant shows this on the example of the problem of space and time (chapter “Transcendental Aesthetic” in his *Critique*) – according to him, space and time are pure forms of human intuition. Space and time do not exist ‘outside of us’ but are subjective forms of our sensibility. According to Kant, space and time are real in the empirical sense, but ideal in the transcendental sense. The transcendental Subject is thus Kant's kind of theoretical *deus ex machina* for the problem of skepticism regarding the existence of a material object that Kant himself intuited – transcendental subjectivity is necessary because otherwise no knowledge would be possible. This is the external, unifying element of knowledge that ensures wholeness and coherence, the totality of our experience of the world, which ensures the synthesis of the empirical and transcendental plane. This is the central point of Kant's idealism, which connects it with the entire tradition of idealistic thinking – Kant's novelty is only that at the place of God, the Platonic soul, etc. he places the transcendental Subject that arises at the moment when philosophy is no longer able to appeal to traditional theological arguments regarding the nature of the existence of the world. In a historical sense, Kant's theory is therefore a response to David Hume's empiricism and his ‘naive realism’, i.e. materialism.

However, if we accept Lenin's reading of Hegel, according to which in his philosophy there is no longer a division between empirical and transcendental plane, i.e. that there is a dialectical connection between the two planes, that there is a constant transition from one plane to another, and that our relationship to the world implies a dialectical unity of the opposites that make up these two planes, the disintegration of every category of transcendental subjectivity follows. There is no external element that ensures the synthesis, coherence and certainty of knowledge – knowledge is immanent and not transcendent. Knowledge, that is, an idea exists only as a unity of concept and objectivity, whereby this agreement of concepts with things is not subjective as Kant believes. On the contrary, knowledge is a process of sinking into inorganic nature in order to dialectically connect it with the power of the mind. This matching of thought with object is a process. It actually means that this match is never certain, it is not completed and forever. Since there is no external, transcendental guarantor of this correspondence, the relationship between thought and object is in perpetual contradiction. In the words of Lenin,

Cognition is the eternal, endless approximation of thought to the object. The *reflection* of nature in man's thought must be understood not 'lifelessly', not 'abstractly', *not devoid of movement, not without contradictions*, but in the eternal *process* movement, the arising of contradictions and their solution. (Lenin 1977, Vol. 38: 195)

The movement of thought is contradictory because there is no external guarantor of thought, no transcendental Subject. This is exactly why Hegel writes in the last paragraph of his *Science of Logic* that the form of determination of an idea is completely free – that it exists for itself without subjectivity (Hegel 1969: 843). Knowledge without (external, transcendent) subjectivity is another confirmation of the materialist core of Hegel's philosophy.

It seems that this is precisely the reason for Lenin's pronounced interest in the chapters of *Logic* that deal with the category of idea, and especially in the last chapter of Hegel's work entitled "The Absolute Idea". What Lenin seems to be attracted to is Hegel's immanent and thus materialistic (albeit covertly) foundation of the idea, which replaces Kant's transcendent and thus idealistic approach. In that chapter, Lenin finds Hegel's explanation of the dialectical method, which is nothing more than a method of knowing objective, therefore material reality, which does not behave as "external reflection; it draws the determinate element directly from its object itself", as quoted by Lenin (220). Precisely because of that, knowledge, that is, an idea, is not an external reflection (Kant's transcendental Subject), but rather some kind of general concept that determines itself from itself, i.e. through the process of inner separation. Precisely because of this, concepts are by their very nature, instead of being immobile, in fact in eternal transition – the formation of concepts arises through an always open process of internal negation. Knowledge, instead of being the achievement of some kind of non-antagonistic synthesis as in Kant, is actually a never-completed model of inner negation. Hegel's negation is a key moment of connection and development and not a form of skeptical negation. At the same time, negation (the second) is not the elimination of the positive assumption that precedes it (the first), i.e. it is not the negation of the first position and its replacement by the second, but the inclusion of the first, the integration of the previous position into a higher form of knowledge. Thus, within the dialectical method of knowledge, the unity of the negative with the positive is achieved (227). However, this unity, integration is never final, never a rounded synthesis – the unity of the first and second statement can only be conditional, temporary, transitory and relative. The initial negation is immediately replaced by the negation of the negation. The negation of the negation thus becomes the third member of the dialectical method. Even this third, this result of the negation of the negation, is not a static or final third, but only a new premise that becomes the source of further analysis. Knowledge is thus an infinite progress in proving and deriving. Each subsequent level of negation contains transformed previous contents, it enriches and thickens them, and thus the original method grows into a system, science. Science thus begins

with a vague, unclear beginning (for example, a general assertion that there is a material object), then through the process of internal negation it enriches its knowledge, builds a system, and when it builds it, it has an enriched insight into its initial premises. Science is thus “a rearward approach” to that beginning, that is, “the regressive confirmation of the beginning and its progressive further determination” (232). Science, i.e. knowledge (Hegel’s idea) thus, since it rests on an always open process of negation of negation, has an immanent (materialistic) and not a transcendent (idealistic) foundation, i.e. knowledge has an inherent, materially based method of its own foundation and cannot be referred to external, transcendental (religious, spiritualistic, idealistic) categories. In other words, knowledge is always knowledge about a concrete object, but it is necessarily the result of the knowledge production process. Lenin thus ends his reading of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* with the statement that this work does not contain any specific idealism but an explication of the dialectical method. Therefore, in this most idealistic work of Hegel, there is the least idealism and the most materialism: “‘Contradictory’, but a fact!” (234), concludes Lenin.

