

Some Materials on Dialectical Contradiction in Marx's Works

This is a summary of Marx's use of dialectical concepts, including contradiction, opposition, organic relation or system, moment, dominant moment, qualitative change, and others. Some important points about materialism and some necessary economic points are also included. The main omissions here are some of Marx's comments in letters. References to the *Marx Engels Collected Works*, New York: International Publishers, 1976-, are given by volume number followed by page number, for example "14:35."

Note: The translation Aveling-Moore translation of *Capital*, vol. I, which is followed in the *Marx Engels Collected Works*, vol. 35, is not adequate for philosophical study, despite its charm. Some passages below have been translated again from the German edition, Marx Engels Werke, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1956-, abbreviated "MEW."

On Hegel's Philosophy of Right

Mediation of opposites is only possible when they share a single essence. E.g.: Man and woman, philosophy and religion, north pole and south pole have one essence, which implies that the two sides need each other, supplement each other. 3:87-8.

Hegel is wrong in treating mutually exclusive essences as aspects of a single essence 3:89.

Hegel is wrong in seeing eagerness to resolve oppositions by "fighting to a decision," i.e., by destroying one side, a defect or something to be avoided. 3:89

Hegel's main error: that contradictory appearances are considered to be unified in essence rather than essentially contradictory. 3:91

Economic MSS of 1844

Economists' views are contradictory because they study a contradictory reality. Contradiction is *active* opposition, driving toward resolution 3:293. The negation of the negation is an abstract expression of the movement of history.

Theses on Feuerbach

The contradictions of the social world explain why people invent religion.

They must be resolved by revolution 5:4.

The Holy Family

The proletariat and wealth are opposites and the proletariat is the negative, which needs to destroy the relationship. The capitalists are the positive side, which tries to preserve it 4:33-36.

A resolved contradiction is no longer a contradiction 4:167. Idealists pretend to reconcile contradictions (that can't be reconciled?) 4:183.

German Ideology

There are contradictions between the forces of production and the social relations of production, different sides of which can be in different nations 5:45.

The division of labor leads to contradictions between individuals and collectives 5:46. St. Bruno presents real conflicts as conflict between self-consciousness and substance. 5:98.

St. Bruno tries to solve [lösen] the contradictions of idealist speculation within that speculation 5:99.

Contradictions between individual and class are constantly destroyed and reproduced 5: 247

Sancho makes real contradictions into contradictions of the individual with his

ideas. 5:287

“True Socialists” resolve contradictions by interpreting them 5:515.

The whole mode of productions must be changed to resolve the contradictions between the relations of production and consumption 5:516.

Herr Grun omits necessary mediations (“connecting links”) and produces fantasy as a result 5:517.

The Poverty of Philosophy

Thought splits into contradictory sides and the struggle between them is dialectical movement 6:164.

Dialectical movement is the coexistence of two contradictory sides, their conflict, and their fusion into a new category 6:168.

The philanthropic school abstracts from contradictions that are met with at every moment in actual reality 6:177

Revolution requires full development of the productive forces 6:211

Opposition of classes culminates in brutal contradictions 6:212.

1857-8 Economic Manuscripts (Grundrisse)

The aim of investigation is the comprehend the actual relationships, not the dialectical reconciliation of concepts 28:27.

Organic relations of production and consumption discussed 28:28-9.

Production and consumption are each a means for the other, each creates the other 28:30.

Society is not a single subject 28:31.

Exchange mediates between production and consumption 28:36.

Despite the dominance of one moment, moments mutually influence each other in all organic entities. 28:37.

Method of investigation starts with the “chaotic conception of the whole,” finds simple categories by analysis, combines them for a rich description of the whole. 28:37

The concrete is the unity of the di-

verse; it appears in thought as a result 28:37

Hegel’s illusion is that the real is the result of the thinking synthesizing itself within itself, but the concrete does not actually originate that way, only the thought of the concrete 28:38.

The real subject is outside the mind 28:38.

The real history of society may or may not correspond to the order of thought 28:39-40.

