

**THE ORIGIN AND ROLE OF IDEAS IN KARL HEINRICH MARX:
IMPLICATIONS OF MARX’S MATERIALIST IDEOLOGY FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY HUMAN SOCIETY**

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Abstract

In contrast with the opinion held by the idealist philosophers like Hegel that the physical universe is a mere manifestation of a hidden, spiritual or supra-sensible reality, the post-idealist philosophers emphasized the primacy of the material or physical reality in the movement of history. Following Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx maintained that reality is fundamentally material. For him, the complex material order, which consists of the factors of production and relations of production, is the basic reality. Marx’s materialist theory of the origin of ideas features a systematic connection of ideology with socio-economic factors as he insists that everything, including the mental realm, is a derivative of the material order. A number of philosophical inquiries and brain-storming border on Marx’s materialist thoughts and culminate in the development of varying models and theories of ideology. In addition to examining these theories, this paper basically features a re-assessment of Marx’s materialist ideology with a view to highlighting its practical implications and relevance for the contemporary human society.

Key words: Ideas, Ideology, Dialectics, Materialism, substructure, superstructure

Introduction

The history of the human society, from the hunting-gathering era to the modern period characterized by most sophisticated sciento-technological development, has always been that of need fulfilment. Man’s natural and necessary quests range from the narrower but more fundamental need for self-preservation to the broader needs for mutual co-existence, community development, rational explanation to the happenings around him, development of his cognitive potentials and the improvement of his general living conditions. The fulfilment of these human needs is invariably a function of ideas; hence it is said that “ideas rule the world.” These ideas undergo frequent revision, reformation and reformulation. Ideas, as

philosophical principles and templates, provide the spring-board for such political systems as democracy, aristocracy, gerontocracy or economic systems like communalism, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and communism.

Philosophers express diverse views on the origin and nature of ideas as well as their roles in driving human history. For instance, in contrast with the opinion held by the Idealist philosophers like Hegel that the physical universe is a mere manifestation of a hidden reality, the post-Idealist philosophers emphasized the primacy of material or physical reality in the movement of history. While not absolutely rejecting the principles of idealism, Karl Marx adopted the materialist approach to historical, economic, and socio-political development. Following Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx (1845) maintained that the basic reality is material. For Marx, the complex material order, which consists of the factors of production and the relations of production, is the basic reality, whereas the mental realm is derivative from it. In other words, the material order (the substructure), which embraces the totality of the natural environment gives rise to human thoughts, ideas, and worldviews (the superstructure).

Against the backdrop that Marx's materialist philosophical system provides practical insights and explanations on the propelling factors of history, this paper defends the thesis that the principles of dialectical materialism could make for genuine socio-political progress in the human society. Thus, while acknowledging the merits of other philosophical systems with regard to the nature and origin of ideas, this discourse makes a philosophical review of the origin of ideas in Karl Marx, with a view to underscoring its relevance for the contemporary human society.

Pre-Marxist Thoughts On The Origin Of Ideas

The issue of the origin or source of ideas is a perennial epistemological concern given that it borders on the validity of human knowledge. As early as the ancient Greek period of philosophy, philosophers expressed views that show inclination to either innatism or advocacy for experience and sense knowledge. Their views, therefore, differ on the source and nature of sense perception as well as the relationship between sense-experience and the material objects. For instance, Heraclitus' (*Cratylus*, 402a) idea of the "unity of opposites" aims at demonstrating that every object manifests some pair of contrary properties and undergoes change. Arguing that everything is in constant flux he maintained that you could not stem twice into the same river. In fact, for him the 'the conflict of opposites' is

the permanent condition of all things and the law of nature. His thoughts could therefore be considered notable precursors of the Marx's materialist dialectics. Democritus (ca 460 – 360 BC) and Epicurus (341-271 BC), for their parts, were equally materialistic in their world outlook. Also, elements of rationalism are evident in the philosophical thoughts of the Eleatics, the Pythagoreans, the Platonists and Neo-Platonists. Plato's rationalist thoughts, for instance, find expression in his 'Theory of Forms'. For him, the non-material, abstract forms or ideas and not the material world of change known to us through the sensation, constitute the most fundamental kind of reality. The world of forms or ideas, according to him, is accessible only to reason and not the senses (Plato, 1941: Book VI, 509-513e).

The diverse philosophical thoughts on the origin and nature of human knowledge gained remarkable prominence in the modern period of philosophy following the differing epistemological traditions of the Continental rationalists, Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, and the British empiricists represented by Locke, Berkeley and Hume.

