

# The Politics of Methodology : Non- dialectical Versus Dialectical Thinking

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**Abstract :** *The central purpose of this paper will be to highlight the methodology of dialectics. I have been drawn to this methodology not out of prejudice or expediency but because of my intention to demystify the 'appearance of things' and my commitment to social transformation. The dialectical methodology is addressed only after undertaking a thorough critique of various modes of theory-construction, from post-empirical positivism to post-structuralism. I found these approaches limited both epistemologically and because of a lack of commitment to social change. Both of these characteristics have rendered such theory-construction favourable to the reproduction of the hegemony. While the former does so by way of undermining the 'knowing subject' and the 'imagination of human kind', the latter does it by reproducing the status quo. Both of these characteristics, moreover, relate to the role played by the 'organic intellectuals' ( i. e. intellectuals related to a particular social group ), who tend to reproduce the 'world-view' of the social group they represent. In this context, critics of hegemony themselves become part of the political campaign to construct a counter-hegemony. This counter-hegemony, while standing in contradistinction to the hegemony organised by the dominant or ruling class, seeks to overcome the power of the dominant or ruling class in the state. Indeed, the central thrust of this paper is to put forward the view that methodology or theory-construction itself is political.*

The intention of this article is very idealistic, and that is to contribute to the task of changing the fate of millions of

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poverty-stricken masses, not only of Bangladesh but of the world. But saying that is one thing and doing it in a concrete way is another. For reality is complex and multi-faceted, where we see everyday, to paraphrase Lenin, 'millions of subjects engaged in struggles, with their victories and defeats.' The essential task, therefore, is to locate the millions of subjects, their imaginations and struggles, not only in day to day political activities, but also ( and this with an added urgency in view of the prevailing intellectual bankruptcy ) in theory - that is, in intellectual and theoretical exercises. It is with this purpose in mind that the article surveys the all-permeating subject of methodology.

The subject-matter of methodology has always been problematic, not merely in the ordinary sense of the term ( that is, each theoretical work contains a methodological discourse of its own ) but rather, and more importantly, in the sense of methodology or methodologies having an intrinsic relationship with politics. This is otherwise to assert that no concept in a theory is neutral in its mode of conceptualisation and that no theory related to a social reality is neutral in terms of praxis. Methodology, however, is used here not to mean the positivist understanding of value-free theoretical tools but rather a mode of theory-construction inseparably linked to the transformation of reality. This is, of course, the representation of methodology from the point of view of dialectics, which the author has come to share not out of prejudice or expediency but because of his intention to demystify the 'appearance of things' and my commitment to social transformation.

But dialectics, one must understand, is *polemical*. It organizes thinking not in isolation but through dialogue and confrontation, both against non-dialectical thinking

(positivism, reductionism, dualism and the like) and those which claim to be dialectical. It cannot be otherwise. In the light of this contention, the methodology of dialectics has validity only with respect to the weaknesses and limitations of other modes of theory-construction. In this context, the article seeks to highlight the weaknesses and limitations of various non-dialectical modes of theory-construction, from post-empirical positivism to post-structuralism, before addressing the dialectical methodology. In fact, the non-dialectical approaches remain limited both epistemologically and because of a lack of commitment to social change, which incidentally have rendered such theory-construction favourable to the reproduction of the hegemony. While the former does so by way of undermining the 'knowing subject' and the 'imagination of human kind', the latter does it by reproducing the status quo.

The article is divided into two sections. In the first section it will critically assess the epistemological foundation of the various modes of theory-construction, particularly the question of representing epistemology *with* or *without* the 'knowing subject', while in the second section it will highlight the methodology of dialectics.

### **The understanding of the 'knowing subject'**

But first, what do we mean by the term 'knowing subject'? On a general level, it means the power of the social being or the subject to 'know', 'learn', 'discover', 'innovate', 'organize', 'reproduce', etc, in the context of his / her activities or practice in the society.<sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, a critical composition of two dimensions - *thought and action*. It must be understood, however, not as a 'single-minded subject', but rather (following Lenin) 'as a huge body of millions of subjects engaged in struggles.'<sup>2</sup> At this stage, it will

suffice to keep this general meaning of the term in mind; later the more particular meaning of 'knowing subject' related to the social category of intellectuals and 'organic intellectuals' will also be elaborated.

Much of the theoretical weaknesses of non-dialectical modes of theory-construction result from a subjectless understanding of theory-construction, which has followed, in turn, from a particular epistemological ( and in that context also ontological ) foundation of theory-construction. An attempt will be made to explain this briefly with reference to each of the various modes of theory-construction.

### Post- empirical positivism

In postulating his science of objectivism, Karl Popper upholds the view that there are three 'worlds' of knowledge : the world of physical objects; the world of states of consciousness ( i. e. the behavioural dispositions to act ); and the world of *objective contents of thoughts*.<sup>3</sup> Whereas worlds one and two represent knowledge in the subjective sense, it is world three which represents knowledge in the objective sense. Popper argues that it is in this third world that scientific and poetic thoughts and works of art are located. This is represented from the point of view of epistemology by the separation of the object from the subject.

