



## Dialectics of the Ideal (2009)

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### Abstract

E.V. Ilyenkov is widely considered to be the most important Soviet philosopher in the post-Stalin period. He is known largely for his original conception of the *ideal*, which he deployed against both idealist and crude materialist forms of reductionism, including official Soviet *Diamat*. This conception was articulated in its most developed form in 'Dialectics of the Ideal' (2009), which was written in the mid-1970s but prevented from publication in its complete form until thirty years after the author's death. The translation before you provides for the first time the complete, unabridged and unedited text of 'Dialectics of the Ideal' in English translation, including the author's own subsequent comments on the text.

### Keywords

Soviet philosophy, neopositivism, anti-reductionism, consciousness, language

The thought of the ideal passing into the real is profound: very important for history. But also in the personal life of man it is clear that this contains much truth. Against vulgar materialism.<sup>1</sup>

The 'ideal' – or the 'ideality' of phenomena – is too important a category to be handled thoughtlessly and carelessly, as it is associated not only with a Marxist understanding of the essence of idealism, but even with its naming.

Among idealistic doctrines we include all those concepts in philosophy which take as their starting-point of an explanation of history and knowledge a conception of the *ideal* that is, as it were, partial, unelaborated – as consciousness or will, as thought or as the mind in general, as 'soul' or 'spirit', as 'feeling' or as 'creativity', or as 'socially-organised experience'.

This is precisely why the anti-materialist camp in philosophy is called *idealism*, and not, say, 'intellectualism' or 'psychologism', 'voluntarism' or 'consciousness-ism [сознанизмом]' – these are already particular specifications, and not the universal<sup>2</sup> [всеобщие] attributes of

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<sup>1</sup> Lenin 1976, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> [The Russian term 'всеобщие', which is translated as 'universal' in his article, 'The Universal' (1974), carries a literal meaning – as 'common to all' – that may be lost for the English reader. This secondary meaning is significant for Ilyenkov, who underscores this point: 'In the

idealism at all, regardless of the particular form it assumes. The ‘ideal’ here is understood in its entirety, as a complete totality of possible interpretations – those already known, and those yet to be invented.

Therefore, we must state that consciousness, for example, is ‘ideal’, or belongs to the category of ‘ideal’ phenomena, and in no case, in no sense or respect, to the *material*. But if one says, on the contrary, that the ‘ideal’ is *consciousness* (mental image, concept, etc.), then one introduces unacceptable confusion into the expression of the fundamental differences (contrasts) between the ideal and the material in general, into the very *concept* of the ‘ideal’. For such an inversion transforms the concept of the ideal from a thought-out theoretical designation of a well-known category of phenomena into a name for only a few of them. As a result, one always risks getting into a fix: sooner or later a new, as yet unknown, variant of idealism will inevitably fall into one’s field of vision that does not fit into one’s too narrow definition of the ‘ideal’, which cannot accommodate the special case. Where would one assign this new type of idealism? To materialism. Nowhere else. Or else one would have to change one’s understanding of the ‘ideal’ and ‘idealism’, to tinker with it to avoid obvious inconsistencies.

Ivan is a person, but a person is not Ivan. This is why under no circumstances is it permissible to define a general category through a description of one, albeit typical, case of ‘ideality’.

Bread is food – this is beyond doubt. But even elementary-school logic does not permit the inversion of this truism, as the phrase ‘food is bread’ is not a correct definition of ‘food’, and can appear correct only to one who has never tried any other food than bread.

This is why one must define the category of the ‘ideal’ in its universal form, rather than through reference to its particular varieties, just like the concept of ‘matter’ is not disclosed through enumerating currently known conceptions of ‘matter’ in the natural sciences.

Incidentally, this method of reasoning about the ‘ideal’ can be found at every step. Too often the concept of the ‘ideal’ is understood as a simple (almost unnecessary) synonym for other phenomena, namely those that are determined theoretically through an understanding of the ‘ideal’ in philosophy, most commonly, the phenomenon of consciousness – consciousness in itself.

Here is a typical illustration of such an understanding {- inversion of the truth}: ‘Ideal phenomena cannot exist beyond and outside of consciousness, and all other phenomena of matter are material’.<sup>3</sup>

‘Beyond and outside of consciousness’ there exist, however, such phenomena as the *unconscious* (‘subconscious’) motives of conscious activity. Remaining faithful to elementary logic, our author would have to take them to the level of *material* phenomena, because ‘all other phenomena of matter are material’. And the thinkers who place this category in the foundation of their concepts – Eduard Hartmann, Sigmund Freud, Arthur Koestler and others like them – would be elevated with the same logical inexorability to the rank of materialists. {And Narsky should not say that he understands the expression ‘beyond and outside consciousness’ ‘in a different sense’ other than the conventional one.}

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literal sense of the word, “*vseobshchee* [universal]” means “*obshchee vsem* [common to all]”, (Ilyenkov 2009, p. 225). – A.L.]

<sup>3</sup> Narsky 1969, p. 78.

Confusion, as you can see, turns out to be very far-reaching, and it is no accident {at all} that I.S. Narsky, following this logic, identified ‘materialism’ in the works of R. Carnap because the latter deals with such an impersonal thing as ‘language’ with its ‘structures’, which are in no way reducible to the phenomena of individual consciousness (see his article on R. Carnap in the ‘Philosophical Encyclopædia’).

Below we shall return to what unpleasant and unexpected consequences are fraught with such an unconsidered understanding of the ‘ideal’. In the meantime, it is enough to note that if one defines consciousness as ‘ideal’, then to answer the legitimate question – what does one understand by the ‘ideal’? – with the phrase ‘the ideal is *consciousness*’, ‘is the phenomenon (or characteristic) of *consciousness*’ – is in no way possible without imitating a playful dog biting its own tail.

I.S. Narsky is not alone. Here is another example:

The ideal is information that is actualised by the brain for the self, it is the ability of the self to have information in its pure form and to operate with it... The ideal is a mental phenomenon though not all mental phenomena can be designated as ideal [! – E.I.]; but the ideal is always presented in the conscious states of the individual self... The ideal is a purely individual phenomenon, realised by means of a certain type of cerebral neurodynamic process (that has as yet been poorly researched).<sup>4</sup>

Very well. It is clearly stated: of all mental phenomena, only those that represent conscious states of an individual must be related to the ‘ideal’. It is self-evident that ‘all other’ mental phenomena inevitably fall (as with I.S. Narsky) into the category of *material* phenomena.

However, the ‘ideal’ itself is subtly interpreted as a purely material, ‘cerebral neurodynamic’, process that differs from ‘all others’, ‘only in that it has as yet been poorly researched’.

It is not difficult to see that to ‘concretise’ the ‘ideal’ in such a way transforms its meaning into a simple naming (‘designation’) of a very specific, cerebral (neurodynamic) process, and the philosophical problem of the relation of the ‘ideal’ to the ‘material’ is replaced by the question of the relation of one neurodynamic process to other neurodynamic processes – a special problem of the physiology of higher nervous activity.

The way in which the problem of the ‘great opposition’ of the ideal and the material was formulated and resolved in philosophy and theoretical psychology is thus safely removed from the sphere of scientific research. In essence, it appears as a pre-scientific, speculative-philosophical (I mean abstract) method of posing the question, which on closer examination turns out to be merely a ‘concrete’ question of physiology – the science of studying the structures and functions of the brain, i.e., facts, localised in the skull of an individual. Naturally, with such an interpretation of the problem of the relation of the ideal to the material, all definitions worked out by philosophy as a special science turn out to be not only ‘too abstract’, but also (and precisely because of its abstraction) too ‘broad’, and therefore ‘incorrect’.

Consequently, D.I. Dubrovsky must categorically object to all those philosophers and psychologists who understand the ‘ideal’ as something other than a fleeting ‘conscious

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<sup>4</sup> Dubrovsky 1971, pp. 187–9.

state of an individual' or the 'current mental state of an individual' or 'facts of consciousness', by which he understands exclusively the material conditions of his own brain as subjectively experienced (at least for a few seconds) by an individual.

For D.I. Dubrovsky (for the sake of his theoretical position, of course), it does not matter what these 'current mental states of an individual' are *in terms of philosophy* – they reflect something objectively real, something outside the human head, or else they are merely his own immanent 'states' subjectively experienced by the brain, i.e., events physiologically conditioned by his specific constitution naïvely taken for events *outside of the brain*. For D.I. Dubrovsky, both are equally 'ideal' because both are 'subjective expressions, *individual reflections* of cranial neurodynamic processes',<sup>5</sup> and could not be anything else. Therefore, 'the definition of the ideal does not depend on the category of truth, because a false idea is likewise not a material, but an ideal, phenomenon'.<sup>6</sup>

{What does our author care that philosophy, as a special science, had worked out and developed the category of the 'ideal' *precisely in relation to the problem of truth*, and that only in this relation did philosophy's definition of the ideal and the material have any meaning at all? What does he care that these definitions have been worked out in philosophy as theoretical expressions of *completely different facts* than those that personally interest D.I. Dubrovsky as a specialist on 'cerebral structures' and 'neurodynamic processes'?)

Meanwhile, philosophy, as a science, was never particularly interested in the 'individual operation of cranial neurodynamic processes', and if we understand the 'ideal' in the sense of D.I. Dubrovsky, then this category must have been misunderstood in philosophy, as a result of various, but equally illegitimate and unacceptably broadened or unacceptably narrowed, uses of the word 'ideal'. Then the scientific monopoly on the interpretation of this term, on the question of what it can and cannot 'denote', would, according to this position, belong to the physiology of higher nervous activity. 'Individual operation of cranial neurodynamic processes' – full stop. Everything else – from the evil one (i.e., Hegel).

{The position of D.I. Dubrovsky is really very typical of people who, having decided to rethink the definitions of concepts of a certain science, have not even bothered to understand what kind of phenomena (practices) this science has considered and studied as it produced these definitions. Naturally, such a (in this case, physiological) diversion in any area of science cannot bear fruit, except for an arbitrary renaming of known scientific phenomena, except for disputes about nomenclature.}

It is well known that the theoretical development of the category of the 'ideal' in philosophy was produced by the need to establish and then to understand just that very distinction, which, for D.I. Dubrovsky, is 'of no matter to the characterisation of the ideal' – a distinction, and even an opposition, between the fleeting mental states of an individual, completely personal, not possessing any universal meaning for another individual; and universal and necessary, and because of this, objective forms of knowledge and cognition independent of one's existing reality {(as if the latter was not interpreted – as nature or as Absolute Idea, as matter or as divine thought)}. This crucial distinction has a direct bearing on the entire millennial battle between materialism and idealism, to their

<sup>5</sup> Dubrovsky 1971, p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> Dubrovsky 1971, p. 188.

fundamentally irreconcilable dispute. This distinction can be declared to be 'of no matter to the characterisation of the ideal' only out of a complete ignorance of the history of this dispute. The problem of the ideal has always been an aspect of the problem of the objectivity ('truth-value [истинности]) of knowledge, i.e., the problem of precisely those forms of knowledge which are conditioned and explained not by the whims of individual mental physiology, but something much more serious, something standing above the individual mind and entirely independent of it. For example, mathematical truths, logical categories, moral imperatives and ideas of justice, which are 'things', which have a certain meaning for any mind, as well as the power to limit its individual whims.

This peculiar category of phenomena, having a special kind of objectivity that is obviously independent of the individual with his body and 'soul', fundamentally differs from the objectivity of things sensuously perceived by the individual, and had once been 'designated' by philosophy as the *ideality* of these phenomena, as the ideal in general. In this sense, the ideal (that which belongs to the world of 'ideas') already figures in Plato, to whom humanity owes the allocation of this range of phenomena to this particular category, as well as its naming. 'Ideas' in Plato are not simply some states of the human 'soul' ('mind'), they are necessarily *universal*, commonly-held image-patterns, clearly opposed to an individual 'soul' that directs a human body, as a mandatory law for each 'soul', with requirements that each individual must consider from childhood much more carefully than the requirements of his own individual body with its fleeting and random states.

As Plato himself explained the origin of these universal prototype-patterns of all diverse-ranging individual states of the 'soul', he correctly *identified* them as a special category, on an indisputably factual basis: as the *universal norms of that culture* within which an individual awakens to conscious life, as well as requirements that he must internalise as a necessary law of his own life-activity. These are the cultural norms, as well as the grammatical-syntactical linguistic norms on which he learned to speak, as well as the 'laws of the state' in which he was born, as well as the rules of thinking about the things around him since the world of his childhood, and so on and so forth. He must internalise [усваивать] all of these normative patterns as a special 'reality' that is clearly distinct from himself (and from his brain, of course), and is, itself, moreover, strictly organised. Having allocated the phenomena of this special reality – unknown to an animal or to a person in a primitive-natural state – to a specific category, Plato put before mankind a real and very difficult problem: the problem of the 'nature' of these peculiar phenomena, the nature of the world of 'ideas', *the ideal world*, a problem that has nothing to do with the problem of the constitution of the human body, let alone the constitution of one of the organs of this body – the constitution of the brain. It is simply not that problem, not that range of phenomena that interests physiologists, whether among Plato's contemporaries or in the present.