The rationalists upheld reason as the only authentic source of human knowledge. For them, human reason possesses innate ideas of all reality, and true knowledge can only be acquired through the analysis of these innate ideas. In his search for an authentic basis for intellectual certainty, Descartes (1954:20) attempted to construct a system of true knowledge based on the powers of human reason alone. For him, our minds naturally possess two powers, namely, *intuition* and *deduction*. While intuition, refers to an intellectual activity or vision of such clarity that leaves no doubt in the mind, deduction refers to all necessary inference from facts that are known with certainty. Through these mental powers, we are able, without fear of illusion, to arrive at the knowledge of things. Very much like Descartes, Spinoza (1985) maintained that our rational powers are capable of forming ideas that reflect the true nature of things. He distinguished three levels of knowledge, namely, the sense perception or imagination, reasoned reflection, and intuition. At the level of imagination, the senses are active and perceive things in the form of images, and images are hardly true representatives of the way things are. The level of reasoned reflection features a reflection on sense perception. At this level, reason advances support or non-support for the formulation of principles based on sense perception. Some generalizations that we have belong to this level. The level of intuition, according to Spinoza, is the highest level of ratiocination. On this level, the adequacy of ideas is immediately known without mediation. For him, only the second and the third levels, strictly speaking, express true knowledge. Leibniz's

(1981) epistemological thoughts also express the fact that the world is knowable a priori, through an analysis of ideas and derivations done through logic. According to him, the mind possesses some innate ideas or self-evident truths, which may be aroused by external objects on certain occasions. Against the backdrop that the senses only give us particular instances, Leibniz argues that they can never yield universal knowledge and that all truths are not experience-based.

Empiricists, on the other hand, maintained that the only reliable route to knowledge is experience. Arguing that error is consequent upon the limitation of human judgement, they insist that there is no error in what is given. Denying the existence of innate ideas, John Locke (1825:51) argues that it is the objects of experience that generate ideas. These ideas or concepts in which knowledge is expressed, derive directly from the mind's activity of reflection on the objects of sensation. In his work, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley (2002: Part I, Section I, 12 – 13) argues that existence of thoughts, passions, and imaginations is dependent on the mind. For him, sensations and ideas cannot exist if they are not perceived by the mind. Berkeley's formula "esse est percipi" (to be is to be perceived) presents existence as being dependent on perception. For him, a thing is the totality of its perceived qualities. Whatever is not perceived, therefore, does not exist. For Hume (1896:259), the contents of the mind can all be reduced to the materials given us by the senses and experience, those materials he calls 'perceptions.' The perceptions of the mind, according to him, take two forms, namely, *impressions* and *ideas*. Whereas impression is the original stuff of thought, an idea is merely a copy of an impression. Thus, corroborating the stand of the scholastics, especially as adopted by Aquinas (1952: q. 2a. 3arg. 19) that, "there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the sense", the empiricists conclude that we have no ideas save those derived from the senses.

Kant expressed the view that neither rationalism nor empiricism provided a satisfactory solution to the problem of the source of human knowledge. His critical philosophy aimed at establishing how much the faculty of reason can know independently of experience. In his attempt at mediating between rationalism and empiricism, Kant affirmed that we possess a faculty that is capable of giving us knowledge without an appeal to experience. While he concurred with the empiricist stand that knowledge begins with experience, he insists that all knowledge does not come from experience. For him, some knowledge are gotten directly from the faculty of rational judgement and therefore a priori. With his idea of 'synthetic a priori' judgement, Kant (1952:17-20) demonstrated the possibility of having propositions that have elements of experience (a posteriori) and yet a

priori, since they considerably rely on intuition and reason. This is the case with mathematics, physics, ethics, and metaphysics which are replete with propositions or judgements that are not only *a priori* but also *synthetic* (a posteriori).

In furtherance of the foregoing argument on the reliability and authenticity of the sense knowledge, philosophers express divergent views on the nature of perception, that is, what kind of reality belongs to the objects which are perceived. Philosophers like G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, Anthony Quinto, and A.J. Ayer express the view what we directly perceive is always an object of a different kind. This object they call *sense datum*. A sense datum, which is usually independent of the mind, is a conglomerate of such elements as patch of colour, a felt surface, a rap of sound, or smell. The nature of sense data is largely determined by a number of factors associated with perception, including the state of the perceiver's nervous system. Bertrand Russell (1980:8) captures this idea thus:

Although I believe that the table is 'really' of the same colour all over, the parts that reflect the light look white because of reflected light. I know that if I move, the parts that reflect the light will be different, so that the apparent distribution of colours on the table will change. It follows that if several people are looking at the same moment, no two of them will see it from exactly the same point of view, and any change in the point of view makes some change in the way the light is reflected.