Economic categories are only valid for limited historical conditions, particular forms of society 28:42-3.

The real value of commodities is constantly negated, i.e., raised or lowered, contradicting its own determination 28:75. Commodities have a dual existence, as thing with exchange value, and as money, which leads to difference, to opposition and to contradiction 28: 84-5. [compare to Hegel’s sequence difference >> opposition >> contradiction.]

Contradictions can develop within trade and cause trade crises 28:86.

There is essential unity between money and commodities, as shown by the violent eruption when they are separated 28:87.

It is inherent in money to be self-sufficient, independent of relation to commodities 28:88.

Idealist mode of presentation seems like the dialectic of concepts 28:89.

Price is a reflected determinateness of a commodity, a property it has because of its relation to something else 28: 125.

Circulation appears as a bad infinite (never ending process), but has circles, accomplished something, when money is turned into more money 28:132.

Economists see the unity, not the contradictions in the money system 28:132.

Money and commodities are apparently independent but have an essential unity, which must manifest itself in violent explosions (crises). Here money is the

germ of crises, makes them possible 28:133.

The totality of production contains contradictions; crises point beyond [capitalism] and urge a new historical form 28:160.

Antagonism of wages is already latent in exchange value and money, which are mediated by deep contradictions 28:179-80.

Circulation is the mediation of presumed extremes, which it does not posit. Circulation is the image of a process occurring underneath it 28:186.

A dialectical derivation of capital: exchange value >> money >> labor that creates value, i.e., capital 28:194.

Against Hegel, new productive forces and relations are not produced by a self-positing Idea, but out of contradictions within existing relations. In a fully developed capitalist system, everything posited is also a premise, an organic system, creating any part it lacks 28:208.

Labor and capital are extremes resulting from development that simplifies a more complicated previous set of relationships 28:223.

Contradictions of capital: capital posits and does not posit necessary labor (must both put workers to work and minimize the required labor) 28:327.

It is necessary to demonstrate the latent contradictions of capital 28:341-2.

The basis of contradiction is (A) necessary connection of moments belong together and (B) mutually independent, indifferent relations between them [Negativity is missing to make a contradiction?] 28:342.

Basic contradiction of developed capitals: its particular restrictions versus its general tendency to go beyond all limits 28:342.

In a crisis, moments that seem indifferent reveal their inner relationship 28:373.

Labor posits its reality not as being-for-self, but as mere being-for-another. Labor posits the totality of wealth confronting

it, as an alien reality 28:383.

The consciousness of the slave that he cannot be the property of another reduced slavery to an artificial lingering existence 28:465.

The barrier to capital is the contradictory development in which individual alienates himself, the conditions of his labor are the property of alien wealth 28:465.

The development of the productive forces transcends capital at some point, i.e., transcends the contradictory social relations of capital 28:467.

The rate of profit declines as capital develops and the size of profit can also fall. This is the most important historical law of capitalism. Beyond a certain point, development of the productive forces becomes a barrier to capital 29:132-4. The contradiction of the productive forces and relations of production is expressed in crises 29:134.

The highest development of the productive powers means the depreciation of capital and the degradation of the laborer. There are counteracting tendencies, however 29:134.

The contradictions of capital produce a great variety of forms of labor 29:153.

Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy

The totality of the social relations of production is the economic foundation of society, which supports the legal and political superstructure 29:263.

Existence determines consciousness, not the other way around 29:263.

The social relations of production conflict with the social forces of production, which begins an era of revolution 29:263.

Revolution requires the maximum development of the productive forces possible within the given social relationships. 29:263

Capital is the last antagonistic form of social production 29:263-4.

There is antagonism already in the

buyer/seller relation 29:331.

The money/commodity contradiction is the abstract form of all contradictions of capitalism 29: 332.

Economist Mill leaves out money in order to get an equilibrium of purchase and sale 29:332.

Money makes development of inherent contradictions possible 29:334.

Crises bring out contradictions in money as a means of payment. It is not required as a measure of value (in a crisis) but as material exchange value, which has assumed a self-sufficient form 29:433.