One can, of course, call something else the 'ideal', such as 'a neurodynamic stereotype of a certain type, which has as yet been poorly researched'. But such a renaming does not advance, by even a millimetre, the solution to the problem, which was outlined and designated by Plato as the 'ideal' – that is, an understanding of that range of facts, for whose clear designation he introduced the term.

However, later (and exactly in line with one-sided empiricism – Locke, Berkeley, Hume and their successors) the word 'idea' and its derivative, the adjective 'ideal', once again became a simple collective term for any mental phenomena, for even a fleeting, mental

state of an individual ‘soul’, and this usage also obtained enough power to maintain quite a stable tradition, which has survived, as we can see, to this day. But this was due to the fact that the narrowly empirical tradition in philosophy simply excludes the real problem demonstrated by Plato, not realising its actual significance, and simply dismisses it as a baseless tale. Consequently, the word ‘ideal’ here means: ‘not really’ existing, but only in the imagination, only in the form of a mental state of an individual.

This terminological and theoretical position is closely associated with the notion that ‘in reality’ there are only separate, particular, sensuously-perceptible ‘things’, and the *universal* is but a phantom of the imagination, but a mental (or psycho-physiological) phenomenon, justified only insofar as it again and again repeats in many (or even all) acts of perception by a particular individual of particular things, and perceived by this individual as a certain ‘similarity [сходство]’ of many sensuously-perceived things, as the identity [тождество] of mental states experienced by an individual.

The dead ends into which this unwise position takes philosophy are well known to anyone even slightly familiar with the criticism of one-sided empiricism by representatives of German classical philosophy, and hence there is no need to reproduce this criticism. Note, however, that the critics of this view were interested in its merits, rather than terminological whims, which forced Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel to reject the empirical explanation of the ‘ideal’, and to turn to a special-theoretical analysis of this most important concept. The point is that mere identification of the ‘ideal’ with the ‘mental in general’, as was common in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, did not offer an opportunity to even clearly formulate the special-philosophical problem, that Plato already had grasped – the problem of the objectivity of universal knowledge, the objectivity of universal (theoretical) definitions of reality, i.e., the nature of the fact of their absolute independence from humans and from humanity, from the special constitution of the human organism – its brain and its mind with its individual-fleeting states. Put differently, it is the problem of the *truth-value* of universal knowledge, understood as the *laws* of knowledge, remaining invariant in all diverse changes in ‘mental states’, and not only ‘individual’, but also entire intellectual formations, epochs and peoples.

Actually, it was only here that the problem of the ‘ideal’ was posed in its entirety and in all its dialectical acuity, as a problem of the relationship of the ideal in general and the material in general.

There, the ‘ideal’ refers to that, and only that, which has a place in the individual mind, in individual consciousness, in the head of an individual, and everything else belongs under the rubric of the ‘material’ (this is a requirement of basic logic). To the realm of ‘material phenomena’ belong the sun and the stars, mountains and rivers, atoms and chemical elements and all other purely natural phenomena. To this classification we must attribute all *materially fixed* (objectified [опредмеченные]) *forms of social consciousness*, all historically formed and socially legitimised *human representations* of the actual world, of objective reality.

A book, a statue, an icon, a drawing, a gold-coin, the royal crown, a banner, a theatrical performance and its dramatic plot – all these are objects existing, of course, outside of the individual head, and perceived by this head (by hundreds of such heads) as external, corporally tangible, ‘objects’.

However, if on this basis one were to assign, say, ‘Swan Lake’ or ‘King Lear’ to the category of *material* phenomena, one would be making a fundamental philosophical-

theoretical error. A theatrical representation is precisely a *representation* [представление]. In the most precise and strict sense of the term – in the sense that in it is *represented* something else, something *other*. What is it?

‘Cranial neurodynamic processes’ once occurring in the heads of P.I. Tchaikovsky and William Shakespeare? ‘The fleeting mental states of an individual’ or ‘individuals’ (the director and the actors)? Or is it something more substantial?

In response to this question, Hegel would have replied: it is the ‘substantial content of an epoch’, meaning intellectual formation in its actual essence [существенной определенности]. And this answer, despite all of its underlying idealism, would have been much truer, deeper, and, most importantly, *closer to the materialistic perspective* on things, on the nature of those peculiar phenomena, which are here being discussed – about ‘things’, in the body of which is tangibly *represented something other than themselves*.

What is it? What is this ‘something’, *represented* in the sensuously contemplated body of another thing (event, process, etc.)?

From the perspective of coherent materialism, this ‘something’ can only be *another material object*. For from the perspective of coherent materialism, there cannot be anything other than matter in motion, than an infinite set of material bodies, events, processes and states.

Under ‘ideality’ or the ‘ideal’, materialism must have in mind that very peculiar and that very strictly established relationship between at least two material objects (things, processes, events, states), within which one material object, while remaining itself, performs the rôle of a *representative of another object*, or, more precisely – the *universal nature of this other object*, the universal forms and laws of this other object, while remaining invariant in all its variations, in all its empirically evident variations.

There is no doubt that the ‘ideal’ so understood – i.e., as the universal form and law of existence and change in diverse, empirically perceptible phenomena given to a person – becomes apparent and established in its ‘pure form’ only in historical forms of intellectual culture, in socially significant forms of its expression (its ‘existence’). And not in the form of ‘fleeting mental states of an individual’, however it is expressed – as spiritualistic-immaterial, in the manner of Descartes or Fichte, or as crudely physical, as the ‘brain’, in the manner of Cabanis or Buchner and Moleschott.

This relates to a sphere of phenomena – a collectively built world of intellectual culture, an internally organised and disjointed world of historically established and socially established (‘institutionalised’) *universal representations* by people about the ‘real’ world – as opposed to the individual mind, as a certain very special and distinctive world, as the ‘ideal world in general’, as the ‘idealised’ world.

The ‘ideal’, so understood, of course cannot be presented simply as a repeatedly reiterated individual mind, as it ‘constitutes’ a special ‘sensuous-suprasensuous’ reality, within which is discovered much that cannot be found in each individual mind, taken separately.

Nevertheless, it is the *world of representations*, and not the actual (material) world, as it exists prior to, beyond, and independent of a person or humanity. It is the real (material) world, *as it is represented* in historically established and historically changing *social (collective) consciousness*, in ‘collective’ impersonal [безличном] ‘reason’, in historically established forms of expression of this ‘reason’. In part, it is in language – in its vocabulary, in its grammatical and syntactic patterns fastening words. But not only in language, it also

exists in all other forms of *expression* of socially significant representations, in all other forms of *representation*, including the form of a ballet-performance – managing, as is well known, without a verbal text.

This is why German classical philosophy made such a huge step forward in the scientific comprehension of the nature of the ‘ideal’ (in its actual fundamental opposition to the *material in general* – including that material organ in the human body, which helps to ‘idealise’ the real world, i.e., the brain, imprisoned in the human head), that for the first time since Plato it ceased to understand ‘ideality’ as narrowly mental, as in English empiricism, and understood well that in no case can the *ideal in general* be reduced to a simple sum of the ‘mental states of individuals’, and thus interpreted simply as the collective name for these ‘states’.

This idea is quite well articulated in Hegel in the form of ‘spirit in general’, in the full sense of the concept – as ‘universal spirit’, as ‘objective spirit’, even more so as ‘absolute spirit’, and in no way can it be represented or understood as a repeatedly reiterated individual ‘soul’, that is to say, the ‘mind’. And if the problem of ‘ideality’ generally coincides with the problem of the ‘mental in general’, then the ‘mental’ (the ‘ideal’) generally confronts the ‘natural’ not as a separate self against the ‘rest’, but as a much more stable and durable reality, which persists despite the fact that individual selves arise and vanish, sometimes leaving a trace in it, and sometimes without a trace, not even touching ‘ideality’, ‘spirit’!

Hegel therefore sees Plato’s service to philosophy as consisting in his realisation that ‘the reality of mind – that is, of mind as opposed to nature – appeared in its highest truth as the organisation of a state’,<sup>7</sup> and not as the organisation of some single soul, or the mind of an individual; moreover, not as a separate brain.

(It should be noted parenthetically that by the ‘state’ Hegel – like Plato – understands, in this case, not only the well-known political organisation, not the state in the current sense of this term {only}, but the whole general ensemble of social institutions that regulate the life-activity of the individual – as well as its household, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic manifestations – in a word, everything that constitutes a distinctive culture of a ‘certain polis’, a state, everything that is presently called the culture of a people or its ‘intellectual culture’ in particular, the laws of living in the current polis in general; the ‘laws’ in the sense that Plato’s Socrates discusses. This should be kept in mind in order to correctly understand the meaning of Hegel’s praise of Plato.)

As long as the question of the relationship of the ‘ideal’ to the ‘real’ is understood in a narrowly psychological fashion, as the question of the relationship of a single soul with its states ‘to everything else’, it simply cannot be even correctly and clearly stated, let alone resolved. The issue is that another separate ‘soul’ automatically falls into the category of ‘everything else’, i.e., *the material, the real*. Moreover, the entire set of these ‘souls’, organised into a certain unified intellectual formation – the *intellectual culture* of a given people, the state or a whole epoch, but in no way, even in the limit-case, can it be understood as a repeatedly reiterated ‘separate soul’, because in this case it is obvious that the whole is irreducible to the sum of its ‘parts’, and is not simply a repeatedly reiterated ‘part’. The intricate shape of the Gothic cathedral is not at all like the shape of bricks, from the set of which it is built; it is also the same here.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



In addition, for each individual soul another soul is never and in no way directly given as 'ideal'; it confronts it only as a set of its own *palpably-embodied, directly-material manifestations* – at least in the form of gestures, facial expressions, words or actions, or, in our time, even drafts of oscillograms, graphically depicting the electrochemical activity of the brain. But this is already not the 'ideal', but its outward corporeal expression, manifestation, so to speak, a 'projection' on matter, something 'material'. Strictly speaking, the ideal, according to this view, is present only in *introspection*, only in the self-observation of an 'individual soul', only as the intimate mental state of the one and only, namely 'my', self. Hence for empiricism the generally fatal and principally irresolvable, notorious problem of 'the other I' – 'does it exist at all?' For this reason, coherent empiricism is to this day unable to get out of the impasse of solipsism, and must accept this most foolish philosophical arrangement by deliberately setting out the principle of the 'methodological solipsism' of Rudolf Carnap and all of his – maybe not so frank – followers.

Consequently, fully developed empiricism (neopositivism) declared the question of the relation of the ideal *in general* to the material *in general* – that is, the only correctly-posed question – a 'pseudo-problem'. Yes, on such shaky ground as the 'mental states of an individual' this question cannot even be posed, it cannot even be intelligibly formulated. The very concept of the 'ideal in general' (like the 'material in general') becomes an impossibility – it is construed as 'a pseudo-concept', as a concept without a 'denotation', without an object – as a theoretical fiction, as a scientifically indeterminable mirage; at best, as a tolerable hypothesis, as a traditional 'figure of speech' or 'mode of speech'.

Hence, the term the 'ideal' (like the 'material') loses all of its clearly defined theoretical content. It ceases to be the designation of a *certain sphere* (circle) *of phenomena* and becomes applicable *to any phenomenon, so far as this phenomenon is 'perceived', 'mentally experienced', so far as we see it, hear it, feel it, smell it or taste it...* And we can rightly 'designate as material' this – *any* – phenomenon, if what we 'have in mind [имеем в виду]' is that we see *it* – namely, something other than ourselves with our mental states, in so far as we experience this phenomenon 'as something separate from ourselves'. But 'in itself, that is to say, independently of what we 'have in mind', no phenomenon can be attributed to one or the other category. Any phenomenon is 'in one respect ideal, but in another material', 'in one sense material, but in another ideal'.

First and foremost stands *consciousness* in all its manifestations: now it is ideal, then it is material. From whichever side one looks – in one sense and respect it is ideal, in another sense and respect it is material.

Let us listen to one of the most active proponents of this view:

Consciousness is ideal in form and in content, *if we have in mind* first, its mental form, correlated with the known (reflected) content (the content of the material world as an object of reflection), and second, the realised content of consciousness...

Consciousness is material in form and in content, *if we have in mind* another pair of the above-mentioned juxtapositions. But apart from that, consciousness is material in form and ideal in content, especially *if we have in mind* the correlation of the material form in the sense of the neurophysiological processes and the mental content in the sense of the 'inner world' of the subject.