## Conclusion

Lenin developed the concept of social formation for practical reasons, in order to use it to analyze the complex social situation of Imperial Russia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. He developed his concept on the basis of Marx’s concept of the mode of production, emphasizing at the same time the similarity and difference in relation to Marx’s thesis. Namely, Marx’s *Capital* is not a description of a concrete structure of social relations, but rather a theoretical tool for the analysis of this structure. This is the basis of Marx’s method – social facts, i.e. social empirical ‘reality’ is not presented to the theory in order for it to confirm or reject its general concepts through the observation of these empirical data; on the contrary, very general concepts, theoretical abstraction enable the analysis of concrete empirical facts. Theoretical abstraction such as the concept of mode of production allows social facts to ‘speak’, to become theoretically visible – theory moves from the abstract to the concrete and not the other way around. Therefore, Marx, placing his text on the level of theoretical abstraction, describes the capitalist mode of production in its pure form. In social ‘reality’, this mode never appears in its pure form, every social ‘reality’ is composed of a number of modes of production, where one stands out and imposes itself as dominant mode. In ‘reality’, therefore, we never encounter exclusively with the mode of production, but with social formation, but in order to understand the concreteness of a certain social formation, it is necessary to start from the abstraction of *Capital*. This is precisely the difference between books such as Marx’s *Capital*, on the one hand, and Lenin’s *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, on the other. Both books are examples of historical materialist analysis, but while Marx’s book deals with one mode of production (capitalist), the other deals with a specific social formation (pre-revolutionary Russia) in which there are different and mutually

competitive modes of production (feudal, small-scale artisanal, small-scale agricultural, capitalist) which are only dominated by one mode of production (capitalist) as the dominant mode.

In this essay, relying on Althusser's readings of Lenin, we tried to expand the concept of social formation to the analysis of philosophical thinking and knowledge in general and to develop the concept of theoretical formation. We tried to find the elements of the mentioned concept in Lenin's works dealing with philosophy, and to look at the philosophical text not as a rounded, complete form, but as a contradictory formation, i.e. theoretical formation of unequal and combined development. Among other things, we have shown that (1) philosophy is not science – while science rests on the concept of truth, philosophy rests on the concept of correctness, and as such it is the practice of producing concepts without an external referent (the so-called empirical object). Precisely because philosophy is the production of concepts, i.e. philosophical propositions, that same philosophy (2) has a specific relationship to ideology – it represents the practice of systematizing otherwise diffuse ideological elements, i.e. philosophy is a systematized ideology, i.e. ideology in its theoretical guise. Since different schools of philosophy actually represent different ideologies in a systematized form, and ideologies are representations of different class interests, it follows (4) that philosophy is nothing more than an extension of the class struggle in theory. The most significant conflict (5) in philosophy is that between idealism and materialism, and this is therefore a reflection of class conflicts specific to a given social formation. As Lenin (6) shows in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, this conflict takes place throughout the entire history of philosophy, but, as he shows in *Philosophical Notebooks* also within an individual theoretical system, even an individual philosophical text – a philosophical text never appears as absolutely completed, whole and pure philosophical discourse, on the contrary: even the most idealistic systems contain elements of materialism (and vice versa). From this comes conclusion (7) about the nature of class struggle in theory as an extension of class struggle in general – class struggle in theory means taking over the subordinated elements of a certain theoretical system (the materialistic ones) and using them against the ruling (idealistic) elements of that same system. Class struggle in theory actually means the intervention of dialectical materialism in the philosophical discourse and the complete transformation of that discourse. Lenin implemented this most precisely on the example of Hegel. Lenin's transformation of Hegel actually points to the fact that there is no 'neutral' or rounded knowledge – knowledge is a battlefield, a struggle, and theory is a formation of unequal and combined development within which different theoretical elements stand in a mutually conflicting relationship. Dialectical materialism is thus a theoretical weapon in struggle for ideological triumph, the hegemony of materialism over idealism.

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## Nikola Dedić

### Ka teoriji teorijskih formacija: od Altisera ka Lenjinu

#### Apstrakt:

U svom teorijskom radu Lenjin je napravio dva izleta u filozofiju – prvo u knjizi *Materijalizam i empiriokriticizam*, a zatim u *Filozofskim sveskama*. Između ova dva dela postoje očigledne razlike koje se ogledaju u odnosu prema Hegelu (prvo odbacivanje, a zatim oduševljenje i prihvatanje Hegelovog dijalektičkog metoda) ali i značajne sličnosti. U radu se ističe da je ono što povezuje Lenjinove dve knjige koncept teorijske formacije. Termin teorijska formacija izvodimo iz Lenjinovog koncepta društveno-ekonomske formacije: u svakom društvu koegzistira veći broj oblika proizvodnje ali su ovi nadodređeni jednim oblikom kao dominantnim. Društvo, dakle, nije celovita i zaokružena forma, već je kontradiktorna nadodređena formacija. Glavna teza rada je da Lenjin primenjuje koncept naodređene formacije na čitanje filozofije. Filozofski diskurs nikada nije ceo, već je podeljen između dve nepomirljive tendencije – materijalizma i idealizma. Filozofski rad nije ništa drugo do borba za teorijsku prevlast jedne tendencije nad drugom. Ova borba između filozofskih tendencija je, kako ističe Luj Altiser, produžetak klasne borbe u teoriji i odvija se kako u celokupnoj istoriji filozofije tako i unutar svakog pojedinačnog filozofskog teksta. Filozofski tekst je dakle kontradiktorna formacija nejednakog i kombinovanog razvoja.

**Ključne reči:** Lenjin, Altiser, Hegel, dijalektički materijalizam, društveno-ekonomska formacija, teorijska formacija, nejednaki i kombinovani razvoj, protivrečnost.