According to Popper :

Knowledge in this objective sense is totally independent of anybody's claim to know; it is also independent of anybody's belief, or disposition to assent; or to assert; or to act. Knowledge in the objective sense is *knowledge without a knower* : it is *knowledge without a knowing subject* ( emphasis in original ).<sup>4</sup>

With this, Popper, of course, was underscoring his theoretical understanding of the development of science ( or theories ); one postulated in terms of trial and error.<sup>5</sup> As Popper categorically points out :

( All theories are) subject to error-elimination . . . the moment we have produced . . . theories, they produce new, unintended and unexpected problems, autonomous problems, problems to be discovered.<sup>6</sup>

Popper's case of theories-in-themselves ( that is, theory reproducing theory ), therefore, remains evident. Indeed, his postulation of the category of error-elimination determining the development of science ( or theories ) critically undermines the human capacity to innovate, i. e. the intervention of the imagination of humankind and of the objective subject.

To the extent, however, that Popper was providing a critique of the subjectivist view ( i. e. the primacy of the subject as represented by the Cartesian *coqito ergo sum* ) in the understanding of the relationship between subject and object, his position provided a qualitative improvement in theoretical exposition. In the subjectivist view [ one whose subscribers ( Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Russell ) ] are referred to by Popper as 'belief philosophers' upholding the Cartesian edifice,<sup>7</sup> the object is viewed strictly in terms of its indubitable existence and as such the object represents nothing but the aggregate of the states of the subject. This position, while referring merely to individual beliefs, eliminates, from the point of view of epistemology, the object of his/her consciousness itself. Popper correctly identified this limit.

Nevertheless, in light of his dogmatism about sophisticated inductivism ( i. e. theory-dependent observation ) and his negation of dialectics, Popper was led to a separation of subject and object, one which resulted in the fetishism ( i. e. in the sense of reification ) of the subject's consciousness (or thinking ). In terms of theory-construction, he essentially advocates theory independent of the 'knowing subject' in relation to social reality. Thus the case remains as futile as the subjectivist view.

The understanding of epistemology in terms of separation of subject and object, however, is not limited to post-empirical positivism. Both structuralism and post-structuralism reflect such a separation in their theoretical exercises. There are, however, substantive differences in the mode of their theoretical considerations. Before attempting to understand these it would be worthwhile considering those approaches which suggest a fusion rather than separation of the categories of subject and object. Both structuralism and post-structuralism in their own way argue against the backdrop of theories proposing such a fusion.

### **The Lukacsian perspective**

In the history of philosophy of science the fusion of subject and object has primarily stemmed from a misunderstanding ( or from one perspective, the seemingly logical extension ) of the Hegelian contention of the unfolding of the 'total Being' ( i. e. the Absolute ) as Spirit or Idea.<sup>8</sup> This view, largely shared by the so-called Hegelian Marxists, has been pioneered by Georg Lukacs.<sup>9</sup> Lukacs' emphasis on the category of totality representing reality led him to conclude, very disturbingly, that :

Being would . . . be understood as Becoming, things would dissolve into processes, and most important of all, the subjective origin of those processes would become apparent to the identical subject-object of history.<sup>10</sup>

In place of the (alleged) 'bourgeois view' of the opposition between subject and object, Lukacs argued for the fusion of the categories. In the light of his commitment to the socialist movement, he saw such fusion shaped by history in the rise and the consequential role of the proletariat class, the latter standing for (both) *subject-object of history*.

While it can easily be recognised that any approach suggesting a fusion of subject and object must stand in opposition to one assuming their separation, there is a critical epistemological correspondence between the two positions. Like the approaches which separate subject and object, as shown above with reference to post-empirical positivism, the Lukacsian perspective also disowns the dynamics of the 'knowing subject', albeit from a different methodological point of view. But how is it so, knowing well that in several of his works Lukacs highlights the 'ontological being'? An answer, while not simple, does exist.

One must carefully dissect Lukacs' argument in *History and Class Consciousness* [1923], a work which he later renounced but from which he was never able to free himself. There are two inter-related points. First, the subject is thought of as 'a creator of the totality of content' and second, the totality is understood as 'a reflection of its own genesis, the product of its own praxis'.<sup>11</sup> This is otherwise

to recognise that the subject of history and the object of history are ultimately one.

But this position poses the problem of dissolving in the understanding of totality the distinction between the internal and external dimensions of social reality, ones that are responsible in the constitution of totality. If the subject is the 'creator' of totality and the said totality the product of its own praxis then there is nothing that remains external to the subject. Put differently, no objective reality exists independent of human consciousness.

The consequence of such fusion has been well recognised by Martin Jay :

By equating praxis with the objectification of subjectivity, instead of seeing it as an interaction of a subject with a pre-given object, Lukacs had missed the importance of the *dialectic of labor in constituting the social world*.<sup>12</sup>

The fusion by undermining the dialectic of labour renders Lukacs' understanding of objective reality devoid of social praxis. Indeed, in the context of the fusion of subject and object and in light of the supposition of the objectification of subjectivity the understanding of social reality logically stands for its inverse, the subjectification of objectivity. In this sense, the fusion of the categories of subject and object in a bizarre manner resurrects the subjectivist view. Both structuralism and post-structuralism, reacting against this fusion of the categories of subject-object, opted for the separation of such categories. The consequence of this, however, remained as theoretically ill-founded as that of post-empirical positivism.