The money embodied in a commodity conflicts with exchange value that becomes self-sufficient, as shown by inflation of money 29:434.

Circulation is a mediation of pre-posed extremes 29:479.

Money seems to be a fateful power, and people rebel against it. Money contains within it its own negation—i.e, contradictions among the different functions of money 29:487.

The dialectical form of presentation is right only when it knows its own limits 29:505.

Critique of Political Economy, 1861- 63 Drafts [also called “Theories of Surplus Value”]

Production and consumption are in their nature inseparable, but are actually separated in the capitalist system, where their unity is restored through opposition 31:180.

General rate of profit contradicts the determination of value by labor time, so the existence of the general rate of profit must be explained by mediations (intermediary stages) 31:401.

Crises reveal contradictions and antagonisms 32:131.

Apologists deny the reality (or at least the necessity) of contradictions, and cling to unity in the face of contradiction. The crisis expresses the unity of what has become separated, and forcibly destroys

the independence they have acquired 32:131.

There can be no crises without the independence of the two sides, but the independence does not explain the crisis, but only its possibility [missing negativity?] 32:131-3.

The contradiction between partial and universal overproduction in a crisis is resolved this way: The crisis becomes general when it affects the main commercial goods 32:136.

Crisis means products cannot be sold 32:139

Crisis is forcible unity of phases that have become self-sufficient 32.140.

The most abstract form of the crisis is the contradiction of use value and exchange value 32:140.

Trade crises are the concentration of all the contractions of the capitalist economy 32.140.

The contradictions of money as a means of payment and the contradiction between purchase and sale are mere abstract forms, possibilities of crisis. These forms do not explain why the potential crisis becomes actual 32:140.

If different phases of capitalist production had no inherent unity, such unity could not be established by force 32:144.

Real contradictions exist, and cannot be exorcized by imagination 32:148.

Sismondi recognizes contradictions that Ricardo denies. He is aware of the fundamental contradiction: unrestricted development of productivity and wealth, whose products must them be sold to a working class whose consumption the capitalists need to restrict to necessaries 32:248.

Sismondi does not understand these contractions, so does not know how to resolve them [by revolution?]. Wealth has oppositional existence, since wealth always requires and develops poverty, too 32.248.

Capitalist production must, by its own immanent laws (A) develop productive

forces without limitation and (B) restrict that development to a narrow basis [of what can be sold to a working class whose consumption capital must limit] 32:274.

Contradictions are more evident in Mill, because he is more systematic. Contradictions between general law and particular concrete circumstances are not resolved by Mill by mediating (discovering connecting links) but by adapting the concrete to the abstract. Real contradictions must be resolved in a real way. Mill emphasizes the unity of a contradiction, leaves out the contradiction [the negativity?] 32:274-8.

Mill unifies opposite relationships, leaving out the oppositions 32:290.

Economic categories are reflected in the mind in a very distorted way 32:348.

The real contradiction is between wealth and workers' misery 32:394.

Mutually contradictory conditions can alternate in time. 34:19

Opposition of capital and wage labor develops into complete contradiction, since capital not only reduces the value of labor power, but makes it superfluous 34:28.

The contradiction between the value and price of labor contradicts the concept of value, and it *exists* and is mediated, but appears unmediated, so the wage looks like the price of a day's work, when it is actually the price of the worker's capacity to work one day 32:72,

Capital, Vol. I.

Natural laws of capitalist production work with iron necessity toward inevitable results 35:9.

Marx sought natural laws of society's movement 35:10.

Capitalist society is an organism capable of change, and constantly changing 35:11.

Ricardo takes class antagonism as a social law of nature 35:14.

Mill attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable 35:16.

Marx endorses a Russian reviewer's

summary, describing Marx's dialectical method 35:19.

The method of presentation differs from mode of inquiry. The presentation may make the empirical research look like an *a priori* construction 35:19.

Marx's method is the opposite of Hegel's, which makes human thought into an independent subject, a "demiurgos" of the real world, the Idea 35:19.