The implication of these views is that only our knowledge of experience is direct and immediate; what we know or claim to "know" about objects is indirect derivation by inference from what we know directly. Hence, objects appear differently to different observers or differently to the same observer under different conditions. Little wonder, a coin which looks circular from one point of view may look elliptical from another point of view, and a stick which normally appears straight looks bent when it is seen in water.

Marx's Materialist Perspective On The Origin Of Ideas

Every philosophical system basically aims at fostering or defending a definite idea or set of ideas. In other words, any given philosophical system propagates a clearly defined ideology. To be sure, the concept 'ideology' refers to a set of ideas or beliefs that form the basis of an economic or political theory or that are held by a particular group or person (Crowther, 1995: 589). An ideology, according to Freedman (1998), "is a set of ideas, beliefs and attitudes, consciously or unconsciously held, which reflects or shapes understanding or misconceptions of

the social and political world. It serves to recommend, justify or endorse collective action aimed at preserving or changing political practices and institutions.”

As a scientific study of ideas that are focused on socially significant systems, beliefs, presuppositions, or sentiments, Marx’s philosophical system demonstrates a materialist perception of reality. His philosophy of history basically features an attempt to propose a materially grounded notion of history and its propelling factors. Marx rejected the idealist or rationalist character of Hegelian metaphysics, that is, the view that the universe is, properly speaking, the manifestation or self-expression of the ‘absolute spirit’. Rejecting the idea of the ‘absolute spirit’, he replaced it with ‘productive forces’ or ‘economic factors. Whereas, for Hegel, it is the absolute spirit that directs the course of history, for Marx, it is the ‘productive forces’ or ‘economic factors.’ For Marx, then, matter preceded spirit and not vice versa. Marx’s ‘historical materialism’ is, therefore, an economic interpretation of history and its development, especially as demonstrated in the ideas that held sway in the different epochs of history. Indeed, the uniqueness of Marx’s insights is in the critical connection he makes of ideology to the socio-economic practices from which it springs.

Marx’s philosophy of history largely hinges on the concepts ‘dialectics’ and ‘materialism’. The concept ‘dialectics’ is of ancient Greek origin and is simply understood as dialogue or conversation. It is the art of discovering and testing truths by discussion and logical argument (Hornby, 1995:319). Dialectics could also be defined as a process of reasoning based upon the analysis of opposing propositions. Different philosophers have differently applied the concept of dialectics. Socrates, for instance, conceived dialectics purely as dialogue, that is, the ability to conduct disputes and bring out the truth by disclosing and resolving contradictions in the arguments of the opponents. In fact, for him, it is the practice of disciplined conversation.

Marx’s thoughts on dialectical materialism were very significantly shaped by those of Hegel. Of course, Hegel, like other idealists before him, advanced the philosophical views of Immanuel Kant, injecting them with his novel conceptions of reason, freedom, spirit, state, and absolute spirit. Hegel’s philosophy brought idealism to its climax. His philosophy was absolutely idealistic. In his philosophy of history, Hegel emphasized ‘rationality’ as the essence of reality. He conceived the world as a rational process. Hence, he claimed that “what is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational.” For him, too, reality is the self-manifestation of infinite reason, and that infinite reason is self-thinking thought which actualizes itself in the historical process (Hegel, 1991: 20-23). Hegel’s idea of dialectics, as

popularized by Fichte (1993:249), denotes the clash of opposites. It involves a triadic movement from thesis to antithesis and finally to synthesis.

While he adopted the dialectics in Hegel's philosophy, Marx maintained a materialist interpretation of dialectics as he pinned down the mechanisms of dialectics' operation to material essences. Hence, he argued that it is the clash of material forces that brings about change. The specialty in Marx's conception of dialectics lies in its conception as a method of cognizing reality, a method which explains the process of movement in history as well as provides rational solutions to man's immediate problems. Highlighting the materialist approach as the critical point of divergence from Hegel, Marx (1977: 98) asserts:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e. the process of thinking, which, under the name of "the idea", he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiourgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the idea." With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.

