



# **What is Dialectical Materialism?**

Unit 2: Marxist Philosophy

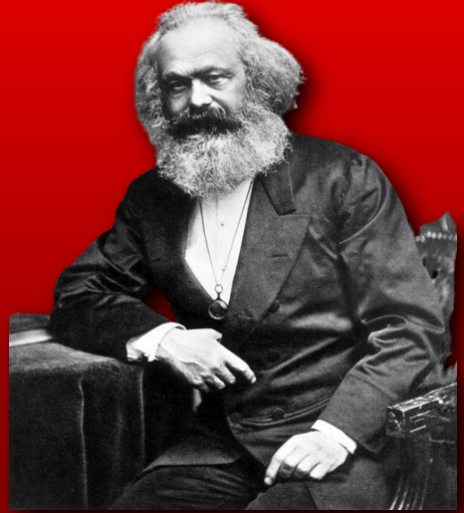
# Dialectical Materialism - Basics

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- What actually is Dialectical Materialism?
- Why should you care about Dialectical Materialism?

“Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”

- Karl Marx, Theses on Feurbach



1) Dialectical materialism is the philosophy of science which

studies the process of the development of material conditions and contradictions that drive historical and social change.

2) You should care about dialectical materialism because

dialectical materialism allows you to understand the world around you, and apply that understanding to change the world for the better.

3) As Marx put it:

“Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”

- Karl Marx, Theses on Feurbach”

# Development of Dialectical Materialism

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- Dialectics were developed 2,500 years ago by Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, and later Socrates.
- Idealist dialectics as put forward by philosophers like Hegel and Fichte gained prominence in Prussia during the 1800's.
- Marx took the Hegelian Dialectic and flipped it on it's head, revolutionizing it, discovering Dialectical Materialism.
- The other classics of Marxism (Engels, Lenin, & Stalin) would go on to further articulate Marx's Dialectic, making it more digestible.



# The Dialectic Component

- The (Thesis → Antithesis → Synthesis) Dialectic is commonly misattributed to Hegel.
- What is Hegel's Dialectic?
- The inherent flaws of Hegel's Dialectic as opposed to the Marxian Dialectic.
- The "Rational Kernel" of the Hegelian Dialectic.

"My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite."

- Karl Marx, *Afterward To The Second German Edition of Capital*



- 1) Thesis Antithesis Synthesis actually comes from German Philosopher Johann Fichte, but is often attributed to Hegel to summarise Hegel's dialectic for beginners. Hegel's dialectic is much more complicated than Fichte's dialectic, to a degree that falls outside the scope of our conversation.
- 2) Hegel's dialectics explores the internal life of a concept starting with positive rationality, the initial idea or viewpoint. This idea is challenged by negative rationality, its internal contradiction or opposing force. The tension between these aspects leads to synthesis, a higher-level concept resolving the contradiction and integrating elements of both. This synthesis then becomes the new basis for further development.
- 3) Hegel's dialectic had many flaws to it. For one, Hegel's dialectic was idealistic as opposed to materialistic, and concerned itself with ideas developing separately from matter and science. To Hegel, the ultimate product of Dialectics was the Absolute Idea, which can be understood as god.
- 4) Marx took the rational kernel, i.e., the correct aspects of Hegel's dialectic, and incorporated it into dialectical materialism, casting aside its idealistic, religious, and spiritual aspects. This rational kernel is the understanding that "concepts evolve through the process of contradictions and resolutions, reflecting the development of human thought itself." To Hegel, concepts are living processes that transform over time.

# The Materialist Component

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- Marx's materialism was both built upon and expanded upon Feurbach's Materialism.
- Feurbach's materialism argues that the study of material reality is the basis of all genuine knowledge.
- In Feurbach's materialism, ideas (the ideal) are a reflection of the material (matter), i.e matter thinking about itself or more succinctly, matter shapes conciousness.
- Feurbach's materialism failed to acknowledge dialectics or understand the process of scientific development



1) Although Marx took from it, he also criticized Feurbach's materialism because it argued that religion is a projection of innate human qualities, emphasizing humanistic values, because it argued against dialectics as a whole. Further, Feurbach failed to understand the dialectical process of development of society, history, culture, and ideas. As such, Feurbach's materialism is inadequate compared to Marx's materialism.

# The Synthesis of Dialectical Materialism

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- Marx's dialectic is both dialectical and material, an evolution in philosophy, which both builds upon and revolutionizes the philosophy of Hegel and Feurbach. I.e it is a synthesis of both Hegel and Feurbach.

Thus, the two components of Marx's Dialectic can thus be summarized as:

- The Dialectical Component - The study of the contradictions between opposing forces which drive conflict, leading to change and development.
- The Materialist Component - The understanding that material conditions are the primary drivers of historical and social development, and that ideas are merely a reflection/interpretation of reality.

**DIALECTICS**



**MATERIALISM**

# The Three “Laws” Of Dialectical Materialism

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In Dialectical Materialism, there are three “laws” of development as put forward by Friedrich Engels.

These three laws are:

- 1) The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa.
- 2) The law of the interpenetration of opposites.
- 3) The law of the negation of the negation.



1) Gradual changes in quantity of X leads to sudden changes in Quality of X. A threshold is reached where quantity converts into a new quality. For example, the exact boiling point of water is 100C, all increases in the temperature in water before that point are quantitative changes, while the transformation from water to steam at 100C is a qualitative change.

To make things more simple, Quality refers to the inherent nature or characteristics of the subject, while quantity refers to the measurable amounts, percentages, and ratios that make up that subject.

2) Opposites are interconnected and their conflict drives change. The interaction of contradictions results in development. For example, the contradiction between labor and capital's conflict drives the social development of capitalism towards socialism.

3) Each stage of development negates the previous one, leading to a new stage that incorporates elements of both. This process results in progress through successive transformations. For example, a new social order emerges by overcoming the old one.

# How To Apply Dialectical Materialism

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- **Identify the Contradictions:**

Examine your subject, consider all contradictions affecting it, both external and internal. Consider the subject wholistically, all of its constituent parts as a whole, as well as the systems entangled with your subject.

- **Look for Quantity of Your Subject:**

Look for the quantities your subject possesses. This could be anything from the temperature of water, the quantity of a certain chemical compound, the development of productive forces, or the ratio between constant capital and human labor.

- **Identify Quality, Identify the Negation of Your Subject:**

Look for where the changes in quantity will change quality. For example, the boiling point of water, a chemical reaction, a change in mode of production, etc. Find where your old subject is negated, where a new subject is synthesised out of the old conflict.

- **Apply the Scientific Method:**

It can help to think of all the previous steps of this method as the observation & research steps in the Scientific Method. Now you can Hypothesize → Experiment → Collect Data → Analyse → Conclude.



## Open Discussion

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- How can you use what you have learned about Dialectical Materialism to bring about social change?
- Do you have any additional questions?



**Thank you for attending the Red Spectre Academy!**

- 1) Dialectical materialism is the philosophy of science which studies the process of the development of material conditions and contradictions that drive historical and