Hegel's method must be stood on its head, to find the rational kernel in the mystical shell. 35:19

Idealist dialectics glorifies the existing state of things, but rational dialectics is a scandal to doctrinaire professors, shows every social form in fluid movement, and is essentially critical and revolutionary. Contradictions of capitalist society are clearest in the business cycle, in periodic crises 35:20.

The utility of a thing makes it a use value. This property is independent of the amount of labor necessary to make it. In capitalist society, useful things also have exchange value 35:46.

Useful articles of equal exchange value only have human labor in common 35:48.

Exchange value is determined by socially necessary labor time 35:49.

Use value is possible without exchange value: e.g., air. All phenomena of universe are modifications of matter. Marx quotes, with apparent approval, Verri, and Italian economists 35:53n.

Productive activity is just expenditure of labor power; skilled labor is intensified labor, and can be reduced to simple labor by multiplying by a suitable constant 35:54.

The two different sides of the equation 20 yards of linen = 1 coat are intimately connected but mutually exclusive, antagonistic extremes 35:58. Better translation: "two mutually conditioning, inseparable moments which belong to each other, but are at the same time mutually excluding, actively opposing extremes, that is,

poles of the that value expression." K. Marx, *Das Kapital*, Erster Band, MEW 23:63.

Marx endorses Fichte's ideas on recognition 35:63n.

The properties of things are not the result of its relations to other things, but only manifest themselves in such relations 35:68-9.

The existence of commodities as values can only be expressed by the totality of their social relationships 35:77.

Exchangeability is a polar relationship, like a magnet 35:79n.

In labor, man changes the form of things provided by nature 35:81

The social character of a commodity is confused with its physical character, i.e, people treat exchange value as a physical property of commodities. These properties, which are mistaken for physical ones, make the commodity mysterious, like a fetish 35:82-3.

The discovery of the properties of commodities, like nature, does not alter those properties.

Man's reflection on social development has a course opposite to the social developments themselves [contra Hegel's Idea]. 35:86.

Elliptical motion (like the motion of a planet) is a contradiction of two tendencies of motion. 35:113. We given a better translation from the original German edition:

We saw that the process of exchange of commodities includes relations that contradict and exclude one another. The development of the commodity does not overcome [aufheben] these contradictions, but creates a form within which they can move themselves. This is in general the method through which contradictions solve [lösen] themselves. It is a contradiction, for example that one body continuously fall into another, and just as constantly fly away from it. The ellipse is a form of movement in which this contradiction actualizes itself just as much as it solves [lösen] itself.

Here is a translation of the French version, which Marx edited:

The exchange of commodities cannot, as one has seen, take place without fulfilling contradictory conditions, which exclude one other. Its development which makes commodities appear as something with two aspects, use value and exchange value, does not make these contradictions disappear, but creates the form in which they can move themselves. This is in any case the only method for resolving real contradictions. It is, for example, a contradiction that a body fall constantly toward another, and also constantly fly away from it. The ellipse is one of the forms of movement by which this contradiction realizes itself and resolves itself at the same time. Marx, *Le Capital*, J. Roy, translator, Livre I, Paris: Flammarion, 1985, p. 89;

[Comments: (a) Note, by comparing with the improved translation, that the English translation in the vol. 35 is quite inadequate, in at least two ways: The phrase "develops a *modus Vivendi* [manner of living]" is a gloss corresponding to nothing in the original text, and the phrase "a form in which they can exist side by side" does not mention motion, which is the key idea here. (b) Second, in the phrase "it is a contradiction to depict..." the words "to depict" do not occur in the original text, and seriously alters the point of the original, since they substitute for the contradiction in elliptical motion *itself* a contradiction in how it is *described*. (c) The book says that motion reconciles the two sides, but neither the German nor the French says that. It is plausible at least that solving or resolving a contradiction does not reconcile the two sides, since if they were reconciled there would be no more contradiction [not Hegel's view, however]. In the case of elliptical motion, the text says that motion does not overcome [*aufheben, fait disparaître*] the contradiction, but solves it [*lösen, résoudre*]. The difference seems to be this, that in an overcome contradiction, the two sides no longer contradict each other, but in the present case, the contradiction continues to exist and to have effects, i.e., influence the direction of motion. An important conclusion from this passage is that Marx maintains that there are contradictions in the physical world, not just in social rela-

tions.]