For Marx, therefore, the concept 'dialectics' expresses the clash of two opposites, one 'the new', the other, 'the old', culminating in the triumph of the new. He insists that this is a natural and indeed endless process of the movement of world history. Corroborating Marx's practical view of dialectics, Leo Trotsky (1939) concludes: "The dialectic is neither fiction nor mysticism, but a science of the forms of our thinking insofar as it is limited to the daily problems of life but attempts to arrive at an understanding of more complicated and drawn-out processes. The dialectic and formal logic bear a relationship similar to that between higher and lower mathematics."

Materialism, as a key concept in Marx's philosophy, has its origin in the Latin word, *materia*, which means 'matter'. It denotes the generality of physical substances as contrasted with such non-material reality as mind or spirit. As a philosophical category, matter incorporates all the diverse bodies surrounding man, whether organic or inorganic. On this stress, Lenin (1909:130) observes: "matter is a philosophical category denoting the objective reality, which is given to man by his sensation and which is copied, photographed, and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them." Within the philosophical universe of discourse, therefore, 'materialism' is the view that matter constitutes the basis of all that exists in the universe. This view projects matter and material

forces as the basis of all reality including the nature of thought. In fact, it expresses the primacy of matter over spirit or mind and, indeed, over consciousness.

Save maintaining that consciousness is only the product of the historical development of matter, materialists affirm that matter is eternal, and can neither be created nor destroyed. Thus, nothing in the material world can be created out of nothing and nothing can disappear without trace. In other words, nothing can bring the movement of matter to a halt. Its destruction in one state gives rise to another and this is an on-going process. Indeed, while the frequent changes in the forms of matter express diversity, matter remains fundamentally indestructible as a primary reality.

Notably, given that the materialist world outlook embraces nature as it is, it largely accords with natural science which is likewise rooted in experience and man's practical activity. Also, materialism closely relates with empiricism and so is opposed to rationalism and idealism. To be sure, the philosophical concept 'idealism' expresses the belief that ideas are the only real things. Idealism, as contrasted with materialism, simply projects the view that the whole reality is the product of the mind, which constructs and structures all things. The philosophical tradition that considers mind pre-eminent stemmed from Descartes' rationalist philosophy, moved through Kant's critical idealism, and reached its fullest manifestation in Hegel's absolute idealism as well as the idealism of the late nineteenth-century Hegelians.

As already observed above, the uniqueness of Marx's philosophy of history is particularly seen in its practical dimension and systematic application of dialectics to the material order. Marx's dialectical materialistic philosophy considers the process of movement in history as a direct consequence of the inherent changes in the 'economic factors.' This culminates in his division of history into five phases, epochs, or productive systems, namely, the primitive communal system, the ancient or slave system, the feudal system, the capitalist system, and the socialist and communist systems. (Marx & Engels, 1952: 415 – 434). Each of these epochs differs from the others consequent upon the varying material conditions characterizing it. The 'economic factors', within this universe of discourse, incorporates all issues concerning raw materials and machinery as well as the forces of production, which also include what Marx calls 'the social relations of production.' Human beings organize themselves in order to extract the raw materials, to invent, make, operate, and repair the machinery, to build and staff the factories and so on. Out of this configuration of social relations, the different

classes in the society arise. The varying economic conditions associated with each human society invariably affect its members' ideas or modes of thought.

In essence, Marx maintained that the ideas of each of these epochs are the offshoots of its material conditions. Ideas about religion, morality, law, justice, etc., are thus various modes of rationalizing the existing material order. For him, it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, rather their social being determines their consciousness. Scarcely, therefore, would Marx consent to the opinion asserting the existence of enduring objective ideas which would be characterized by universal consensus on issues bordering on religion, ethics and indeed all facets of human social intercourse.

The Role Of Ideas In Karl Marx

In the *Communist Manifesto* published in 1848, Marx and Friedrich Engels expressed the view that the history of the world right from the beginning has always been a history of class struggles due to economic factors (Marx and Engels, 1952: 419). This implies that history is interpreted as a record of class conflict in which such economic factors as the means of production, distribution, and exchange exert a decisive influence on the social process and historical development. Thus, if there are changes in the economic structure of the society, the class relations will definitely be affected. Such changes would also have implications for the social, political, moral, and religious lives of the populace.