## Structuralism

Louis Althusser in projecting his theoretical position stated that :

The sighting is . . . no longer the act of an individual subject, endowed with the faculty of 'vision' . . . ; the sighting is the act of its structural conditions . . . . It is literally no longer the eye ( the mind's eye ), of a subject which *sees* what exists in the field defined by a theoretical problematic : it is this field which *sees itself* in the objects or problems it defines-sighting being merely the necessary reflexion of the field on its objects.<sup>13</sup>

This is indeed the anti-Cartesian approach to knowledge, where the privileged position of the subject has been removed. Althusser's anti-Cartesianism, however, rests well within the French intellectual tradition of linguistic philosophy.

In opposition to the Cartesian understanding of language (where language is viewed as a collection of signs whose nature depends on their relation to entities outside language and where the meaning of a word is guaranteed by the subject ), the French linguistic theorists under the leadership of Ferdinand de Saussure had by the early 20th century begun advocating a subjectless cognition of language. This view claimed that the linguistic sign unites not a thing and a name, but a concept (signified) and its sound- image (signifier).<sup>14</sup> Language thus began to be understood not by the relation between words and things, discourse and a reality that exists independently of and prior to it, but by its own *inner structure*.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the constitution of this 'inner structure' devoid of the 'knowing subject', developed by Saussure, represented the theoretical basis of Althusserian structuralism.

Saussure maintained that in language there are only 'differences', a view that can be traced back to classical Greek and German philosophy.<sup>16</sup> But the Saussurian ingenuity was to postulate the pervasiveness of 'differences', which was responsible for the multiplication of not only the elements-signifiers and signified - but also their relations. And it is this understanding of difference that allowed Saussure to posit the priority of *langue* ( i. e. the whole set of linguistic habits which allow an individual to understand and to be understood ) over *parole* ( i. e. its usage in speech ), and correspondingly, the priority of synchrony ( the relations constiuing *langue* at any one time ) over diachrony ( the evolution of language ).<sup>17</sup> It is this critical understanding of difference in synchronic diacritical systems, which represents the theoretical foundation of Saussurian and Althusserian structuralism alike.

For Althusser, therefore, social formations are determined by 'the ever-pre-givenness of a structured complex unity'.<sup>18</sup> And in opposition to a Hegelian unified temporality, Althusser posits an ontology of differential temporality representing the priority ( the ever-pre-givenness ) of the structured complex unity of social formations. This allowed Althusser to distinguish in a determinate society different levels of practices - economic, political, ideological and theoretical. And as each of these practices remains relatively autonomous and hence relatively independent from other levels, theoretical practice ( a core of Althusserian structuralism ) can be pursued alone.

Indeed, in many ways familiar to Popperian objectivism, Althusser seeks the production of theoretical practices in the resolution of an 'unstated and implicit set of questions' representing the internal unity or problematique

of a discourse. Althusser therefore maintains that one has to 'read' Marx's *Capital*, seeking behind the explicit discourse to salvage the silent discourse of which even Marx himself remained unaware. As the silent discourse emerges, Althusser asserts the priority of the problematique which does the thinking 'in and through Marx'. Not only does this represent, as one critic maintains, the banishment of the author,<sup>19</sup> but it also critically disowns the imagination of human kind. Like post-empirical positivism, the separation of subject and object in Althusserian structuralism mystifies the task of theory-construction.

### Post-structuralism

The contemporary attack on Cartesianism has had more theoretical imagination than simply Althusserianism. One such effort is now found under the banner of post-structuralism.<sup>20</sup> In post-structuralism the attack on Cartesianism rested on new grounds, although also essentially emerging from the anti-Cartesian development in linguistic philosophy.

In the place of the Saussurian distinction between the signified ( concept ) and signifier ( sound-image ), the post-structuralists ( Jacques Lacan, Claude Levi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault, for example ) insisted on the primacy of the signifier ( sound-image ) over signified ( concept ). Such a reformulation rested on the premise that the production of meaning cannot be external to language. Any privileging of the signified mean that the subject was still secure, since it is "he who assigns words to the role of standing for his thoughts"<sup>21</sup> Such latent Cartesianism was unacceptable to the post-structuralists. They wanted to overcome what seemed to be a contradiction

in structuralism . The way envisaged was the total decentering of 'logocentrism' ( i . e . the metaphysics of presence ) manifested by the classical Either-Or approach.<sup>22</sup> The latter was replaced by the category, popularly credited to Zeno's paradox of the flight of the arrow, of now not-now.<sup>23</sup>

Such theory-construction based on anti-logocentrism necessarily disowns the concept of being. This is precisely what the post-structuralists were up to. For Foucault ( for example ) :

... Subjectivity is not to be understood as something behind events and discursive practices, pushing them forward, as it were. Subjectivity is rather something constructed or constituted within such practices. Subjects are effects of strategies of power, and strategies of power without a subject.<sup>24</sup>

Foucault, therefore, transforms the understanding of the primacy of the signifier into one of priority of strategies of power. He understands power, moreover, not in the sense of a substance, that is, not as signified, but as multiplicity of relations that are immanent and omnipresent and into which the subjects make their entry or are created. For Foucault, therefore, discipline *makes* individuals. With power-relations preforming the task of creating subjects, it can now safely be said that the last vestiges of Cartesianism have finally been removed - but painfully, so has been the imagination of human kind.