Thus, much depends on what is meant by 'form' and 'content' in a given case. The meaning of the 'ideal' and the 'material' change accordingly.<sup>8</sup>

With this explanation, the concepts of the 'ideal' and the 'material' cease to be theoretical categories expressing two strictly defined *categories of objectively distinct phenomena*, and become just buzzwords that 'have in mind' one thing or another, depending on the circumstances and depending on 'what is meant' by these buzzwords.

Of course, if the word 'consciousness' is used to mean not consciousness but 'neurophysiological processes' then consciousness turns out to be 'material'. But if one uses 'neurophysiological processes' to mean *consciousness* then one would have to define neurophysiological processes as *ideal* phenomena.

Very simple. Of course, if by the word 'ideal' we were to *have in mind the material*, then we would get the same thing as though by the word 'material' we were to 'have in mind' the *ideal*... What is true is true. Only these word-games cannot be called dialectics, let alone materialist. We must not forget that the 'ideal' and the 'material' are not just 'terms' to which opposite meanings can be attached, but fundamentally opposite *categories of phenomena*, rigorously and objectively defined in scientific philosophy, and that *to call* consciousness 'material' means to carry out an unacceptable blurring of boundaries between one and the other, *between idealism and materialism*. V.I. Lenin specifically underscored this point.

The real problem of the mutual transformation of the 'ideal' and the 'material' *occurring in the course of an actual process* – that very transformation, the importance of the study of which was noted by Lenin – here {purely sophistically} becomes a verbal problem, which, naturally, is solved by purely verbal procedures {-tricks}, due to the fact that in one case what is called 'ideal' is in the other case called 'material', and vice versa.

The real materialist solution to the problem in its proper formulation (already noted by Hegel) was found, as we know, by Marx, who 'had in mind' an entirely real process, specifically inherent to human life-activity: the process by which the *material* life-activity of social man begins to produce not only a material, but also an *ideal* product, begins to produce the act of *idealisation* of reality (the process of transforming the 'material' into the 'ideal'), and then, having arisen, the 'ideal' becomes a critical component of the material life-activity of social man, and then begins the opposite process – the process of the *materialisation* (objectification, reification, 'incarnation') of the ideal.

These two actually opposite processes eventually lock into more or less pronounced cycles, and the end of one process becomes the beginning of the other, opposite one, which leads in the end to the motion of a spiral shape with all its ensuing dialectical consequences.

A very important fact is that this process – the process of the transformation of the 'material' into the 'ideal', and then back, which constantly closes 'on itself' into more and more cycles, spirals – is highly specific to the socio-historical life-activity of human beings.

To an animal, with its life-activity, it is foreign and unknown – and therefore there cannot be any serious talk about the problem of the 'ideal' with respect to animals, however highly developed.

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<sup>8</sup> Narsky 1969, p. 74. [Ilyenkov's italics – A.L.]

Although it goes without saying, highly developed animals have *minds*, a *mental form of reflection* of the surrounding environment, and therefore if you want one can find the scent of the ‘ideal’ even among animals, if by the ‘ideal’ one means all mentality, and not only that singular form that is characteristic only of the human mind, *of the socio-human ‘spirit’, of the human head*.

By the way, in Marx, the issue is about this and only this, and by the ‘ideal’ he does not mean all mentality, but a much more specific formation – the form of socio-human mentality.

The ideal for Marx ‘is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought’.<sup>9</sup>

It must be specified that for an understanding of Marx’s position this expression can be correctly understood only if one ‘has in mind’ that it is expressed in the context of a polemic *with the Hegelian* interpretation of the ‘ideal’, and outside of this very specific context its specific meaning is lost.

And if one loses sight of this context, i.e., the principal differences between Marx and Hegel’s explanation of the ‘ideal’, and turns Marx’s position into the *definitive* ‘concept of the ideal’, then this position, having lost its actual specific meaning, will acquire an entirely different, alien one, that is to say, it will be interpreted entirely falsely.

Very often, it is understood (interpreted) in a vulgar-materialist spirit, and of course, one need only understand the ‘human head’, referred to by Marx, as an anatomic and physiological organ of the body of the species *homo sapiens*, that is to say, as a set of material phenomena, located under the cranial cap of the individual – then everything else follows automatically. The formal possibility of such an interpretation was quite accurately revealed, and once revealed, rejected, by Todor Pavlov:

Sometimes it [the ideal – E.I.] is read behaviouristically, and the transposition and processing are taken as purely physiological or other material processes. With this interpretation of Marx’s thought, it could also be related to an automatic device and the operation of various, human-made or natural control-systems. In this case, mentality, consciousness, thought, not to mention creative thought, truly turn out to be unnecessary concepts.<sup>10</sup>

And, as a direct consequence of this reading, the ‘ideal’ comes to be understood in terms of cybernetics, information-theory and other physical-mathematical and technical disciplines, it begins to appear as a certain type of ‘code’, as a result of ‘coding’ and ‘decoding’, converting some ‘signals’ into other ‘signals’, and so on and so forth. Naturally, an infinite number of *purely material* processes and events that are observable in blocks of electro-technical devices, machines and apparatuses fall within the framework of *such an understanding* of the ‘ideal’, and in the end – all those purely physical phenomena, which are in one way or another related by the interconnection of one material system with another material system, producing in the other system some purely material changes.

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<sup>9</sup> Marx 1996a, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Pavlov 1966, pp. 167–8.

As a result, not a trace is left of the concept of the ‘ideal’, and Todor Pavlov rightly criticises this way of reasoning in that it irrevocably leads away from that subject of discussion in Marx, from the discussion of the ‘ideal’, that is to say, toward extreme abstraction and ambiguous terminology.

Terms such as ‘isomorphism’, ‘homorphism’, ‘neurodynamic model’, etc. will not be of help in this case. All this is simply *not about that*, not about that subject, not about that concretely understood category of phenomena that Marx denoted by the term ‘ideal’. It is simply about something else. In the best case, it is about those *material prerequisites*, without the presence of which ‘ideality’, as a specific form of reflection of the external world by the *human* head, could not have arisen and come to life.

But it is not about the actual ideal. It is not about that kind of product that results from the ‘transposition’ and ‘translation [переработки]’ of the material by the human – and only the human – head. It is not about those concrete-specific forms in which the ‘material in general’ appears in this specific product of *human* life-activity.

For a correctly understood category of the ‘ideal’ includes precisely those – and only those – forms of reflection that specifically distinguish humans, and are completely alien and unknown to any animal, even one with a highly developed higher nervous system, activity and psychology. Precisely these – and only these – specific forms of reflection of the external world by the *human* head have always been investigated by the science of philosophy under the designation: ‘ideal’ forms of mental activity; it retained this term precisely for the sake of their delimitation from all others. Otherwise, this word completely loses its concrete-scientific meaning, its meaning as a scientific category.

This is exactly the same situation as with the meaning of ‘labour’. During the time when political economy, through its classical representatives, seriously tried to solve the problem of value, it clearly understood ‘labour’ as always being human labour. As soon as bourgeois science discovered its own bankruptcy and became completely lost in contradictions by this ticklish problem, it was forced onto the path of taking the meaning out of the fundamental concepts of the labour-theory of value. And then, having preserved the term ‘labour’, it came to understand by this term the labour of an ass, harnessed to a cart, and the labour of the wind, of the rotating spokes of a windmill, and the labour of steam, of the moving piston, and the labour of all natural forces that humans have harnessed to serve them in the process of their labour, in the process of ‘the production of value’ . . .

And the sun and the wind began (presumably within the scope of this conception) to produce ‘value’. And human labour – that too is equal to them. But ‘not only it’ [i.e., human labour – A.L.], and not principally it.

The same thing with ‘ideality’.

It is not by chance that Marx returns to the problem of the ‘ideal’ in relation to the problem of value, the *value-form*. These problems proved to be entangled in a single knot. It was impossible to disentangle one without disentangling the other.

For the *value-form*, as demonstrated with indisputable clarity by the most critical theoretical analysis of its features, turned out to be *ideal*, in the most strict and precise sense of this concept expressing this conception of the term.

The fact is that *any* sensuously perceptible object that satisfies a human need, any ‘use-value’, can assume the ‘value-form’. This is a purely universal form, completely indifferent to any sensuously perceptible material of its ‘incarnation [воплощения]’, of its

'materialisation'. The value-form is absolutely independent of the characteristics of the 'natural body' of the commodity in which it 'dwells [вселяется]', the form in which it is *represented*. Similarly, with money, which also *only expresses*, represents with its own specific body this mysterious reality, but is in no way *that reality itself*. It is always something distinct from every material, sensuously perceptible body of its own 'incarnation', from any corporeal reality.

This mystical, mysterious reality does not have its own material body, which is why it easily changes one material form of its incarnation for another, persisting in all of its 'incarnations' and 'metamorphoses', and even increasing with this its own 'incorporeal body', controlling the fate and movement of all those individual bodies that it inhabits, in which it temporarily 'materialises'. Including the human body.

Virtually all those characteristics, which traditional philosophy and theology attributed to the 'soul': universality, incorporeality, elusive of the most precise physical and chemical methods of detection, and at the same time an omnipotent power commanding the fate of things and people – all this confronted theoretical thought in the form of definitions of the value-form, as undeniable, without subject to any doubt (even Cartesian, even Hume's), persisting, *reality*. Objectivity in the sense of Kant, in the sense of Plato, and in the sense of Hegel.

But here metaphysical (non-dialectical), moreover vulgar, materialism found itself in an unpleasant situation. Furthermore, it suffered complete theoretical bankruptcy, falling into the vice-grip of an insoluble dilemma. Either deny doubtlessly existing objective reality, or bow down to Plato, and then to Berkeley.

Take your pick, but 'value' is not the 'soul' of priests and theologians. If priests were barely able to interpret the 'soul' as an entirely material organ of the human body (the brain) as a mystical-priestly definition, then this explanation did not pass in the case of 'value'.

And it will not pass, regardless of the achievements counted among the assets of scientific study of the human brain.

The value-form is *completely* ideal. And this in no way means that it exists only in consciousness, inside the physiologically interpreted 'human head', as a mental-physiological phenomenon, as a cerebral, neurodynamic phenomenon, of a definite, 'though still poorly investigated', type. Precisely, such an explanation would be a one-hundred-percent idealist explanation of history from the perspective of the silliest variety of idealism – *physiological idealism*, an interpretation of a socio-historical process, and that in its most important commodity-capitalist phase.

We would very much like to ask D.I. Dubrovsky and I.S. Narsky a delicate question: in what way would they philosophically orient political economy, faced with the mystery of the ideality of the value-form, if they continued to insist on their own understanding of 'ideality', on their own answer to the question – what is the ideal and where is it to be found?

*Of course, it is inadmissible and absurd to speak of any 'ideal' without man, with his human 'head', not only from the perspective of Marx's materialism, but from any materialism that accounts for the words it is using.*

But this in no way means that it is to be 'found in the head', deep in the bulk of the cerebral cortex, although it does not exist without the brain and the head, and theorists

who do not understand this difference must be reminded of this indisputable fact, that not only the 'ideal', but the totality [совокупность] of *material relations of production* cannot exist without man with his human head, and even the very forces of production.

Following from the above, we can see with how much accuracy and acuity V.I. Lenin formulated the dialectical-materialist understanding of the relationship between thought and the brain.

*Man thinks with aid of the brain* – that is the Leninist formula.

Not the 'brain' itself, as the physiologists and cyberneticists who think one-sidedly on this issue claim and believe. And this is a principal difference.

Yes, the thing is that it is not the brain that thinks, but an individual with the aid of the brain – an individual who is entwined in a net of social relations, always mediated by material objects, created by man for man. The brain is but the material, anatomical-physiological organ of this labour, mental labour, that is to say, intellectual labour. The product of this special labour is precisely the ideal. And not the material changes within the brain itself.

The relationship here is exactly the same as the relationship between a person and his own hand: the hand does not work, but a person works with the aid of the hand. And the product of his labour is not 'found in the hand', not inside it, but in that substance of nature that is worked upon, that is to say, the form of substance outside of the hand, and not as the form of the hand itself with its five fingers.

It is exactly the same here. The person thinks with the aid of the brain, but the product of this labour is in no way the material changes in the system of 'cerebral structures', but changes in the system of intellectual culture, in its forms and structures, in the system of *patterns and images of the external world*.

Therefore, having drafted (whether on paper or only in the imagination) a circumference, or say, a pyramid, man is able to investigate this ideal geometrical representation as a specific object, discovering in it new properties, even though he did not consciously invest these properties in the object. In this way, he investigates not the properties of his own brain, not changes occurring in states of the brain, but something entirely different.