According to Marx, the class struggle is bound up with particular historic phases; hence his distinction of the five phases or epochs of history or productive systems alluded to above. The members of the society belong to different classes with varying interests and ideology. For Marx, the conflict of ideas spurs on the dialectic process, a process which involves the disappearance of some things and the birth of new things. This ultimately makes for progress in history. Marx expresses the view that the logic of the material order, which involves man's continuous effort to subjugate nature, continues to move man to the direction of progress. The dialectical conflict of opposites would eventually culminate in the rise of the common masses against the capitalist ideologies as they insist on their participation in the management of common resources.

More still, Marx maintains that when technology advances, it causes changes in the rate of production and human relationship. The impelling force to survive leads to the creation of tools, and the kinds of tools created affect the way people relate with one another. The motive force that pushes the society forward, therefore, lies in human labour. Whereas certain tools, such as the bow and arrow,

permit independent existence, the plough logically requires a division of labour. Similarly, whereas a spinning wheel can be used in the home or in small shops, heavier machinery and equipment would require large factories and a concentration of workers in a given locality.

Apart from simply affirming that the essence of reality is material, Marx believed that philosophy ought to be employed in practice to change the world. His social interpretation of the dialectical process culminated in its adoption as a tool for social revolution. The human society, according to Marx (1952:419), features a complicated arrangement of men into orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In other words, the human society is highly stratified on the basis of social class. It is a society of 'the oppressors' and 'the oppressed', 'the haves' and 'the have-nots'. The existence of these opposing social classes makes conflict and violence inevitable. Hence, the need for social revolution.

The ideologies produced by the material order, according to Marx, form the principles on which the society is founded. The ideas produced by the dynamic material order make for the enhancement of the dialectic process. Marx (1998: 67) observes that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; that is, the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force." In other words, the acceptable "mainstream" ideas in any society tend to serve the interest of the ruling class. The members of the ruling class may indeed have their individual differences but as a class they share an overriding interest in maintaining their class social and economic dominance. They accomplish this by presenting their class social dominance as normal, natural, and even necessary. The ruling class, Marx says, are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, that is, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.

Marx further avers that the longevity and stability of the ruling class's dominance, rather than being by brute force alone, is fostered by their ability to influence, if not control, the thoughts, the beliefs and ideas – the "consciousness" – of the working class. These ideas, therefore, make for the explanation, legitimization, and justification of the arrangements and institutions of the society i.e. the division of labour, class differences, and differences of wealth, status, and power that exist in a particular society. Thus, Marx emphasized ideology in a capitalist system as a reflection which is in itself a form of power and exploitation embedded in the social contradictions to which material conditions give rise. The dominant class – The bourgeoisie – was the beneficiary of ideology, precisely because ideology served its chief interests, namely, the maintenance of its domination. On this stress,

the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci conceives ideologies as the superstructures consolidated by intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971).

In the light of the pivotal roles of ideology in social development, therefore, Marx insists that ideas constitute a formidable force driving human history and social development. In other words, the materially generated ideas constitute the law of motion of the society.

Dialectical Materialism As The Basis Of Social Development

As already observed above, the concept ‘dialectical materialism’ captures the essence of Marx’s philosophy given that it emphasizes the primacy of matter over consciousness. In his article “The ABC of Materialist Dialectics”, Leon Trotsky (1939) comments on Marx’s stance thus:

We call our dialectic materialist, since its roots are neither in heaven nor in the depths of our ‘free will’, but in objective reality, in nature. Consciousness grew out of the unconsciousness, psychology out of physiology, the organic world out of the inorganic, the solar system out of the nebulae. On all the rungs of this ladder of development, the quantitative changes were transformed into qualitative. Our thought, including dialectical thought, is only the forms of the expression of changing matter... the dialectic of thinking having grown out of the dialectic of nature, possesses consequently a thoroughly materialist character.

The concept of dialectics, as noted above, connotes a movement. Dialectical materialism, as a philosophical system, simply highlights the propelling force in the progress of the material world. Matter is not stagnant. It constantly moves in space and time which constitute its mode of being. Materialist dialectics is, therefore, preoccupied with discovering the general laws of the society’s motion and development. Since matter and the material conditions associated with it are not immutable and motionless, matter exists also as motion. Thus, Engels (1877: 36) writes, “Motion is the mode of existence of matter. Never anywhere has there been matter without motion, nor can there be.”

Dialectical materialism is concerned with motion to the extent it involves the coming into being of new phenomena, bodies, or material conditions, and the phasing away of the old ones. Everything is entangled in the web of change, as such new structures always emerge to replace the pre-existing ones in human society. This is the dialectical law of nature to which all things within the realm of nature are subject. Dialectical thinking, thus, analyzes all things and phenomena

in the light of change. The materialist dialectics is neither abstract nor a theory existing merely in the mind but a projection of the world as an integrally connected whole. It examines the universal connections of the countless multitude of particular individual objects and phenomena as well as the reflection of these in man's consciousness. It equally studies the dynamic matter with a view to disclosing how it controls and is controlled by human activities.