Such a theoretical exposition does seem strange ( and even naive ) in the light of Foucault's own imagination. If power-relations have pervaded all and every discourse, how is it that Foucault's own imagination ( the theorization of archeological-genealogy ) is not subjected to such pervasion? How can Foucault himself remain detached from the discipline if it is discipline that *makes* individuals? In this

context critics, have rightly pointed out the problems with Foucault's endorsement of new modes of collective resistance ( like feminism, environmentalism, gay rights, anti-nuclear movements ).<sup>25</sup> Foucault, in fact, is imprisoned by the fate of his own imagination which must see the reality of 'subjects of action' only external to it.

The foregoing analysis makes it apparent that both separation and fusion of the relationship between subject and object, from different and varied standpoints, mystify the task of theory-construction. But the convergence does not end there. Insofar as no theory related to social reality is neutral in terms of praxis, the convergence between such theoretical-constructs extends even further - one finds in all of them a penchant for a static world - view.

For example, in Popperian objectivism, epistemology becomes static in the light of its concern merely with theories, basic statements, and the logical relations between them, since logical relations are atemporal;<sup>26</sup> in Althusserian structuralism the priority of structures leads one to identify 'what was constant and repeated ( rather ) than what actually changed';<sup>27</sup> in Foucaultian post-structuralism the pervasion of the circularity of power-relations provided for the understanding of 'the endlessly repeated play of domination';<sup>28</sup> and in the Lukacsian perspective the postulation of totality represented a theodicy (i. e. one providing for the justification of the evil and injustices of the status quo ).<sup>29</sup>

In this context, nothing is more elusive than to construct a critique of the objective reality or for that matter a critique of the hegemonic paradigm formulating a status-quo oriented praxis by using the theoretical insights of post-empirical positivism, Althusserian structuralism,

Foucaultean geneology, or Lukacsian holism. This is because such theoretical constructs themselves hold to a static world-view. Accordingly, the praxis of such theoretical constructs can only contribute to the preservation of the status quo rather than changing it.

This itself, however, from the standpoint of dialectics, is nothing new. The Eleventh "Thesis on Feuerbach" is a reminder of that: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." The latter is not merely a personal choice or a prejudice but is based on the understanding of reality in motion. One must overcome such statics in theory-construction in order to make sense of this world of dynamics. Moreover, in so far as such theoretical-constructs hold a static world-view, they tend to reproduce hegemony, which, under conditions of domination, could well play in the hands of conservative forces and oppressive classes. Therefore an alternative is needed.

### **Dialectical logic**

The mode of thinking has undergone a fundamental change with Hegel when he asserted that there are contradictions in reality in opposition to the (pre-Hegelian) world-view of non-contradictory objective reality.<sup>30</sup> But what does Hegel mean by this? One way of explaining this would be to consider Zeno's paradox. Zeno, in his attempt to convince us of his sound understanding of reality, forced us to conceptualize a flying arrow at every moment of its flight. By this, Zeno saw the impossibility of motion as there is an inherent contradiction in the phenomenon of a flying arrow which while in motion is always at rest.

However, Hegel, while approvingly pondering the paradox, found Zeno's conclusion inconclusive. For Hegel, the paradox does not warrant the impossibility of motion but rather confirms that there are contradictions in reality. It is this contradiction ( and not incompatibilities, confusions or inconsistencies in thinking ) which, represents the inner source of all motion. But dialectical contradiction is not only a source of motion, it is itself in the process of motion and development.

Therefore, in terms of dialectical logic, as it involves a concrete unity of opposites, one has acquaintance with particulars only insofar as this is at the same time a knowledge of universals. Similarly, the understanding of the relationship between subject and object involves a concrete dialectical unity. While the object exists independently of the subject, the two form a concrete unity. In this, neither object nor subject represent abstract opposites of each other. Rather, the subject by its unity actively reproduces and transforms the object; their interaction being based on social praxis.

In this light, the slave society, for example, is neither reducible to slaves or slave-owners nor is it reducible to individuals. Individuals are slaves and slave-owners only in (slave) society. This constitutes a concrete dialectical unity between subject and object. And insofar as individuals are slaves and slave-owners only in (slave) society - that is, they are not slaves and slave-owners when situated outside (slave) society - does not mystify the reality of individuals. On the contrary it manifests contradiction in social reality without which there can be neither reproduction nor transformation of the slave society.

What is evidently suggested here is the understanding of opposites representing contradictions in reality, and this itself distinguishes the dialectical world-view from structuralism, post-structuralism and the Lukacsian perspective, not to mention from post-empirical positivism. But insofar as the understanding of dialectics represents a world-view, the mode of theory-construction in dialectics, as we have seen with respect to other theoretical constructions, must be undertaken only within the world-view. It is this we shall now refer to.