The ideal – it is the pattern [схема] of the real, object-oriented activity of man, consistent with the form of the thing outside the head, outside the brain.

Yes, it is precisely a pattern, and only a pattern, rather than the activity itself in its flesh and blood. However, precisely because, and only because, it is a pattern (image) of real, purposeful human activity with things in the external world can it be presented and examined as a specific object, entirely independent from the facilities of the 'brain' and its specific 'states', as an object of specific activity (of intellectual labour, thought), aimed at changes in the image of the thing, and not at the thing itself presented in this image. And this is the only thing that distinguishes purely ideal activity from immediately material activity.

To think that a mathematician investigating the properties of a sphere or a cube in this way examines a representation of the flow of events, flowing through the bulk of his own brain, a representation of neurodynamic processes and so on, would entail adopting wholesale the perspective of a specific variety of subjective idealism – physiological idealism – in its understanding of the ideal as well as the material.

And D.I. Dubrovsky should not forget that 'if someone were to put everyone to sleep for ten minutes, then there would not exist during that period of time on our planet' *not only*

*the ideal*, but the process of the production of material life with its relations of production.

Does it really follow from this ingenious thought-experiment that material relations of production exist only in consciousness and only because of consciousness? Based on D.I. Dubrovsky's logic, it follows. And it follows for the simple reason that he draws the main line between 'ideal' and 'material' phenomena not where it had been drawn once and for all in the theory of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

When a theorist *writes a book* with a quill and paper or with the aid of a typewriter, he produces an *ideal* product, regardless of the fact that his work is established in the form of sensuously perceptible visible curlicues on paper. He accomplishes *intellectual* labour, and in no way material labour. When an artist paints a painting, he creates an *image*, not an original. When an engineer drafts his draft, he also does not yet create any material product, he also accomplishes only intellectual labour and produces only an ideal – and not a real – machine. And the difference here is not that the creation of a material product requires physical effort, and the creation of an ideal product only 'intellectual'. Nothing of the kind. Any sculptor will tell you that to carve a statue from granite, to create a sculptural image, is physically much more difficult than to weave a cubit of linen or to sew a coat. The conductor of a symphony-orchestra sheds no less sweat than a digger.

Does the creation of a material product not require maximum force of consciousness and will from the labourer? It requires it, and the more so the less the process of labour and its product makes personal sense to him.

Nevertheless, one category of people accomplishes only intellectual labour, creating *only an ideal* product and altering *only people's social consciousness*, while the other category of people creates a material product, since it produces alterations in the sphere of their material being.

And that makes all the difference, that very difference between social being and social consciousness, between the 'material' and the 'ideal', which Marx, Engels and Lenin were the first to draw strictly scientifically, which A.A. Bogdanov, for example, was unable to make out, for whom they merged into one and the same on the basis that both are independent of individual consciousness, outside of individual mentality, and identically confront the individual mind as 'forms of socially-organised experience', as social 'stereotypes', completely impersonal, and entirely independent of the whims of individuals.

The fact that historically established stereotypes of social consciousness are spontaneously imposed upon individual consciousness, as an external power, and actively form this individual consciousness in its own image and likeness, by no means makes them *material* forms, forms of social *being*. They were, and remain, forms of *social consciousness*, i.e., *completely ideal forms*.

But D.I. Dubrovsky {as well as A.A. Bogdanov} refuses to accept them in general, ascribing them to the category of *material* phenomena. For him, of course, this also includes syntactical and grammatical forms of language, and legal norms regulating the wills of individuals by means of state-institutions designed for this purpose, and much, much more. All that is not 'cranial neurodynamic processes of a certain type'. Everything, except that. Including, it stands to reason, the *value-form*.

We ask the reader to judge, if this understanding can be associated with the axiomatic positions of the materialist conception of history, and what conclusions it would produce

in the attempt to critically work out the antinomies of value of this ‘sensuous-suprasensuous thing’, with its mysterious properties of the commodity.

According to the ‘meaning’ that K. Marx attached to the word ‘ideal’, the *value-form in general* (not just the money-form) is a ‘purely ideal’ form.<sup>11</sup>

And this is not on the basis that it exists only ‘in consciousness’, only in the head of the commodity-owner, but on quite opposite grounds. Price, or the money-form of value, like any value-form in general, is ideal because it is entirely distinct from the tangible-corporeal form of the commodity in which it appears – as we read in the chapter ‘Money, or the Circulation of Commodities’.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, the value-form is ideal, although it exists outside human consciousness, independent of it, in the space outside the human head, in things, i.e., in the commodities themselves, or ‘only in their own heads’, as Marx put it.<sup>13</sup>

This use of the term may confuse the reader who is accustomed to the terminology of popular essays on materialism and on the relationship of the material to the ‘ideal’. The ‘ideal’, existing outside the heads and consciousness of individuals, as completely objective, entirely independent of the consciousness and will of individuals, invisible, intangible, sensuously imperceptible and consequently appearing as something merely ‘conceptual’, something ‘supra-sensuous’.

A reader who is somewhat better versed in the field of philosophy may suspect Marx of an unnecessary flirtation with Hegelian terminology, with the ‘semantic tradition’ associated with the names of Plato, Schelling and Hegel, typical representatives of objective idealism, that is to say, conceptions according to which the ‘ideal’ exists as a special world of incorporeal entities (‘ideas’) outside and independent of man. Such a reader would most likely reproach Marx for an unjustified or ‘incorrect’ use of the term ‘ideal’, of Hegelian ‘hypostatization’ of phenomena of consciousness, and other mortal sins inexcusable for a materialist.

However, the matter is not so simple. It is not at all a matter of terminology. But since terminology plays not an insignificant rôle in science, Marx uses the term ‘ideal’ in a sense that is close to the Hegelian interpretation precisely because it makes much more sense than does the popular pseudo-materialist understanding of the ideal – as a phenomenon of consciousness, as purely a function of the brain. The fact is that intelligent (dialectical) idealism, which is the idealism of Plato and Hegel, is much closer to the essence of the matter than materialism that is popular, superficial and vulgar (‘silly’, as Lenin called it) materialism. The fact is that Hegel’s system theoretically expressed, albeit in inverted form, the dialectical transformation of the ideal into the material and vice versa, which was never even suspected by metaphysical {~ ‘silly’} materialism, which remained stuck in crude, non-dialectical oppositions.

The popular sense of the ideal is incapable of registering what subtle traps had been prepared by the dialectics of these categories.

Marx, however, having had substantial training in Hegelian dialectics, was not so naïve as the ‘popular’ materialists. His materialism had been enriched by all the achievements of philosophical thought from Kant to Hegel. This explains the fact that in the Hegelian

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<sup>11</sup> [Daglish translation begins roughly here – A.L.]

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



notion of the ideal structure of the universe, existing outside the human head (and outside consciousness), he was able to see not simply ‘idealist nonsense’, not simply the philosophical version of religious tales about God (as was seen by the old, non-dialectical materialism), but an idealistically-inverted description of an actual relation of ‘spirit to nature’, ‘the ideal to the material’, ‘thought to being’. This also found expression in terminology.

We must, therefore, briefly consider the history of the term ‘ideal’ in the history of the development of German classical philosophy from Kant to Hegel, as well as the moral that Marx, the ‘intelligent’ (i.e., dialectical) materialist, was able to draw from this history.

It all began with the fact that the founder of German classical philosophy, Immanuel Kant, took as his point of departure the ‘popular’ interpretation of ‘ideal’ and ‘real’ (actual), similarly unsuspecting what pitfalls he had thus prepared for himself.

The author of *The Critique of Pure Reason* explains his understanding of this distinction with the well-known example of the ‘talers’:<sup>14</sup> it is one thing to have a hundred talers in one’s pocket, and quite another to have it only in one’s consciousness, only in the imagination, only in dreams – in other words, only ideal talers.

This example plays quite an important rôle in Kant’s philosophy, as one of the arguments against the so-called ‘ontological proof of the existence of God’: one cannot infer from the presence of an object in *consciousness* that it exists *outside consciousness*. God exists in people’s consciousness, but it does not follow from this that God actually exists, outside consciousness. After all, all kinds of things exist in people’s consciousness! There are centaurs, witches, ghosts and dragons with seven heads.

Among phenomena of consciousness (‘ideal phenomena’) there exist green devils;<sup>15</sup> however, any average sober person knows full well that – outside of the consciousness of an inebriated alcoholic – they do not exist, and that by ‘green devils’ he means entirely different objects.

If Kant only had known what a subtle trap he had prepared for himself with his imprudent example of ‘real’, ‘actual’ talers! In a neighbouring country, where the currency is not talers, but roubles or franks, it would be popularly explained to him that he had in his pocket not ‘actual talers’, but only *symbols* [знаки представления] stamped on paper, which carry an obligation only for Prussian subjects. Of course, if one acknowledges as ‘actual’ and ‘real’ only what is authorised by the decrees of the Prussian king, affirmed by his signature and seal, and discounts all else as otherworldly fictions, then Kant’s example proves what Kant wanted it to prove. However, if one takes a somewhat broader view of the ‘real’ and the ‘ideal’, then it proves precisely the opposite. Namely, he does not refute, but affirms that very ‘ontological proof of the existence of God’, which Kant declared to be a typical example of an erroneous inference about the existence of a prototype outside of consciousness from its image in consciousness.

‘The contrary is true. Kant’s example might have enforced the ontological proof’, wrote an author from a much more radical atheistic position with respect to God than Kant. In fact,

<sup>14</sup> [Kant 1933, p. 499, A599/B627. – A.L.]

<sup>15</sup> [In reference to a Russian saying: ‘to drink until [you see] green devils [напиться до зеленых чертей]’ – A.L.]

Real talers have the same existence that the imagined gods have. Has a real taler any existence except in the imagination, if only in the general or rather common imagination of man? Bring paper money into a country where this use of paper is unknown, and everyone will laugh at your subjective imagination.<sup>16</sup>

The reproach formulated here against Kant does not, of course, proceed from the desire to change the meaning of ‘ideal’ and ‘actual’ according to Hegelian fashion. It is based on the understanding of the fact that a philosophical system that denotes as ‘real’ and ‘actual’ everything that man perceives as existing outside his own consciousness, and ‘ideal’ as that which is not perceived in the form of this thing – is unable to critically distinguish the most fundamental illusions and errors of the human race.

Of course, real talers in no way differ from the gods of primitive religions, from the crude fetishes of a savage who worships (precisely as his god!) a real, actual piece of wood, a piece of rock, a bronze-idol or some other similar external object. The savage by no means regards the object of his worship as a symbol of God; for him, this object, in all its crude sensuously perceptible corporeality, is God – God Himself, and not His mere ‘representation’. And this is how the crudely fetishistic religious consciousness actually finds the argument in Kant’s example in its favour.

For a devout old woman, the prophet Elijah actually exists precisely because she sees him in the bolt of lightning and hears him in the rumble of thunder. She sensuously perceives precisely the prophet Elijah, and in no way his symbol. More accurately, she perceives thunder and lightning as the prophet Elijah, and not as symbols of this person. In lightning and thunder she perceives his actual activities, the actual forms of his sensuous perceptibility.

This is the essence of fetishism – that properties are attributed to an object, precisely in all its crude corporeality, in its directly perceived form, that in actual fact do not belong to it and have nothing in common with its sensuously perceptible appearance.

When such an object (be it a piece of wood, or a stone or bronze-idol, and so on and so forth) ceases to be regarded as ‘God Himself’ and acquires the meaning of an ‘external symbol’ of this god, when it becomes perceived not as the immediate subject of the actions attributed to it, but merely as a sign of something ‘other’, only as a symbol of this ‘other’, which in no way outwardly resembles it, then man’s consciousness takes a step forward on the path to understanding the essence of the matter.

For this reason Kant himself, as well as Hegel, who is completely in agreement with him on this point, consider the Protestant version of Christianity to be a higher stage in the development of religious consciousness than archaic Catholicism, which had, indeed, not progressed very far from the primitive fetishism of idol-worshippers. The very thing that distinguishes the Catholic from the Protestant is that the Catholic tends to take everything depicted in religious paintings and Bible stories literally, as an exact representation of events that occurred in the ‘external world’ (God as a benevolent old man with a beard and a shining halo around his bald head, the birth of Eve as the actual transformation of Adam’s rib into a human being, and so on and so forth). The Protestant, on the other hand, seeing ‘idolatry’ in this interpretation, regards such events as allegories that have an internal, purely ideal, moral meaning.

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<sup>16</sup> Marx 1975a, p. 105.