In contrast to the view of some idealists who deny the knowability and even the objective existence of the world and regard it as a product of consciousness alone, Marxist dialectics affirms its knowability. In fact, it studies the laws governing the process of cognition, which are a reflection of the laws of the objective world and how man can bring about its revolutionary transformation. Basing on the wealth of experience accumulated by mankind which is made manifest in the achievements of science and revolutionary practice, dialectical materialism demonstrates that the whole world is fully knowable and that through his power of ratiocination man is capable of forming a correct idea of material reality. It is, therefore, the material order or the 'substructure' that determines the 'superstructure'. Hence, the ideas of a given period or epoch reflect the material conditions in vogue. Marx (1952: 428) succinctly puts it thus: "When people speak of the ideas that revolutionize society, they do but express the fact that within the old society the elements of a new one have been created, and that the dissolution of old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of the old conditions of existence."

More still, Marx's materialist dialectics, through critical analysis of social development, projects social revolution as an efficient method of achieving social change. Social revolution is always in the interest of the working class or the poor masses, to the effect that it aims at proffering solutions to the ever-growing inherent contradictions characterizing the human society. The revolutionary actions of the working class are important also in the sense that they more practically express their democratic rights to protest against its bad leaders and their unfavourable policies and programmes, and so limit the chances of tyranny.

Social revolution denotes the replacement of a society's social, economic, political, and ideological structures by another. It is often necessitated by the antagonistic contradictions between social classes, the appearance of new productive forces in the old society, changes in the economy and the disposition of the class forces. The social consciousness that these contradictions elicit in individuals together with its consequent transformation into practice to effect fundamental social changes capture the idea of social development. Strong ideology drives social revolution

as it forms the basis for a qualitative or fundamental change in a given social system. Man's conscious activities are, therefore, necessary in the project of replacing the old social formations with new ones. Buttressing this Marxist, Afanasyev (1980:74) writes:

The invincibility of the new does not mean that its victory comes of itself, automatically. This victory must be prepared, must be doggedly fought for. The conscious activity of the people, the advanced classes, the progressive parties play a decisive part in the victory of the new over the old in social life.

Against the backdrop that revolution is often understood as expressing violent or forceful change, it must be noted that violence and force do not exhaust the entire content of Marx's idea of social revolution. While acknowledging that revolution needs some measure of force, given its fundamental aim of replacing obsolete social, political, or economic formations with new ones, it can still be non-violent and peaceful. However, when peaceful revolution becomes impossible given the undue support an 'outdated system' enjoys from a recalcitrant and 'outdated class', violent revolution becomes inevitable; after all, violence is a fundamental character of the social order. Indeed, conflict of opposites makes violence part of human existence. Violence makes for progress so long as it is constructive and used as an instrument of social revolution. Through fundamental transformations, therefore, the society aims at resolving class antagonisms and socio-economic and political contradictions.

In sum, dialectical materialism highlights a natural and necessary condition of human existence, namely, the change in the material order which influences man's consciousness as well as makes for progress and development in human society. In each of Marx's 'epochs of history', dialectics constituted a natural order of things whereby old economic conditions necessarily gave way for new ones. In the capitalist epoch, for instance, dialectical materialism formed the theoretical foundation of the working class's world outlook and ideology.

History As Economics In Action

As an ontologically social being, man lives authentically and finds genuine fulfilment as a member of the human society. Hence, Aristotle (1962: Book 1, Chapter 2, 28) avers: "He who is unable to live in society or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself must be either a beast or god." Man's needs are numerous and no individual can provide these all alone. Individual forces must

of necessity be joined in order to ensure meaningful success. Emphasizing the inevitability of mutual support among the members of the any human society and quest for need fulfilment as a driving force of the civil society, Plato (1994: BIII, 369 & C) writes: “Polis originates, then...because the individual is not self-sufficient, but has many needs which he cannot supply himself...come then...let us make an imaginary sketch of the origin of the polis. It originates from our needs.”