### Methodology of dialectics

In undertaking this approach one must first dispossess the 'ghost of positivism'. A close representation of this ghost is found in the positivist critique of Engels' suggested postulation of dialectics. Critics have particularly referred to *Anti-Duhring* where Engels identifies the dialectical method in terms of 'dialectical laws' ( such as Law of the unity of opposites, Law of quantity and quality, Law of the negation of negation, etc. ), one which seemingly upholds Engels' understanding of dialectics in the manner of positivist methodological criteria of value-free theoretical tools. But much of this criticism is based on a serious lack of understanding of Engels' position. The critical question that must be posed here : was Engels in *Anti-Duhring* constructing a methodology per se or was he just identifying the salient features of the dialectical method?

Indeed, the very title of the work suggests that Engels was formulating a critique of Herr Duhring, more precisely a critique of Duhring's natural philosophy. In order to make sense of his critique of Duhring, Engels ( no doubt in a positivist manner ) highlighted the qualitatively different



features of Marxian methodology. To take an example, for Engels the question related to the negation of the negation was : "What role does the negation of the negation play in Marx?"<sup>31</sup> By this he was merely attempting to describe the features of the category of the negation of negation. But to jump from there and say, as some critics do, that Engels developed "a distinctly positivist dialectic" is to undertake a critique of Engels' *Anti-Duhring* outside of its content.

In fact, the immediate goal behind Engels' work was to convince the members of the Second International of the scientific authenticity of revolutionary Marxism ( incidentally the Second International was founded eleven years after the publication of *Anti-Duhring* ). While one with all justification may question the easy path that Engels chose to address the working class, it certainly did not consist in developing a methodology of dialectics. If there was any positivism here it was in the manner in which the features were highlighted. And for this the attack on Engels is only partly valid.

Similar attempts to explain ( in different language and tradition) the Marxian dialectical method are found in Lenin ( eg. *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism* ) and Mao ( eg. *Four Essays on Philosophy* ). But such works are also not trying to develop a methodology. However, if one keeps his/her understanding of dialectics merely within the laws highlighted by Engels ( or Lenin and Mao in their own way ) and attempts to superimpose them over a critique or a study of social reality, the task is bound to be hopelessly limited, distorting and empty. Unfortunately, this has been the case not only with the critics of the dialectical world-view ( who have a genuine political interest in distorting dialectics ) but also with many of the Marxists!

Indeed, the 'ghost of positivism' has been particularly pernicious to the understanding of dialectics. What is required here is rather the recognition of a qualitatively different approach to the mode of theory-construction. Critics and often ardent supporters have failed to understand this. Instead they maintain that there is a vacuum in the mode of theory-construction in the dialectical world-view. In this context, reference is often made to Marx's January 14, 1858 letter to Engels :

... I have overthrown the whole doctrine of profit as it has existed up to now. The fact that by mere accident I again glanced through Hegel's *Logik* ... has been of great service to me as regards the *method* of dealing with the material. If there should ever be time for such work again, I should very much like to make accessible, to the ordinary human intelligence - in two or three printer's sheets - what is *rational* in the method which Hegel discovered ...<sup>32</sup>

A literal reading of this led some to conclude that "Marx never did find the time for this work"<sup>33</sup> and, therefore, the methodology of dialectical world view itself needed to be developed afresh.

But this immediately raises two very simple questions : one, how is it that Marx who had another twenty-six years to live and who wrote another ten or more voluminous books and hundreds of papers did not have time to write just 'two or three printer's sheets'?; and two, what method was Marx using all these years in his work ? If the answer to the second question is the dialectical method ( and which indeed is the case ) then the answer to the first question is not difficult to find.

The contention here is that from the position of the dialectical world -view one cannot represent the mode of theory-construction in an abstract manner. That is, one

cannot approach the method in the manner of positivism with detailed criteria representing its methodology and superimpose them on the study of social reality. The dialectical methodology must be situated within the context of the subject-matter. And it is for this reason that we do not find Marx ( or even Hegel for that matter ) writing abstractly 'two or three printer's sheets' on the dialectical method. The method remains internal to the work itself, for Marx - from his *Capital* to his *Correspondence*.<sup>34</sup>

If this has been well understood then it is not difficult to grasp the qualitatively different approach to the question of methodology in the dialectical world-view. Method here after all ( to follow Hegel ) is the motion of the content itself ( that is, method is internal to the subject-matter, engaged in the process of demystifying the 'appearance of things' ) and therefore it cannot be examined in isolation from the content or the subject-matter.<sup>35</sup> The best one can do is to represent *abstractly* some of the important generalised concepts, notions, elements and categories internal to the dialectical world-view.

## Conclusions

In the very beginning of the article it began by asserting the inseparable relationship between concept and theory and between theory and praxis in a social reality. While the article has already identified the nature of such a relationship in various philosophical traditions, including dialectical logic, particularly in the context of the understanding of the 'knowing subject', the assertion begs an understanding of reality itself for it is in the context of reality alone that theory-construction has any validity. But how do we approach reality?