Hegelians did, in fact, reproach Kant for playing into the hands of Catholic idolatry with his example of the talers, for arguing against his own Protestant sympathies and attitudes because the external talers (the talers in his pocket) were only signs or symbols in the ‘common or rather social imagination of man’, only representatives (forms of external expression, incarnation) of spirit, just as religious paintings hanging on the wall, despite their sensuously perceptible reality, were only images produced by human social self-consciousness, by the human spirit [intellect – A.L.]. In their essence they were entirely ideal, although in their existence they were substantial, material and were located, of course, outside the human head, outside the consciousness of the individual, outside individual mental activity with its transcendental mechanisms.

Gods and talers are phenomena of the same order, declared Hegel and the Hegelians, and by this comparison the problem of the ‘ideal’ and its relationship to the ‘real’, to the actual, materially substantial world was posited quite differently from Kant’s account. It was associated with the well-known problem of ‘alienation’, with the question of ‘reification’ and ‘de-reification’, of man’s ‘re-assimilation’ of objects created by man, which had through some mysterious processes been transformed into a world of objective formations that were not only ‘external’, but also hostile to man.

Hence comes the following interpretation of Kant’s problem:

The proofs of the existence of God are either mere hollow tautologies. Take for instance the ontological proof. This only means: ‘that which I conceive for myself in a real way [*realiter*], is a real concept for me’, something that works on me. In this sense all gods, the pagan as well as the Christian ones, have possessed a real existence. Did not the ancient Moloch reign? Was not the Delphic Apollo a real power in the life of the Greeks? Kant’s critique means nothing in this respect. If somebody imagines that he has a hundred talers, if this concept is not for him an arbitrary, subjective one, if he believes in it, then these hundred imagined talers have for him the same value as a hundred real ones. For instance, he will incur debts on the strength of his imagination, his imagination will *work, in the same way as all humanity has incurred debts on its gods*.<sup>17</sup>

Posing the question in this way, the category of the ‘ideal’ acquired quite a different meaning from that given to it by Kant, and this was by no means due to some terminological whim of Hegel and the Hegelians. It expressed the obvious fact that social consciousness is not simply the individual consciousness repeated many times, just as the social organism in general is not the individual human organism repeated many times, but is, in fact, a historically formed and historically developing system of ‘objective representations’, forms and patterns of the ‘objective spirit’, of humanity’s ‘collective reason’ (or more directly, the ‘people’ with its unique intellectual culture), all this being quite independent of the whims of the consciousness or will of individuals. This system comprises all the common moral norms regulating people’s daily life-activity, as well as the legal precepts, the forms of state-political organisation of life, the ritually legitimised patterns of activity in all spheres, the ‘rules’ of life that must be obeyed by all, the strict regulation of the workplace, and so

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

on and so forth, up to and including the grammatical and syntactical structures of speech and language and the logical norms of reasoning.

All these structural forms and patterns of social consciousness unambiguously oppose individual consciousness and will as a special, internally organised 'actuality', as completely 'external' forms of its determination. It is a fact that every individual must from childhood reckon far more carefully with demands and restrictions expressed and institutionalised by means of tradition than with the immediately perceptible appearance of external 'things' and situations or the organic attractions, desires and needs of one's individual body.

It is equally obvious that all these externally imposed patterns and forms cannot be identified in the individual consciousness as 'innate', transcendental psychological patterns or even as instinctive tendencies. They are all internalised in the course of upbringing, education and rehabilitation – that is, in the course of the individual's assimilation of the intellectual culture that is available and that took shape before him, without him and independently of him – as the patterns and forms of that culture. These are no 'immanent' forms of individual mental activity, but the assimilated form of 'another' external 'subject'.

This is why Hegel sees the main advantage of Plato's teaching in the fact that the question of the relationship of 'spirit' to 'nature' is for the first time posited not on the narrow basis of the relations of the 'individual self' to 'everything else', but on the basis of an investigation of the universal (read: social-collective) 'world of ideas' in relation to the 'world of things'.

With Plato, therefore, begins the tradition of examining the world of ideas (here originates the concept of the 'ideal world') as a somewhat stable and internally organised world of laws, rights and patterns, according to which exist the mental activity of an individual, the 'individual soul', as a special super-natural, 'objective reality', confronting each individual, dictating his conduct in particular situations. This 'external' force determining the individual appears directly as the 'state', which defends the whole system of the available intellectual culture, the whole system of rights and duties of every citizen.

Here a completely real fact was clearly stated in a semi-mystical, half-mythological form: the fact of the dependence of the mental (and not only mental) activity of an individual on a system of culture entirely independent of him, within which occurs and proceeds the 'mental life' of each individual, that is to say, the labour of the human head.

The question of the relationship of the 'ideal' to the 'substantially material' was here presented as a question of the relationship of these stable forms (patterns, stereotypes) of culture to the world of 'individual things', which included not only 'external things', but also the physical body of man himself.

As a matter of fact, it was only here that the necessity arose for a clear definition of the category of 'ideality' as opposed to the undifferentiated, vaguely undefined notion of the 'mind' in general, which might equally well be interpreted as a wholly corporeal function of the physically interpreted 'soul', no matter to what organ this function was actually ascribed – heart, liver or brain. Otherwise, 'ideality' remains a superfluous and completely unnecessary verbal label for the 'mental'. This is how it was before Plato (the term 'idea' denoted, even for Democritus, a completely substantial form, the geometrical outlines of a 'thing', a body, which was quite physically impressed on man, in the physical body of his

eyes – this usage, characteristic of the early, naïve form of materialism cannot, of course, be used by contemporary materialism, which takes into consideration the complexity of the relationships between individual mental activity and the ‘world of things’.

For this reason, in the vocabulary of contemporary materialistic psychology (not only philosophy) the category of ‘ideality’ or the ‘ideal’ characterises not mental activity in general, but only a certain phenomenon connected, of course, with mental activity, but by no means merging with it.

*Ideality* mainly characterises the idea or image insofar as they – becoming objectified in words, entering into the system of socially produced knowledge, existing for the individual as a given, ‘objective reality’ – thus acquire a relative independence, separating themselves, as it were, from the mental activity of the individual’, writes the well-known Soviet psychologist S.L. Rubinstein.<sup>18</sup>

Only in this interpretation does the category of ‘ideality’ become a specifically meaningful definition of a well-known category of phenomena, establishing the form of the process of reflection of objective reality in mental activity, which is social-human in its origin and essence, in the social-human consciousness, and ceases to be an unnecessary synonym for mental activity altogether.

With reference to the quotation from S.L. Rubinstein’s book it need only be observed that the image is objectified not only in words, and may ‘enter into the system of socially produced knowledge’ not only in its verbal expression. The category of the image is understood quite broadly in dialectical-materialist theory. The image is objectified (‘reified’) just as well (and even better, more directly) in sculptural, graphic, pictorial, and plastic representations, and in the form of the routine-ritual ways (‘images’) of dealing with things and people, so that it is expressed not only in words, in speech and language, but also in drawings, models and such symbolic objects as coats of arms, banners, forms of dress, utensils and so on, everything from furniture in the throne-room to children’s toys, and so on and so forth; as money, including ‘real’ bars of metal, and gold-coins, and paper-money, and promissory notes, bonds or credit-notes.

‘Ideality’ in general is, in the historically formed language of philosophy, a characteristic of the materially-established (materialised, reified, objectified) images of social-human culture, that is, the historically formed modes of social-human life, which confront the individual possessing consciousness and will as a special ‘supernatural’ objective reality, as a special object comparable with material reality and situated on one and the same spatial plane (and hence often conflated with it).

Consequently, purely for the sake of terminological accuracy, it is pointless to apply this definition to purely individual mental states at any given moment. The latter, with all their individually unique whims and variations, are determined in effect by the practically infinite interconnections of the most diverse factors up to and including transient states of the organism and the peculiar features of its biochemical reactions (such as allergies or colour-blindness, for instance), and, therefore, may be considered on the plane of social-human culture as purely accidental.

This is why we find Kant discussing the ‘ideality of space and time’, but not the ‘ideality’ of the conscious sensations of heaviness in the stomach or in the muscles of the arm when one is carrying something; discussing the ‘ideality’ of the chain of cause and effect, but not

<sup>18</sup> Rubinstein 1957, p. 41.

the ideality of the fact that a rock heats up when the sun shines on it (although this fact is also consciously perceived). In Kant 'ideality' becomes a synonym for the 'transcendental character' of universal forms of sensuousness and reason, that is, patterns of cognitive activity that are inherent in every 'self' and thus have a completely impersonal character, and which display, moreover, a compulsive force in relation to each separate ('empirical') 'self'. This is why space and time, causal dependence and 'beauty' are for Kant 'ideal', while mental states, which are connected with the unique and transitory physical states of an individual's body, are not honoured with such a term. Admittedly, as we have seen in the example of the 'talers', Kant does not always adhere rigorously to his usage, although the reason for this is certainly not carelessness (it would be difficult to reproach Kant for that), but rather the dialectical cunning of the problems that he raises. But despite the instability of the terminological definition of these well-known categories, their objective dialectical content begins to show through – the very content that the Hegelian school provides with a far more adequate definition.

The fact is that Kant did not fully overcome the notion of 'social consciousness' ('universal spirit') as the many-times repeated individual consciousness. In essence, the 'universal' parameters of spirit appear in Kant in one way or another as those patterns, which, being peculiar to each individual consciousness, turn out to be his impersonally invariant [безличноинвариантными] determinations (here 'universal' means identical for each individual and abstractly-universal 'for all').

In Hegelian philosophy, however, the problem was presented in a fundamentally different way. The social organism (the 'culture' of a given people) is by no means an abstraction expressing the 'sameness' that may be discovered in the mentality of every individual, an 'abstract' inherent in each individual, the transcendently psychological pattern of individual life-activity.

The historically developed and developing forms of the 'universal spirit' ('the spirit of the people', the 'objective spirit'), although still understood by Hegel as certain stable patterns within whose framework the mental activity of every individual proceeds, are nevertheless regarded by him not as formal abstractions, not as abstractly universal 'attributes' inherent in every individual, taken separately. Hegel (following Rousseau with his distinction between the 'will of all' and the 'general will' ['всеобщей воли – universal will' – A.L.]) fully takes into account the obvious fact that in the diverse collisions of differently orientated 'individual wills' certain results are born and crystallised which were never contained in any of them separately, and that because of this, social consciousness, as a certain 'whole', is certainly not built up, as of bricks, from the 'sameness' to be found in each of its 'parts' (individual selves, individual consciousnesses). And this is where we are shown the path to an understanding of the fact that all the patterns, which Kant defined as 'transcendently innate' forms of operation of the individual mind, as *a priori* 'internal mechanisms' inherent in every mind, are actually forms of the self-consciousness of social man assimilated from without by the individual (originally they opposed him as 'external' patterns of the movement of culture independent of his will and consciousness), social man being understood as the historically developing 'ensemble of all social relations'.

It is these spontaneously arising forms of the organisation of social (collectively realised) human life-activity that exist before, outside and completely independent of the individual

mind, that in one way or another are materially established in language, in ritually legitimised customs and laws and, further, as ‘the organisation of a state’ with all its material attributes and organs for the protection of traditional forms of life that stand in opposition to the individual (the physical body of the individual with his brain, liver, heart, hands and other organs) as an organised whole that is ‘in-itself and for-itself’, as something ‘ideal’ *within* which all individual things acquire a different meaning and play a different rôle from that which they had played ‘in themselves’, that is, outside this whole. For this reason the ‘ideal’ definition of any thing, or the definition of any thing as a ‘disappearing’ moment in the movement of the ‘ideal world’, coincides in Hegel with the rôle and meaning of this thing in social-human culture, in the context of socially organised human life-activity, and not in the individual consciousness, which is here regarded as something derived from the ‘universal spirit’.

It will readily be appreciated how much broader and deeper such a positing of the question is, despite all the other fundamental flaws of the Hegelian conception, in comparison with any conception that designates as ‘ideal’ everything that is ‘in the consciousness of the individual’, and as ‘material’ or ‘real’, everything that is outside the consciousness of the individual, everything that the given individual is not conscious of, although this ‘everything’ does exist in reality, and thus draws between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real’ a fundamentally dividing line which turns them into ‘different worlds’ that have nothing in common with each other. It is clear that, given such a metaphysical differentiation, the ‘ideal’ and the ‘material’ cannot and must not be regarded as opposites. Here they are ‘different’, and that is all.