With the idea of ‘historical materialism’, Marx and Engels proved that the masses or the working people are the real makers of history, and that their labour constitutes the indispensable foundation of society’s life and progress. They were of the view that before one can engage in science, art, philosophy, and other rational endeavours of the sort, one must have satisfied such basic needs as food, shelter, and clothing, for which one must work. Hence, Marx and Engels maintained that the socio-economic formation of a society plays a decisive role in its progress. To be sure, ‘socio-economic formation’ here refers to the totality of social phenomena and processes, including all issues related to economy, ideology, family, and way of life.

Despite the inherent anti-social tendencies in him, man possesses a natural tendency to strive for progress and improve his living conditions. The natural art of constantly relinquishing ‘the old’ and the assumption of new and better living conditions expresses a dialectical movement. The class struggle that occasions transition from one epoch to another is obviously a function of ideological reviews that demonstrate ‘the law of unity and conflict of opposites’ and ‘the law of negation of negation’ in the materialist dialectics. Engels (1877:87) observes that, “negation’ in dialectics, does not mean simply saying no, or declaring that something does not exist, or destroying it in any way one likes. No doubt, a rejection is a pre-requisite for negation; but dialectical negation rather than viewing the process of negation from the perspective of absolute rejection considers it an essential factor of development. New modes of existence only come as a result of the negation of previous modes. “...The new, as a negation of the old, of what has gone before, does not merely destroy, does not leave behind it a ‘desert’, but merely ‘sublates’ the old.” (Engels, 1877: 80). The basic laws of dialectical materialism, therefore, highlight the nature of development in the material world and its driving forces. Konstantinov (1982:120) captures this idea thus:

Development is, in fact, a chain of dialectical negations, each of which not only rejects the previous links, but also preserves all that is positive in them, thus concentrating more in the further, higher links, the richness of development as a whole. The infinity of development lies not in the infinite

arithmetical addition of one unit to another, but in the emergence of new and higher forms, which create within themselves the preconditions for further development.

Marx's materialist dialectics, as contrasted with the abstract theories that preceded it, is rooted in concrete realities. The laws driving the development of human society, described as the laws of dialectical materialism, find expression in everyday life and practice. The observable progress in human society is a natural consequence of the motion of matter. As the material economic conditions change positively, all other aspects of man's life like his social consciousness are also affected. Hence, Afanasyev (1980: 355) writes: "social consciousness is the aggregate of people's ideas, theories and views, social feelings, habits and morals reflecting objective reality – the human society and nature. The social being of the people is the main object which social consciousness reflects. Since social being is multifarious and complex, social consciousness, too, is multifarious and complex."

The development in modern human society is subject to the intrinsic contradictions of objects and phenomena, since it is also "the unity and conflict of opposites" that forms the basis of social development. This is demonstrated by the inherent conflict and negations that characterize the forces of production and relations of production, which are aspects of labour. Labour itself plays a fundamental role in the sustenance of human life, the maintenance of the society as well as its development. As a theory, therefore, dialectical materialism offers considerably satisfactory scientific laws of development. It also presents social progress as a natural process, the driving forces of which are traceable to material conditions. It equally emphasizes the essential roles of human beings as agents of social progress as they concretize the objective laws of historical developments through their conscious actions.

The Implications Of Marx's Materialist Ideology

Marx's materialist dialectics, as a profound theory of development, approached the issue of social development from a very fundamental perspective. Its materialist undertone suggests that the material conditions give rise to the ideas that eventually drive social development. This view, to a large extent, addressed one of the fundamental questions of philosophy, namely, the relationship between consciousness and being vis-a-vis the human society.

Marx's theory of the origin and role of ideas basically underscores his rejection of capitalism for its exploitative. His critique of capitalism is evidently a moral one.

It aims at a moral ideal which tends towards objectivity. This critique also highlights a fundamental problem of ideology, that is, its being dominated by the interests of the ruling class. Indeed, his analysis of the capitalist system undoubtedly highlights obvious facts. For instance, it observes that the material order contributes a great deal to the shaping of human mind and largely affects the ideologies of a given society. There is no gainsaying the fact, too, that the capitalist society is a highly stratified one, and so based on multi-varying ideas. Nevertheless, it would be an overstatement and indeed an extreme assumption to rule out, as Marx did, the possibility of universal ideas. The dynamic nature of the substructure or the material order notwithstanding, some basic principles like fairness, equity, etc. can still be the underlying factors on which the ideologies are based. Thus, ideas about justice could be considered universal when it is animated more by the spirit of reciprocal fairness. Moreover, human beings by virtue of their ability to reason possess the capacity to change with the dynamic material order, thereby adapting to the dynamic substructure. Hence, the denial of the possibility of the notion of universal and eternal norms rather than being absolute is relative. While not being objective, it is subjective.