Here is a German translation of a passage discussing the dialectical nature of circulation of commodities by means of money. Among other things, the complex interactions here show the unity of opposites. 35:114:

The process of exchange produces a doubling of the commodity into commodity and money, an external opposition, in which they present their immanent opposition of use value and exchange value. In this opposition the commodity as use value confronts money as exchange value. On the other side [of the opposition of commodity and money] both sides of the opposition are commodities [since money is itself a commodity], hence unites of use value and exchange value. But this unity of differences presents itself inverted at each pole and presents in that way the mutual relationship [of the two sides] at the same time. The commodity is really use value, [and] its value being appears only ideally in the price, which relates it to gold, gold which confronts as its real value form. Inversely, the material gold is valid only as the material of value, which is money. It [gold] is therefore really exchange value. Its use value appears only still ideally in the series of value expressions, in which it relates to the commodities that confront it as the surroundings of its real use form. These oppositional forms of commodities are the actual moving forms of their process of exchange. MEW Bd. 23, p. 119

“The one process is a two-sided process a sale from the pole of the commodity owner, and a purchase from the opposite pole of the possessor of money. Or, a sales is a purchase, C – M is at the same time M – C.” 35:118.

The unity of opposites in exchange corresponds to a unity of opposites poles of social roles 35:120-1 [Note the persistent natural science analogies with economics, e.g., 35:123 on magnetism.]

It is silly to claim that purchase and sales are always in equilibrium. This is either a tautology, or it means that the seller will always find a buyer and vice versa. Because of the existence of money, this is not true, and a period of time can separate selling and subsequent buying. 35:123.

Inner unity expressed in outer oppo-

sitions, oppositions of the commodity, lead to the possibility of crisis, although its actual occurrence facts that don't appear at this level of abstraction—commodity production in general, not specifically capitalist production. The oppositions of the commodity require certain kinds of movement. A German translation:

"That the opposing processes [of buying and selling] which are independent of one another form an inner unity means just as much that their inner unity moves them into outer oppositions. The processes which are inwardly dependent and hence mutually supplementary, progress to externally independent processes up to a certain point and thus make themselves forcefully unified through a– crisis. The immanent oppositions of the commodity of use value and [exchange] value, [the opposition] of private labor, which must be presented at the same time as immediately social labor, [the opposition] of particular concrete labor, which at the same time is valid only as abstract general labor, [the opposition] of the personification of things and the objectification of persons – this immanent contradiction preserves in the oppositions of the metamorphosis of commodities its developed forms of movement. These forms include therefore the possibility, but also only the possibility of crisis. The development of this possibility to actuality requires a whole surrounding [collection of] relationships which still do not exist at all from the standpoint of simple commodity circulation." MEW, vol. 23, p. 127-128.

Contradictions drive processes and a limit (of one kind) can contradict limitlessness (of another kind) 35:144. A German translation:

"This contradiction between the quantitative limits and the qualitative limitlessness of money drives the hoarder constantly back to the Sisyphus labor of accumulation. It is with him as it is with the world conqueror, which with each new country conquers only a new limit." MEW Bd. 23, p. 147.

There are contradictions in money as a means of payment and in the credit system 35:145-150.

Debts and credits cancel each other, like positive and negative quantitative. Money as a means of payment contains an unmediated contradiction 35:148.

Contradiction is intensified opposi-

tion and contradictions come in degrees. A translation from German:

"Like the stag striding toward fresh water [Psalms, 42:1], his [the citizen's] soul strides toward money, the only riches in a crisis, [and] the opposition between the commodity and money, its value form, is increased to an absolute contradiction." MEW Bd. 23, p. 152.