It is here that the intrusion of science makes sense, for historically the task of uncovering reality remained under the domain of science. But the crucial question that arises here is why does reality have to be uncovered? The question essentially points out the fact that there are 'contradictions in reality' that require uncovering because, as Marx said: "All science would be superfluous, if the appearance, the form, and the nature of things were wholly identical".<sup>36</sup>

In representing such contradictions in reality Marx was more explicit :

It is . . . paradox that the earth moves round the sun, and that water consists of two highly inflammable gases. Scientific truth is always paradox, if judged by everyday experience, which catches only the delusive appearance of things.<sup>37</sup>

The purpose of science in essence becomes one of uncovering or demystifying the appearance of things in a concrete situation.

For example, even five hundred years after the Copernican Revolution we are daily confronted by the appearance of sunrise and sunset. However, the only way we can understand such phenomena is by demystifying the appearance of sunrise and sunset. We are faced with an interesting paradox, which is that while our eyes observe the phenomena of sunrise and sunset, in the context of earth's motion around the sun such observation belies reality. Put in terms of the dialectical world-view, the phenomena of sunrise and sunset represent contradictions in reality - between the appearance of the phenomena and their essence.

But the demystification of such appearance of things in a concrete situation from the point of view of a dialectical methodology involves a whole set of concepts, notions,

elements; categories internal to a dialectical world-view. Keeping in mind that in dialectics' method is the motion of the content itself such concepts, categories, notions and elements can only be represented, as we have indicated earlier, abstractly and in a generalised manner.

While this, no doubt, as we have seen with the critique of Engels' *Anti-Duhring*, can generate the charge of harbouring positivism, the criticism itself should not deter us from highlighting some of the important generalised theoretical concepts, notions, elements and categories relevant to this understanding. Indeed, positivism creeps in only if we limit ourselves to such concepts, notions, elements and categories and superimpose them on the study of social reality.

In demystifying the appearance of things in a concrete situation, the more important generalised concepts, notions, elements, categories internal to the theoretical task include:

One, *dialectical contradiction*. Contrary to the understanding of logical contradiction which represents confusion, incompatibility and inconsistency in thinking, in dialectics the concept of contradiction stands for the unity of opposites which itself is the inner source of all motion and development.<sup>38</sup>

Two, *matter and motion*. While matter exists independently of human consciousness, it cannot exist without motion and vice versa. It is motion which is the mode of existence of matter and simultaneously there can be no motion without matter. In this sense, matter's state of rest is itself in motion.

Three, *time and space*. In as much as matter can exist only in relation to space and time, dialectics upholds the unity of motion, space, time and matter. Only in relation to the understanding of such complexity can one uncover reality.

Four, *quantity and quality*. Whereas quality represents the existing definiteness of a thing which is different from all other objects, the category of quantity represents that definiteness of a thing which can be divided into parts or assembled from the divided parts. The process of development consists of an unity of quantity and quality, of continuity and discontinuity. The latter emerges by the process of negation, that is, by creatively negating the quantitative changes which had reached its limits.

Five, *wholeness*. All objects and phenomena of nature, while inter-related, interdependent and interconditioned, represent an integral whole. That is, one, an element has a specific existence within the framework of totality; two, the articulation of elements forms an organic whole; and three, once a relationship has been formed in the process of articulation or interaction it has its own complexity irreducible to the original elements. The understanding of this organic whole in motion, of the articulation, interaction, and complexity, is what constitutes the relationship between parts and totality in dialectics.

What emerges from all these in relation to our study of social reality is the exclusion of the possibility of analysing events in isolation and in static formation. Rather they must be analysed in connection with other events in movement and development.

Moreover, such a description of the dialectical methodology also exposes the common distortion of dialectics, as incidentally championed by Popper, among others,<sup>39</sup> in the form of the triadic scheme of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. The latter not only wrongly ascribes to dialectics the task of finding abstract conclusions from abstract principles but also wrongly presents the categories in separated and isolated manner.<sup>40</sup> If anything, the triadic scheme stands for the positivist representation of the understanding of dialectics!

But the theoretical task in the demystification of appearance remains incomplete and scholastic if such theoretical expositions remain devoid of praxis (i. e. experience. ) For only in experience can we prove the demystification of the appearance of sunrise and sunset, as Marx would say : 'In practice man must prove the truth . . . of his thinking'. One finds the essence of this in Einstein's debate with Ernst Mach. Einstein makes it clear that 'although the discovery, or better, invention, of a theory goes beyond experience, experience remains the sole criterion for judging the utility of the theory'.<sup>41</sup> This evidently brings us to our methodological position of dialectics.

The article already indicated earlier the dialectical relationship of subject in its unity with the object actively reproduces and transforms the object, in an interaction based on social praxis. This, however, requires the understanding of the nature of social reality as interaction between subject and object, the reproduction and transformation of which takes place in the light of the dialectic of labour.