Marx's materialist conception of history demonstrates that the production of the means to support human life and the exchange of things produced determine the nature of all social structures. In other words, the human society is sustained by human beings' effort to meet their basic needs: food, shelter and clothing. Human beings, therefore, ought to be discussed in the context of praxis or their practice of need fulfilment. Save as part of nature, rational being, social being, etc., Marx would, therefore, define man as a laboring, productive or creative being. Man reaches his full potential only when he uses his intellect to fill his needs. Man's labour, thus, becomes his defining characteristic.

Another relevance of Marx materialist ideology is seen in the conception of labour as a social undertaking. The effort to conquer the forces of nature has always stimulated in men the desire to unite as they seek for the means of livelihood. Human beings organize themselves in order to extract the raw material, to invent, make, operate and repair machinery, to build and staff the factories and so on. The unity of these productive forces culminates in the advancement in the instruments of production, improvement in human skills, potentials and relations of production. Thus, there is a correlation between human needs and the means to fulfill them.

The uniqueness of Marx's materialist ideology also finds expression in its projection of the interest of the working class. Marx's philosophy aims at

emancipating the masses from exploitation, which is especially made manifest in the alienation of labour. In fact, historical materialism, as developed by Marx and Engels, has a revolutionary character, and serves as the working class' weapon in the struggle against capitalism and a reliable means of renewing the face of the human society. Thus, Marx's materialist ideology, with its corollaries brings to fore the role of philosophy in social development.

Remarkably, too, the connection which Marxism makes between philosophy and science makes many natural scientists develop some penchant for it since it helps them find their bearing in the objective, material world and to reveal the dialectics of nature in their concrete scientific studies. On this, Afanayev (1980: 23-24) writes:

As it develops, natural science strengthens its links and interaction with philosophy. These links have become especially close in our day when natural scientists are solving such complicated problems as the character of elementary particles of matter, the origin of life, the development of cosmic bodies and many others. Profound philosophical generalizations are absolutely essential in our age of momentous scientific advances; the tremendous progress of natural science and the deep revolutionary changes that are taking place in it require the closest union of philosophy and science. In these circumstances, Lenin noted, a natural scientist must be a dialectical materialist.

In essence, Marxism, especially as seen in the principles of dialectical materialism, presents a scientific picture of the world and indeed operates using scientific principles. By so doing, it highlights the existing interconnection between philosophy and science. The scientific form that Marx's philosophy takes is mainly demonstrated in its systematic unification of 'materialism' and 'dialectics'. Prior to him, philosophers treated these concepts distinctly. Hegel, for instance, was a dialectician but not a materialist, while Feuerbach was a materialist but not a dialectician. Marx integrated these concepts into a dialectical-materialist world outlook. On the strength of this novelty, Afanasyev (1980: 22) considers *historical materialism* the only existing scientific theory of social development, a method of the cognition and revolutionary transformation of the society. Marx's philosophy offers considerable explanation to the changes in human society, and why they occur. It also presents feasible strategies for social, economic, and political advancement of the human society.

Conclusion

The social, political and economic concerns of any human society largely determine its structure and direction. The direction of history is also a function of the its organizational principles or basic ideology. The human persons, as true makers of history, must habitually strive to generate novel ideas aimed at renewing the face of the human society. Hence, the attempt to ensure a radical transformation of a society's social and political structures, to a great extent, requires improved intellectual and progress-oriented practical activities. Marx regrets the fact that most philosophers and social scientists merely engaged in theoretical analysis and interpretation of the social reality with little or no practical attempt to effect positive change. His philosophy obviously bridges this gap as it features a harmonious blend of theory and practice and provides a formidable framework for social change.

With his materialist ideology, especially as demonstrated in dialectical materialism, Marx succeeded in expounding a system of philosophy that genuinely attempts a reconciliation of the principles of Hegel's idealist dialectics and materialism. This culminated in the development of a scientific theory of development and a critical analysis of historical progress. Marxism, as a social system that seeks to effect social change and defends the interest of the masses, has perennial relevance. Its pursuit of such ideals as freedom, justice, equality and liberation endears it to scholars, trade unionists and human right activists. By developing a practical conception of history, therefore, Marx cast the enterprise of philosophy into a very powerful mould with a view to satisfying human needs and ensuring genuine socio-political progress in the contemporary human society.

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