Hegel proceeds from the quite obvious fact that for the consciousness of the individual, the ‘real’ and even the ‘crudely material’ – certainly not the ‘ideal’ – is at first the whole grandiose materially-established intellectual culture of the human race, in and through which this individual awakens to ‘self-consciousness’. It is this that confronts the individual as the thought of preceding generations realised [осуществленное] (‘reified’, ‘objectified’, ‘alienated’) in sensuously perceptible ‘matter’ – in language and in visually perceptible images, in books and statues, in wood and bronze, in the form of places of worship and instruments of labour, in the designs of machines and state-buildings, in the patterns of scientific and moral systems, and so on and so forth. All these objects are in their existence, in their ‘determinate being’ substantial, ‘material’, but in their essence, in their origin they are ‘ideal’, because they ‘embody’ the collective thinking of people, the ‘universal spirit’ of mankind.

In other words, Hegel includes in the concept of the ‘ideal’ everything that another representative of idealism in philosophy (admittedly he never acknowledged himself to be an ‘idealist’) – A.A. Bogdanov – a century later designated as ‘socially organised experience’ with its stable, historically crystallised patterns, standards, stereotypes, and ‘algorithms’. The feature which both Hegel and Bogdanov have in common (as ‘idealists’) is the notion that this world of ‘socially organised experience’ is for the individual the sole ‘object’ which he ‘assimilates’ and ‘cognises’, the sole object with which he has any dealings, and behind which there is nothing deeply hidden.

But the world existing before, outside and independently of consciousness and will in general (i.e., not only of the consciousness and will of the individual but also of the social consciousness and the socially organised ‘will’) is taken into account by this conception

only insofar as it has already found expression in social forms of consciousness and will, insofar as it is already 'idealised', already assimilated in 'experience', already presented in the patterns and forms of this 'experience', already included therein.

By this twist of thought, which characterises idealism in general (whether it is Platonic, Berkeleyan, Hegelian or that of Carnap-Popper), the real material world, existing before, outside and quite independently of 'experience' and before being expressed in the forms of this 'experience' (including language), is totally removed from the field of vision, and what begins to figure under the designation of the 'real world' is an already 'idealised' world, a world already assimilated by people, a world already shaped by their activity, the world as people know it, as it is presented in the existing forms of their culture. A world already expressed (represented) in the forms of existing human experience. And this world is declared to be the only world about which anything at all can be 'said'.

This secret of idealism shows up transparently in Hegel's discussion of the 'ideality' of natural phenomena, in his presentation of nature as an 'ideal' being in itself: the discussion is about certain natural phenomena, but in actual fact we have in mind their image in concepts and terms from physics available to Hegel (i.e., Newtonian mechanics): 'But there is no empty space between the bodies [*Massen*] which are thrusting and pressing against each other, they are in *contact*; and it is in this contact now that the ideality of matter begins; and the interest lies in seeing how this inwardness of matter emerges into existence, just as the attainment of existence by the Notion is always the interesting thing.'<sup>19</sup> This 'attainment of existence by the Notion', according to Hegel, consists of the fact that in the moment of 'contact' (with the push) 'there are two material points or atoms, coinciding in a single point or in an identity',<sup>20</sup> which means that their 'being-for-itself' is something 'other'. But by 'being other', while remaining nonetheless 'itself', this means having not only a 'real' but also an 'ideal' being. Therein lies the secret of the Hegelian 'idealisation of matter', 'idealisation of nature': here Hegel is really speaking not at all about nature 'as it is', but exclusively about nature as it is represented (depicted) in the system of a definite physical theory, in the system of its definitions established by its historically formed 'language'.

It is this fact, incidentally, that explains the persistence of such 'semantic substitutions'; indeed, when we are talking about nature, we are obliged to make use of the available language of natural science, the 'language of science' with its established and commonly understood 'meanings'. This forms the basis of all the sophistry of 'logical positivism', which quite consciously identifies 'nature' with the 'language' in which people talk and write about nature, and the whole tricky Heideggerian construction, according to which 'being' is revealed and exists only 'in language', and lives only in 'language', as in one's 'house', in its hidden 'essence', in its immanent power, its invisible organisation, and 'outside language' it does not exist.

It will be appreciated that the main difficulty {and, therefore, the main problem of philosophy} is not to distinguish and counterpose everything that is 'in the consciousness of the individual' to everything that is outside this individual consciousness (this is hardly ever difficult to do), but to delimit the world of collectively acknowledged notions, that is, the whole socially organised world of intellectual culture with all its stable and materially

<sup>19</sup> Hegel 2004, p. 50.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



established social patterns, *and the real world as it exists outside of and apart from its expression in these socially legitimised forms of 'experience', in objective forms of 'spirit'.*

It is here, and only here, that the distinction between the 'ideal' and the 'real' ('material') acquires a serious scientific meaning, because in practice many people confuse one for the other, accept one for the other, with the same ease that they accept 'the desired for the real', and the form of things for the things themselves. . . . *Pointing out the fact that the thing and the form of the thing exist outside individual consciousness and do not depend on individual will still does not solve the question of their objectivity in its serious materialistic sense.* And conversely, it is by no means the case that everything that people do not know, are unaware of, do not perceive as the forms of external things, is fabrication, a fiction of the imagination, a notion that exists merely in their heads. Precisely because of this, the 'sensible person', to whose way of thinking Kant appeals with his example of the talers, is often deluded into taking collectively acknowledged notions for objective reality, and the objective reality revealed by scientific research for subjective fiction existing only in the heads of 'theoreticians'. It is the 'sensible person', daily observing the sun rising in the East and setting in the West, who protested that the system of Copernicus was a blasphemous invention that was contradicted by 'obvious facts'. And in exactly the same way the common person, drawn into the orbit of commodity-money relations, regards money as a perfectly material thing; and value, which in fact finds its external expression in money, as a mere abstraction existing only in the heads of theoreticians, only 'ideally'.

For this reason serious materialism, faced with these kinds of situations, could not define the 'ideal' as that which exists in the consciousness of the individual, and the 'material' as that which exists outside this consciousness, as the sensuously perceived form of the external thing, as a real corporeal form. The boundary between the two, between the 'material' and the 'ideal', between the 'thing-in-itself' and its representation in social consciousness, could not pass along this line because, if it did, materialism would be completely helpless when confronted with the dialectics that Hegel had discovered in the relations between the 'material' and the 'ideal' (particularly, in the phenomena of fetishism of all kinds, from religious to commodity-fetishism, and further, the fetishism of words, of language, symbols and signs).

It is a fact that like the icon or the gold-coin, any word (term or combination of terms) is primarily a 'thing' that exists outside the consciousness of an individual, any individual, and possesses perfectly real corporeal properties and is sensuously perceived. According to the old classification accepted by everyone, including Kant, words clearly come under the category of the 'material' or the 'real' with just as much justification as stones or flowers, bread or a bottle of wine, the guillotine or the printing press. In contrast to these things, what we call the 'ideal' is their subjective image in the head of the individual, in the individual consciousness. No?

But here we are immediately confronted with the trickiness of this distinction, which is fully apparent in discussions on money in political economy (Kant, being poorly acquainted with political economy, did not suspect such tricks), and which is fully taken into account by the Hegelian school and its conception of the 'reification', 'alienation', 'objectification' of universal representations. As a result of this process, which occurs completely spontaneously, out of sight of the consciousness of the individual, that is to say, quite unintentionally, the individual is confronted by people's common (i.e., collectively acknowledged) representation in the form of an 'external thing', which has absolutely

nothing in common with the sensuously perceived corporeal form in which it is represented.

For example, the name ‘Peter’ is, in its sensuously perceptible corporeal form, absolutely unlike the real Peter, the person it designates, or the sensuously represented image of Peter that other people have of him.<sup>21</sup> The relationship is the same between the gold-coin and the goods that can be bought with it, goods (commodities) whose universal representation is the coin or (later) the banknote. The coin represents not itself but an ‘other’ in the very sense in which a diplomat represents not his own person but his country, which has authorised him to do so. The same may be said of the word, the verbal symbol or sign, or any combination of such signs and the syntactical pattern of this combination.

This relationship of representation (reflection, in the dialectical-materialist sense of the term) is a relationship in which one sensuously perceived thing, while remaining itself, performs the rôle or function of representing quite another thing (to be even more precise, it represents the universal nature of that other thing, that is, something ‘other’ which in sensuous, corporeal terms is quite unlike it), and in this way acquires a new plane of existence. It was this relationship that in the Hegelian-terminological tradition acquired the title of ‘ideality’.

Clearly, this is not an arbitrary semantic whim of Hegel and Hegelians, but a very important terminological designation of the actual situation, even if not fully understood by Hegel. ‘Ideality’, according to Hegel, only begins where the sensuously-perceived thing, while remaining itself, transforms into a representation of something ‘other’, where its ‘being-for-itself is not being-for-itself’. Where this ‘other’ transforms it into a form of its own being (which is why he illustrates ‘ideality’ in the image of a push, ‘contact’, ‘mediation’, although the push is ‘ideal’ only at one point, at the point where it flows into another body). Behind the scholasticism of Hegelian terminology lay a fundamentally important relation, which was fully understood only by Marx in the course of his analysis of commodity-fetishism and the money-form of value, the money-form of the expression (i.e., representation) of value.

In *Capital* Marx quite consciously uses the term ‘ideal’ in this formal meaning as it was given by Hegel, and not in the sense in which it was used by the whole pre-Hegelian tradition, including Kant – although the philosophical-theoretical interpretation of the range of phenomena, which in both cases is similarly designated ‘ideal’, is diametrically opposed to its Hegelian interpretation. The meaning of the term ‘ideal’ in Marx and Hegel is the same, but the concepts (i.e., the ways of understanding this ‘same’ meaning) are profoundly different. After all, the word ‘concept’ in dialectically interpreted logic is a synonym for ‘understanding the essence of the matter’, the essence of phenomena which are only denoted by a given term; it is by no means a synonym for the ‘meaning of the term’, which may be formally interpreted as the sum-total of ‘attributes’ of the phenomena to which the term is applied.

It was for this reason that Marx, like any genuine theoretician, preferred not to change the historically formed ‘meanings of terms’, the established nomenclature of phenomena, but, while making strict and rigorous use of these, proposed a quite different understanding of these phenomena that was actually the opposite of the traditional understanding. This

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<sup>21</sup> There is no ‘isomorphism’, ‘homorphism’, or any other morphisms here. No point in looking, for they are not here.

is in contrast to ‘theorists’ who accept and pass off as scientific discoveries purely terminological reworking of old truths, and invent new terms, and do not advance by one iota the current understanding, ‘concept’, or ‘definition of the concept’.<sup>22</sup>

In *Capital*, when analysing money – that familiar and yet mysterious category of social phenomena – Marx formulates the following definition: ‘Der Preis oder die Geldform der Waren ist, wie ihre Wertform überhaupt, eine von ihrer handgreiflich reellen Körperform unterschiedene also nur ideelle oder vorgestellte Form’.<sup>23</sup>

The ‘ideal’ described here is nothing more or less than the value-form of the products of labour in general (‘die Wertform überhaupt’).

Consequently, the reader for whom the term ‘ideal’ is a synonym for that which is ‘immanent in consciousness’, ‘existing only in consciousness’, ‘only in people’s representations’, only in their ‘imagination’, will simply misread the thought being expressed, and will acquire a false understanding of Marx, one that has nothing in common with his actual understanding. Indeed, in this case the text will be read in a way where capital – which is nothing other than the value-form of the organisation and development of productive forces, a form of the functioning of the means of production – also exists (following Marx!) only in consciousness, only in people’s subjective imagination, and ‘not in reality’.

Obviously, only someone like Chase, but in no way Karl Marx, could understand the issue this way, that is to say, only a follower of Berkeley, and certainly not a materialist.

According to Marx, of course, the ideality of the value-form consists not in the fact that this form represents a mental phenomenon existing only in the brain of the commodity-owner or theoretician, but in the fact that in this case, as in many other cases, the corporeally palpable form of the thing (for example, a coat) is only a form of expression of quite a different ‘thing’ (linen, as a value) with which it has nothing in common. The value of the linen is represented, expressed, ‘embodied’ in the form of a coat, and the form of the coat is the ‘ideal or represented form’ of the value of the linen.

As a use value, the linen is something palpably different from the coat; as value, it is the same as the coat, and now has the appearance of a coat. Thus the linen acquires a value form different from its physical form. The fact that it is value, is made manifest by its equality with the coat, just as the sheep’s nature of a Christian is shown in his resemblance to the Lamb of God.<sup>24</sup>

This is a completely objective relationship (as it is entirely independent of the commodity-owner’s consciousness and will, established outside his consciousness), within which the natural form of Commodity B becomes the value-form of Commodity A, or the body of

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<sup>22</sup> Note that neopositivists, by fundamentally equating the definition of the concept with the definition of the term, thus in their own way resolve the problem of the ‘ideal’, essentially denying this important category of its scientific meaning, and attributing the opposition of the ‘ideal’ and the ‘material’ to the category of ‘metaphysical’, that is, in their terminology, to pre-scientific and anti-scientific distinctions.