In relation to society such reproduction and transformation can be best expressed, following Lenin, as "imagination of the human kind and of the objective subject making his / her history not like a single-minded subject but like a huge body of millions of subjects engaged in struggles, with their victories and their defeats".<sup>42</sup> That is, constant social innovation, and/ or discovery ( i.e. social imagination ) remains critical to the task of reproducing and transforming a given social reality. Put differently, the dialectic of labour, with the power of the 'knowing subject' to 'imagine' and 'struggle', constitutes and transforms the social world.

Such imaginations and struggles of the knowing subject, however, is related to the latter's general understanding, as outlined earlier. At a particular level ( keeping in mind the dialectical relationship between general and particular ), the imagination of the knowing subject relates to the social category of intellectuals. This is best highlighted by Gramsci :

All men are intellectuals . . . . There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded : *homo faber* ( creative being ) cannot be separated from *homo sapiens* ( thinking being ).

Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a philosopher, an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought.<sup>43</sup>

In this light, in a capitalist society, the existing nature of social reality represents the constant innovative reproduction of the capital-labour relationship, centralized and organised by the hegemony. And in that, the constant



reproduction of the capital-labour relationship not only constitutes innovative modes of domination but also innovative modes of consent.

It is here that the knowing subject ( as well as the social category of intellectuals ) take more specific meaning in relation to the role of the organic intellectuals related to particular social groups in the society. The latter, in so far as they are organically related to particular social groups, tend to innovatively reproduce ( as well as replicate ) the world-view of the social group they represent. In this context, if transformation in society is to take place one must creatively demystify not only the reproduction of social reality, including the futile case of replication in the context of reality in motion, but also the role of the organic intellectuals reproducing hegemony while contributing to the power of the dominant social forces of the ruling class.

Such demystification, no doubt, remains politically relevant. Indeed, while undertaking the task of demystification one must simultaneously lay the groundwork for a qualitative change in favour of the social forces opposed to the hegemony organized by the dominant social forces - that is, contribute to the task of organizing a counter- hegemony. This, of course, in line with dialectics, presupposes the development of counter-hegemony ( albeit existing at the level of subalternity in reality ) with the development and reproduction of hegemony. In this sense, social imagination itself is political. Not unlikely, therefore, we often see crude ( even at times sophisticated ) attempts to distort or undermine the dialectical basis by which one can demystify the appearance of things. In the context of society, the dialectical world-view contributes to the task of demystifying the historical development of the social relationship of domination and consent and thereby

creatively nurtures in opposition to the political interests of the hegemony, a social praxis of transformation and counter-hegemony.

Praxis in social reality, therefore, is politics not merely in a particular sense but in total. Gramsci aptly describes the essence of this : "Everything is political - even philosophy or philosophies. And the only philosophy is history in action, that is, life itself".<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the existing nature of social reality is nothing but the historical product of politics. What is, however, required here is the constant demystification of it in terms of dialectics. Such is the organic relationship between theory and praxis in dialectical methodology.

### Notes and References

1. For an insight into the epistemological question, see Susan Haack, 'Epistemology With a knowing Subject', *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 33 No. 2. (1979), P. 329.
2. See V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1967) and Alain Lipietz, 'Imperialism or the beast of the apocalypse', *Capital & Class*, 1984.
3. Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge : An Evolutionary Approach*, Revised Edition (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1979).
4. *Ibid.*, p.109.
5. Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London : Routledge, 1969).
6. Popper (1979), *op. cit.*, p. 161.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-36.
8. We are reminded here of Hegel's classic statement upon seeing Napoleon Bonaparte ride through the streets of Jena: "Today I saw the World- Spirit riding on horseback". See Frank Magill

- (ed.), *Masterpieces of World Philosophy* (New York : Harper and Row, 1970), p. 267.
9. G. Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness : Studies in Marxist Dialectics* ( Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, (1923), 1971).
  10. Martin Jay, *Marxism & Totality : The Adventures of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas* ( Berkeley : University of California Press, 1984 ), P.111.
  11. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
  12. *Ibid*, p.114.
  13. L. Althusser, and E. Balibar, *Reading Capital* ( London : New Left Review, 1970 ), p. 25.
  14. F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* ( New York : McGraw-Hill, 1966 ),
  15. Alex Callinicos, *Is There A Future for Marxism ?* (New Jersey : Humanities Press, 1982 ), p. 15.
  16. One can sense this in Plato's understanding of the relationship between 'particular' and 'universal'. While to exist means to be 'particular', anything which is universal as it is not a particular must be non-existent. For Plato, therefore, a particular 'horse' exists (black horse, small horse, brown horse, etc.) but not the universal 'horseness'. That is, the *difference* of the particular from the universal suggests the existence of the former vis-a-vis the latter. See W. T. Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel : A Systematic Exposition* (London : Macmillan, 1924). Hegel, on the other hand, posits that :

'Whatever exists is concrete, with *difference and opposition* in itself . . . Contradiction is the very moving principle of the world; and it is ridiculous to say that contradiction is unthinkable. The only thing correct in that statement is that contradiction is not the end of matter, but cancels itself.

See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (London : Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 96.