Resolution of an *apparent* contradiction, zero divided by zero, by mediation, that is, intermediate links that show that how it is possible for 0/0 to make sense 35:311.

Marx asserts the correctness of Hegel's law that quantitative changes pass over into qualitative ones. Footnote explicitly applies this to chemistry 35:313.

Inner laws of capital are compared to the laws of motion of heavenly bodies 35:321. [Although this translation often uses the word "antagonism" where it should have "opposition," antagonism is correct in this spot.]

There is a tendency to equilibrium between different spheres of production, since they have in inner relationship. This tendency is realized in a constant reaction against the upsetting of this equilibrium 35:361.

Technology discloses man's mode of dealing with nature, and also discloses social relations. Materialism includes the view that mental conceptions flow from social relations. The abstract materialism of natural scientists [e.g., Buechner] leaves out history, and is ideological 35:375n.

Contradictions in the use of machinery in capitalist production: surplus value (hence profit) is only created by exploiting labor, but use of machinery saves labor, so allows less surplus value, so implies a fall in the rate of profit. This contradiction drives the capitalist to lengthen the working day 35:409-10.

Bourgeois economists deny the contradiction inherent in the use of machinery in capitalist production 35:444.

Capitalist production requires flexibility and a variety of skills in the work force. It also requires low wages. But the training and experience of the worker who can do many tasks and switch quickly among them requires a higher wage. The requirements of capitalist production are therefore an absolute contradiction 35:489-91.

Carey doesn't see Ricardo's economics as the ideal expression of the real contradictions of capitalism, but as the cause of those contradictions in the real system 35:562:

J. S. Mill is at home in absurd contradictions, but at sea in Hegelian contradiction, the source of all dialectic 35:592n.

That there are always more workers than are needed is a contradiction inherent in the movement of capital 35:635.

The antagonistic character of capitalist accumulation is sometimes recognized by economists, but confused with characteristics of earlier economic systems 35:640.

The immanent laws of capitalism lead to the expropriation of the expropriators, the negation of the negation 35:748-51.

Supply and demand only coincide rarely and by accident. Political economy assumes that they do coincide as an idealization. 37:188.

A German translation:

"Since the inequalities [of supply and demand] of an opposite nature, and since they continuously follow one another, they equalize themselves through their opposite directions, and through their contradictions with one another." MEW Bd. 25, p. 199.

Another German translation, see 37:189:

"... that, when the whole of a larger or smaller time period is considered, supply and demand continuously coincide; but only as the average of the previous movement, and as continuous movement of their contradiction." MEW 25:200.

There is a contradiction between the production of surplus value and realization of that value in the market. You can't make a profit if you can't sell the product, but the capitalists need to keep the buying power to a minimum, so that they can make more surplus value. The more that they make in this way, the less they can realize it in the market by selling it profitably 37:243.

"The inner contradiction seeks to equalize itself through the expansion of the external field of production." No mention here of resolution, only equalization." MEW 25:255.

"... exactly with that the contradiction between the conditions in which this surplus value is produced and the conditions in which it is realized." Contradictions can become more intense." MEW 25:255.

Conflicting tendencies work against each other at the same time. 37:247

"These two moments included in the accumulation process are, however, not only to be considered at rest next to one another, as Ricardo does; they included a contradiction, which announces itself in contradictory tendencies and phenomena. The conflicting agencies work against each other at the same time." MEW 25:259.

The capitalist system as a tendency toward the absolute development of the productive forces, but is also a barrier to that production. A capitalist you have to produce as if there were no limits, or you will lose out to the competition. There are limits, however. The real barrier to capital is capital itself. Capital needs superworkers to expand production and buy products, but needs restricted and limited workers to be paid low wages 37:248-9.

The law of the falling rate of profit produces "antagonistic" [feindlich] oppositions that lead to crises 37:257.

Expansion of the productive forces comes into contradiction with the conditions under which capital can increase its value, hence crisis 37:265.

The ultimate causes of a crisis is poverty and the restricted consumption of

the masses, as opposed to the capitalist drive to develop productive forces. 37:482-3.