<sup>23</sup> Marx 1969, p. 110. [English translation: Marx 1996b, p. 103 – A.L.]

<sup>24</sup> Marx 1996b, p. 62.

Commodity B acts as a mirror to the value of Commodity A, the authorised representative of its 'value'-nature, of the 'substance' which is 'embodied' both here and there.

For this reason, and no other, the value-form is ideal, that is to say, it is something quite different from the palpable-corporeal form of the thing in which it is presented, 'represented', expressed, 'embodied', 'alienated'.

What is this 'other' that is expressed or represented here? People's consciousness? Their will? By no means. On the contrary, people's will and consciousness are both determined by this objective ideal form, and the thing that is expressed in it, 'represented' by it, is a definite social relationship between people which in their eyes assumes the fantastic form of a relationship between things.

In other words, what is 'represented' here as a thing is a form of human activity, a form of life-activity that they perform together, developing quite spontaneously, 'out of the sight of consciousness', and materially established in the form of the relationship between things, as described above. By means of this, and no other, is created the ideality of such a 'thing', its 'sensuous-suprasensuous character'.

Here the ideal form actually does confront individual consciousness and individual will as the form of the external thing (recall Kant's talers) and is necessarily perceived precisely as the form of the external thing, not its palpable-corporeal form, but as the form of another equally palpable-corporeal thing that it represents, expresses, embodies, differing, however, from the palpable corporeality of both things and having nothing in common with their sensuously perceptible physical nature. What is embodied and 'represented' here is a definite form of labour, a definite form of human objective activity, that is to say, the transformation [преобразования] of nature by social man.

It is here that we find the answer to the riddle of 'ideality'. Ideality, according to Marx, is nothing else but the form of social-human activity represented in the thing, reflecting objective reality; or, conversely, the form of human activity, which reflects objective reality, represented as a thing, as an object.

'Ideality' is a kind of stamp impressed on the substance of nature by social-human life-activity, a form of the functioning of the physical thing in the process of social-human life-activity. So all the things involved in the social process acquire a new 'form of existence' that is not included in their physical nature and differs from it completely – their ideal form.

So, there can be no talk of 'ideality' where there are no people socially producing and reproducing their material life, that is to say, individuals collectively performing labour and, therefore, necessarily possessing consciousness and will. But this does not mean that the 'ideality of things' is a product of their conscious will, that it is 'immanent in consciousness' and exists only in consciousness. Quite the reverse, the individual's consciousness and will act as functions of the ideality of things, as the realisation of the ideality of things.

Ideality, thus, has a purely social nature and origin, and yet, the ideal, in the form of knowledge, reflects objective reality, which exists independently of humanity. It is the form of a thing, but it is outside this thing, namely in the activity of man, as a form of this activity. Or conversely, it is the form of a person's activity but outside this person, as a form of the thing. Here, then, is the key to the whole mystery, the whole mystique, which forms the real basis for all kinds of idealistic constructions and conceptions both of man and of the world beyond man, from Plato to Carnap and Popper. 'Ideality' constantly slips away

from the metaphysically single-valued theoretical establishment. As soon as it is established as the ‘form of the thing’ it begins to tease the theoretician with its ‘immateriality’, its ‘functional’ character, and appears only as a form of ‘pure activity’, only as *actus purus*. On the other hand, as soon as one attempts to establish it ‘as such’, as purified of all the traces of palpable corporeality, it turns out that this attempt is fundamentally doomed to failure, that after such a purification there will be nothing but transparent emptiness, an indefinable vacuum.

And indeed, as Hegel understood so well, it is absurd to speak of ‘activity’ that is not realised in anything definite, not ‘embodied’, not realised in something corporeal, if only in words, speech, or language. If such ‘activity’ exists, it cannot be in reality but only in possibility, only potentially, and, therefore, not as activity but as its opposite, as inactivity, as the absence of activity.

So, according to Hegel, ‘spirit’, as something ideal, as something opposed to the world of corporeally established forms, cannot ‘reflect’ at all (i.e., become aware of the forms of its own structure) unless it preliminarily opposes ‘itself to itself’, as an ‘object’ that differs from itself, as a ‘thing’. This is impossible for absolute spirit, much like the desire of a beautiful woman to admire herself in the absence of a mirror in which she can see herself as something ‘other’, as an image existing outside herself. The eye cannot see itself; it sees only what is other, even if this other is another eye, its own reflection in the mirror.

When speaking of the value-form as the ideal form of a thing, Marx by no means accidentally invokes the image of the mirror:

In a sort of way, it is with man as with commodities. Since he comes into the world neither with a looking glass in his hand, nor as a Fichtean philosopher, to whom ‘I am I’ is sufficient, man first sees and recognises himself in other men. Peter only establishes his own identity as a man by first comparing himself with Paul as being of like kind. And thereby Paul, just as he stands in his Pauline personality, becomes to Peter the type of the genus homo.<sup>25</sup>

Here Marx himself unequivocally draws a parallel between his theory of the ‘ideality’ of the value-form and Hegel’s understanding of ‘ideality’, which takes into account the dialectics of the emergence of the collective self-consciousness of the human race. Yes, Hegel understood the situation with greater breadth and depth than the ‘Fichtean philosopher’; he established the fact that before it is able to examine itself, ‘spirit’ must shed its purity, unblemished by ‘tangible matter’, and its transparent nature, and must turn itself into an object and in the form of this object oppose itself to itself. At first in the form of the Word, in the form of verbal ‘embodiment’, and then in the form of instruments of labour, statues, machines, guns, churches, factories, constitutions and states, in the form of the grandiose ‘inorganic body of man’, in the form of the sensuously perceptible body of civilisation which for him serves only as a mirror in which he can examine himself, his ‘other being’, and know through this examination his own ‘pure ideality’, understanding himself as ‘pure activity’. Hegel realised full well that ideality as ‘pure activity’ is not directly given and cannot be given ‘as such’, immediately in all its purity and undisturbed perfection; it can be known only through an analysis of its ‘incarnations’, through its

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<sup>25</sup> Marx 1996b, p. 103.

reflection in the mirror of palpable reality, in the mirror of the system of things (their forms and relations) created by the activity of 'pure spirit'. By their fruits ye shall know them – and not otherwise.

The ideal forms of the world are, according to Hegel, forms of 'pure' activity realised in some material. If they are not realised in some palpable-corporeal material, they remain invisible and unknown for the active spirit itself, the spirit cannot become aware of them. In order to examine them they must be 'reified', that is, turned into the forms and relations of things. Only in this case does ideality exist, does it possess determinate being; only as a reified and reifiable form of activity, a form of activity that has become and is becoming the form of an object, a palpable-corporeal thing outside consciousness, and in no case as a transcendental-mental pattern of consciousness, not as the internal pattern of the 'self', distinguishing itself from itself within itself, as it turned out with the 'Fichtean philosopher'.

As the internal pattern of the activity of consciousness, as a pattern 'immanent in consciousness', ideality can have only an illusory, only a phantasmal existence. It becomes real only in the course of its reification, objectification (and de-objectification), alienation and dis-alienation. Clearly, this is a much more reasonable and realistic interpretation, compared to that of Kant and Fichte. It embraces the actual dialectics of people's developing 'self-consciousness', it embraces the actual phases and metamorphoses in whose succession alone the 'ideality' of the world exists.

It is for this reason that Marx joins Hegel as regards terminology, and not Kant or Fichte, who tried to solve the problem of 'ideality' (i.e., activity) while remaining 'inside consciousness', without venturing into the external sensuously-perceptible corporeal world, the world of the palpable-corporeal forms and relations of things.

This Hegelian definition of the term 'ideality' takes in the whole range of phenomena within which the 'ideal', understood as the corporeally embodied form of the activity of social man, really exists – as activity in the form of the thing, or conversely, as the thing in the form of activity, as a 'moment' of this activity, as its fleeting metamorphoses.

Without an understanding of this state of affairs it would be totally impossible to fathom the miracles performed by the commodity before people's eyes, the commodity-form of the product, particularly in its dazzling money-form, in the form of the notorious 'real talers', 'real roubles', or 'real dollars', things which, as soon as we have the slightest theoretical understanding of them, immediately turn out to be not 'real' at all, but 'ideal' through and through, things whose category quite unambiguously includes words, the units of language, and many other 'things'. Things that, while being wholly 'material', palpable-corporeal formations, acquire all their 'meaning' (function and rôle) from 'spirit', from 'thought' and even owe to it their specific corporeal existence. Outside spirit and without it there cannot even be words; there is merely a vibration of the air.

The mystery of this category of 'things', the secret of their 'ideality', their 'sensuous-suprasensuous character', was first revealed by Marx in the course of his analysis of commodity-fetishism, in the course of his analysis of the commodity (value) form of the product, as the typical and fundamental form of this type, as the 'purely ideal form'.

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the

sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses. In the same way the light from an object is perceived by us not as the subjective excitation of our optic nerve, but as the objective form of something outside the eye itself. But, in the act of seeing, there is at all events, an actual passage of light from one thing to another, from the external object to the eye. There is a physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities. There, the existence of the things *quâ* commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, Marx characterises the commodity-form as an ideal form, that is to say, as a form that has absolutely nothing in common with the real, corporeally palpable form of that body, in which it is represented (i.e., reflected, expressed, reified, objectified, alienated, realised) and by means of which it ‘exists’, possesses ‘being’.

It is ‘ideal’ because it does not include a single atom of the substance of the body in which it is represented, because it is the form of quite another body. And this other body is present here not corporeally-substantially (it is found to be ‘corporeal’ at quite a different point in space), but again only ‘ideally’, and there is not a single atom of its substance. Chemical analysis of a gold-coin will not reveal a single molecule of boot-polish, and vice versa. Nevertheless, a gold-coin represents (expresses) the value of a hundred tins of boot-polish precisely by its weight and lustre.

And, of course, this act of representation is by no means performed in the consciousness of the seller of boot-polish, but outside his consciousness in any ‘sense’ of this word, outside his head, in the space of the market, and without his having even the slightest suspicion of the mysterious nature of the money-form and the essence of the price of boot-polish. Anyone can spend money without knowing what money is.

For this very reason the person who confidently uses his native language to express the most subtle and complex circumstances of life would find himself in a very difficult position if he were to take it into his head to acquire consciousness of the relationship between the ‘sign’ and the ‘meaning’. The consciousness which he may gather from linguistic studies in the present state of the science of linguistics is more likely to place him in the position of the centipede who was unwise enough to ask himself which leg to use. Thank God that such things remain ‘outside consciousness’. And the whole difficulty which has caused so much bother to philosophy as well lies in the fact that ‘ideal forms’, like the value-form, the form of thought or syntactical form, have always arisen, taken shape and developed, turned into something wholly objective, completely independent of anyone’s consciousness, in the course of processes that occur not at all in the head, but always outside it – although not without its participation.

If it were otherwise, the idealism of Plato and Hegel would, indeed, be a most strange delusion, some nonsense, quite unworthy of minds of such calibre and such influence. The

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<sup>26</sup> Marx 1996b, p. 82.

objectivity of the ‘ideal form’ is no fantasy of Plato’s or Hegel’s, but an entirely indisputable, obvious, and well-known stubborn fact, a fact that caused thinkers of such calibre as Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel and Einstein, not to mention thousands of lower-rank thinkers, to rack their brains for millennia.

‘Idealism’ is not a consequence of some elementary error committed by a naïve schoolchild who imagined a terrible ghost that was not there. Idealism is a speculative interpretation of the objectivity of the ideal form, that is to say, of the fact of its existence in the space of human culture, independently of the will and consciousness of individuals.

In the given case, materialism can consist only in the scientific explanation of this fact and not in ignoring it. Formally, this fact appears {just as thinkers of the ‘Platonic line’ depicted it;} as an objective form of movement of physical corporeal bodies, despite its obvious incorporeality; an incorporeal form, controlling the fate of entirely corporeal forms, determining if they are to be or not to be, a form, like some immaterial [бесплотная] yet all-powerful ‘soul’ of things. A form that preserves itself in the most diverse corporeal incarnations, and does not coincide with any of them. A form of which it cannot be said where exactly it ‘exists’. Everywhere and nowhere in particular. And in any case, not in the head of Ivan Ivanovich or Petr Petrovich, although it exists there too.

A completely rational understanding of the ‘ideal’ form in general – purified of all mysticism, as the ‘ideal form’ of the real, substantially material world – was achieved by K. Marx precisely in the course of his constructive-critical overcoming of the Hegelian conception of ideality, appearing in specific form as the solution to the question of the value-form through a critique of political economy, i.e., the classical labour-theory of value. The ideality of the value-form is a typical and characteristic case of ideality in general; hence, Marx’s concept of the value-form concretely demonstrates all the advantages of the dialectical-materialist view of ideality and of the ‘ideal’.