That is, with Hegel, 'difference and opposition' involve a concrete dialectical unity. It is otherwise evident that Saussurian linguistics remains devoid of any understanding of dialectics. Plato, however, is more at home.

17. Callinicos, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
18. L. Althusser, *For Marx* (London : Allen Lane, 1969), p. 199.
19. Steven Smith, 'Althusser's Marxism without a knowing Subject', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 79, No. 3, (September, 1985), p. 642.
20. We must not forget here, however, that even Hegel and Marx in their own time and with distinctive world-views also confronted the Cartesian subjectivism.
21. Callinicos, *op. cit.* p., 33.
22. The metaphysics of presence can be illustrated in several ways, as Jonathan Culler points out :

One, in the sense of Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore, I am'). With Descartes the act of thinking stands for one's presence (i.e. existence).

Two, the corresponding relationship of future and of past with present. That is, the reality of both future and past depends on their relationship with the presence of a present : 'the future is an anticipated presence and the past a former presence'.

And three, the understanding of the notion of meaning in the sense that it represents what the speaker 'has in mind' at the moment of speaking.

Post-structuralists maintain that the pervasiveness of the metaphysics of presence limits the understanding of reality into 'either something is present or else it is absent', instead they appreciate Zeno's position of 'not-now in the now' and thereby like Zeno in this context disown the concept of being altogether. See Jonathan Culler, 'Jacques Derrida', in John Sturrock (ed.), *Structuralism and Since : From Levi Strauss to Derrida* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 154-180.

23. Jonathan Culler captures the essence of Derrida's contention regarding Zeno's paradox :

"The motion of the arrow is never given as something simple and present which could be grasped in itself; it is always already complex and differential, involving traces of the not-now in the now".

See *ibid.* p. 163. The futility of this argument is shown further below.

24. See Stephen White, 'Foucault's Challenge to Critical Theory', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 2, (June 1986), p. 421. See also M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge : Selected Interviews and Other Writings* ( New York : Pantheon Books, 1980 ), p. 204.
25. See White, *op. cit.*; Mark Poster, *Foucault, Marxism and History : Mode of Production versus Mode of Information* (Cambridge : Polity, 1984) and Charles Taylor, 'Foucault on Freedom and Truth', *Political Theory*, No. 2., (1984).
26. Haack, *op. cit.*, p. 321.
27. Jay, *op. cit.*, p. 389.
28. Foucault's classic case is that of 'the birth of the prison' :

... The prison is the focus of the synthesis of disciplinary techniques with the reformers' ideology of punishment, and of their intensification and transformation into a new type of apparatus of political and social power which, transcending particular institutions, functions as a paradigm for modern society in some of its fundamental aspects : 'the carcel society'.

One is reminded here of the *fated* Hamlet:

*Hamlet* : Denmark's a prison.

*Rosencrantz* : Then is the world one.

*Hamlet* : A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons,

With Hamlet, however, we know what he was after, but what about Foucault? If we are all condemned to 'dungeons i.e. carcel society), does that man that our existence also remains *fated* ? Foucault's position can only nod to this.

29. Jay, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
30. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (London, 1929).
31. F. Engels, *Anti-Duhring* (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1966), p. 145.

32. Karl Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow : Progress, Publishers. 1975), p. 93.
33. Sean Sayers, 'The Marxist Dialectic', *Radical Philosophy*, No. 14, (1976), p. 4.
34. Lenin understood this very well. In referring to Marx's *Capital* he pointed out that

It is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx !!

See V. I. Lenin, 'On Marx's *Capital*', *Collected Works*, Vol. 38 (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1967 ), p. 180.

35. I. Frolov, *Dictionary of Philosophy* ( Moscow : Progress Publishers, (1967, 1984 ), p. 268.
36. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1894, 1962), p. 951.
37. Karl Marx, *Value, Price and Profit* ( Moscow : Progress, 1968 ), p. 37.
38. To take an example, whereas in formal logic : (i) the law of identity serves to fix a symbol to its referent,  $A = A$ ; (ii) the law of (logical) contradiction specifies that  $A$  and its negation,  $not-A$ , cannot overlap because this would challenge the law of identity; and (iii) the law of the excluded-middle asserts that no third term can exist between  $A$  and  $not-A$ . In dialectics, on the other hand,  $A$  and  $not-A$  constitute a concrete dialectical unity, that is, concrete unity of opposites which represents their inner source of motion and development.
39. Popper [(1965) 1969], *op. cit.*, pp. 312-319.
40. In this context there is an interesting comment by Georgi Plekhanov :

Not once in the eighteen volumes of Hegel's works does the 'triad' play the part of an argument, and anyone in the least familiar with his philosophical doctrine understands that it could not play such a part.

See Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works : Volume 1* ( Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1974 ), p. 544.

41. See Gerald Holton, "Mach, Einstein, and the Search for Reality, *Daedalus*, 97, (1968), p. 650 and R. C. Dougherty, "Einstein and Chomsky on Scientific Methodology, *Linguistics*, 167, (1976), pp. 5-14.
42. Lipietz, *op. cit.* pp. 82-85.
43. A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York : International Publishers, [(1971) 1989]), p. 9.
44. *Ibid.* p. 357