The value-form is understood in *Capital* precisely as the reified (represented as, a thing, a relationship between things) form of socio-human life-activity. Directly it does appear before us as a corporeal, physically palpable ‘incarnation’ of something ‘other’, and this ‘other’ cannot be some other physically-palpable ‘body’, another ‘thing’, or ‘matter’, or substance understood as matter, as a certain physically palpable matter.

The only alternative, it appears, is to assume some kind of an incorporeal substance, some kind of ‘immaterial thing’, and classical philosophy proposed a logical enough solution: this strange ‘substance’ could only be activity – ‘pure activity’, ‘purely form-creating activity’, ‘*actus purus*’. But in the sphere of economic activity this substance was obviously deciphered as labour, as physical human labour, transforming the physical body of nature, and ‘value’ as realised labour, as the ‘embodied’ act of labour.

So it was precisely in political economy that scientific thought made its first decisive step towards solving the riddle of the essence of ‘ideality’. Already Smith and Ricardo, men fairly far removed from philosophy, clearly perceived the ‘substance’ of the mysterious value-definitions in labour.

Although understood from the standpoint of ‘substance’, value remained a mystery as regards its ‘form’; thus, the classical labour-theory of value was unable to explain why this substance expressed itself as it did, and not in some other way. Incidentally, the classical bourgeois tradition was not particularly interested in this question, and Marx clearly demonstrated the reason for its indifference toward this subject. In any event, ‘deduction’,



that is, the theoretical inference of the value-form from its 'substance', remained an impossible task for bourgeois science. Consequently, the ideality of this form remained as mysterious and mystical as before.

Insofar as theorists found themselves in direct confrontation with the mysterious – physically impalpable – properties of this form, again and again they returned to the well-known ways of interpreting 'ideality'. Hence, the idea of the existence of 'ideal atoms of value', which were highly reminiscent of Leibniz's monads, the immaterial and unextended quanta of 'intellectual substance'.

Marx, as an economist, was assisted by the fact that he was not as naïve about philosophy as Smith and Ricardo.

Having noted in the Fichtean-Hegelian conception of ideality, as 'pure ideality' – an abstractly mystifying description of the real, physically palpable labour of social man, the process of the physical transformation of physical nature, accomplished by the physical body of man – he gained the theoretical key to the solution to the riddle of the ideality of the value-form.

The value of a thing presented itself as the reified labour of man and, therefore, the value-form turned out to be nothing other than the reified form of that labour, a form of human life-activity, appearing to man in the form of a thing.

And the fact that this is by no means the form of a thing by itself (i.e., the thing in its natural determination) but a form of socio-human labour or the form-creating activity of social man embodied in the material of nature – this fact contained the solution to the riddle of 'ideality'. An entirely rational, factual solution – a materialist interpretation of all the mystical-mysterious determinations of the value-form as the ideal form.

Precisely the understanding of the 'value-form in general' as a 'purely ideal form' gave K. Marx the possibility, for the first time in the history of political economy, to distinguish with confidence material forms of relations between people – as relations that bind them in the process of producing their material life, which are entirely independent of their conscious intentions (of their will and consciousness) – from the ideal expression of these relations in forms of their conscious, purposeful will, that is to say, in the form of their stable ideal formations, which Marx called 'objective forms of thought'.<sup>27</sup>

It was this very same distinction as the distinction between material and ideological relations on which V.I. Lenin later (1894) insisted. In the latter category he included, as is well-known, legal, political and state-political relations between people, materialised in the form of the corresponding institutions – in the form of the organs of state-power, the structures of political parties and other social organisations, and, earlier, in the form of the church with its strict hierarchy, in the form of systems of customs and rituals, and so on.

All these relations and their corresponding institutions, as the ideal forms of the expression of material (economic) relations, exist, of course, not inside the head, not inside the brain, but in that same real space of human life-activity as material, economic relations of production.

This is precisely why they are so often confused with each other, seeing economic relations where there are only legal forms of their regulation (and vice versa); and confused as unceremoniously as economists before Marx confused 'value' with 'price', i.e., a material economic fact with its ideal expression in the material of money.

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<sup>27</sup> [Here the Daglish translation substantially veers from the original text – A.L.]

Without hesitation they took a 'purely ideal form' of the expression of a material fact for the actual material, economic fact, for 'value as such', for 'value in general'. Though they had no doubt that 'value as such', independent of its ideal expression in price, is but a 'fiction', invented by classics of the labour-theory of value, and existing only in the heads of Smith, Ricardo and Marx.

On this rested, and continues to rest until now, the whole vulgar political-economy, starting with Bailey and J.S Mill and ending with J.M. Keynes: in place of an analysis of the real material, economic relations and their immanent forms, there is groping in the sphere of purely ideal forms of these relations, objectively presented in such self-evident 'things' as money, bonds, stocks, investments, i.e., in established laws and the *conscious* social relations between agents of capitalist production and circulation that they permit. From here automatically develops a perspective on economic relations as purely mental relations, that is, in their terms, 'ideal'.

Thus, for J.M. Keynes, 'value' is a myth, an empty word. In reality, allegedly, there 'exists' only market-price. Consequently, the 'rate of interest' and all similar categories are but 'predominantly mental categories', and the crisis of overproduction 'is the mere consequence of upsetting the delicate balance of spontaneous optimism. In estimating the prospects of investment, we must have regard, therefore, to the nerves and hysteria and even the digestions and reactions to the weather of those upon whose spontaneous activity it largely depends.'<sup>28</sup>

Here is a consequence of a metaphysical understanding of the relationship between the 'material' and the 'ideal'.

This leads to one conclusion: metaphysical materialism, with its naïve understanding of the 'ideal' and the 'material', when confronted with a concretely scientific (in this case, political-economic) problem, demanding a properly philosophical (dialectical) distinction between one and the other, unwittingly transforms into the purest subjective idealism in the Berkeleyan-Machian sense – the inevitable and just punishment for a metaphysical materialist disregarding dialectics. Fighting against dialectics as 'Hegelianism', he inevitably falls into idealism, infinitely lesser and more banal than Hegelian.

Exactly the same thing happens when he confronts the so-called problem of 'ideal, or abstract, objects' in mathematical knowledge.

In mathematics in general, but especially in essays on its epistemological rationale, the expression 'ideal object' has for some time now been given widespread usage. Naturally, the following question arises: How legitimate, in this case, is this expression from the perspective of materialist philosophy, from the perspective of the theory of reflection? What is being called here the 'ideal', what in general is being meant by this word?

Obviously, this concept embraces all {significant} objects of mathematical thought {: topological structures, imaginary numbers such as the square root of minus one, regularities discovered in natural numbers, and so on and so forth. In short, all that current mathematicians study}.

This fact serves as the basis for a widely known assertion – according not only to mathematics, but all contemporary science, unlike the natural sciences of previous epochs – that it examines specifically (and only) the ideal (the world of 'ideal objects'), that the ideal is its only specific object.

<sup>28</sup> Keynes 2006, p. 145.

Representatives of neopositivism, it goes without saying, did not miss the opportunity to discern in this fact an extra argument against materialism, against the thesis that mathematics, like any science, nevertheless investigates the real material world, even though it examines it from its own special perspective, from its own specifically mathematical point of view.

It must be acknowledged that non-dialectical, spontaneous [стихийный], materialism clearly proves to be unfounded, and finds itself in a difficult position, in a no-win situation. And the fault lies with its naïve interpretation of 'ideality', the category of the ideal.

In fact, if you understand the 'ideal' as that (and only that), which exists in consciousness, in the human head, i.e., some purely mental or psycho-physiological mental phenomenon, then you have already found yourself to be helpless before a subjective-idealist understanding of the object of contemporary mathematical knowledge, forced to capitulate before the combined forces of neopositivism, Husserlianism and similar doctrines. For the syllogism here turns out to be fatal: if it is true that contemporary mathematics studies 'ideal objects', and 'ideal objects', by your own account, exist in consciousness, and nowhere else, then it automatically follows that contemporary mathematics examines only events, which occur in consciousness and only in consciousness, only in the human head, and in no way in the real, existing world outside consciousness and outside the head.

Of course, you can always make a feint that mathematicians, in considering 'ideal objects', in fact, unbeknownst to themselves, 'have in mind' something completely other than philosophy, namely the 'material', objective world of natural and socio-historical phenomena, only expressed, consequently, inaccurately.

But this, of course, is only a feint, and in actual fact you would only further entangle yourself in difficulties. This question is not resolved so easily, and you would have to explain to mathematicians what 'in actual fact' is hidden behind this designation.

If you answer that, say, a 'topological structure' is in fact a completely material object, and not an ideal one, as they are accustomed to thinking, then you risk causing confusion for anyone skilled in mathematics. It will be explained that a topological structure (as if it were the only one!) is still a mathematical image, and not the actual material reality, and furthermore, that if anyone, then certainly a philosopher, should have a more acute understanding of the differences between a material object and a mathematical construction.

And the mathematician will be entirely correct on this point, as he knows well that it is useless to look for a 'topological structure' in the world of sensuously perceptible phenomena. For he understands quite well that to declare the topological structure to be exclusively a *mental* phenomenon (as subjective idealism tends to do, in part the 'methodological solipsism' of Rudolf Carnap and his followers) means to commit at best an unforgivable sin, to deny mathematical science, and in the end the whole of mathematical natural science [естествознанию], of the objective and necessary meaning of its constructions.

Karl Popper would then say that the world of 'ideal objects' in contemporary science is not the 'physical world' or the 'mental world', but clearly some 'third world', existing in some mysterious manner alongside and distinctly from both. It differs from the world of *physical* phenomena – observed by means of synchrotrons, oscilloscopes and other ingenious devices – by its obvious 'incorporeality' and 'intelligibility' (that is to say, by its

purely intelligible character), and from the world of *mental* phenomena by its equally obvious organisation and independence from the individual mind and from a collective of such minds, i.e., by its very peculiar objectivity and necessity.

This explanation would certainly appear to a representative of contemporary mathematical science much more convincing and satisfying than the explanation arising from the position of the homegrown, spontaneous, and non-dialectical materialism. It is no coincidence that Popper is quite popular in the academic world.

For non-dialectical and pre-dialectical materialism, the situation is genuinely hopeless and treacherous.

The only philosophical position that can defend the honour of materialism in this situation consists of decisively rejecting the old, metaphysical understanding of ‘ideality’, and of decisively accepting the dialectical-materialist interpretation, which was developed by Karl Marx. The first step on the path to a critical materialist transformation of the Hegelian dialectic proceeds from the acceptance of the ‘ideality’ of the phenomena of the external world themselves, the world that is outside of, and prior to, man with his head, and then, more concretely, in the course of the positive solution to the problem of the ‘value-form’ and its fundamental difference *from value-in-itself* – this most-typical case of the opposition between a ‘purely ideal form’ and its own *material* image.

This is what is interesting, this is what is actual to this day about *Capital*, where this problem is solved brilliantly – dialectically, and also entirely concretely – in general philosophical terms and in specifically economic terms, in terms of the properly philosophical distinction between the ‘ideal form’ of the expression of a real economic fact, as well as its real, material, fact.

When science, including mathematical natural science, completely understands the full depth and accuracy of the solution to the problem of the dialectical identity and difference between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘material’ achieved in *Capital*, then and only then will it stop believing Popper with his interpretation of the world of ‘ideal objects’ and ‘ideal models’ as ‘third world’, which confronts, as something special, the physical world and the mental world. Then Popper will be understood as a phenomenon, where we find entangled in this tricky problem: neopositivism, the *subjective* idealism of Russell and Carnap, degenerating into a belated type of archaic *objective* idealism, closely resembling traditional Platonism.

But this requires the dialectical-materialist solution to the problem of ‘ideality’, that is, an essentially materialist solution, but one enriched by the lessons of Hegelian dialectics, which Popper, like all neopositivists, prefers to dismiss, not comprehending that simple historical circumstance that Hegel’s dialectic is much closer to the contemporary scientific view on things than Plato...<sup>29</sup>

The ideal form of a thing is a form of social-human life-activity, which exists not in that life-activity, but, namely, as a form of the external thing, which represents, reflects another thing. Conversely, it is a form of a thing, but outside this thing, namely, as a form of human life-activity, in man, ‘inside man’.

And since in its developed stages, human life-activity always has a purposeful, that is to say, consciously willed character, ‘ideality’ appears as a form of consciousness and will – as a law directing human consciousness and will, as an objectively compulsory pattern of consciously willed activity. This is why it is so easy to picture the ‘ideal’ exclusively as a

<sup>29</sup> [Daglish translation begins again roughly here – A.L.]

form of consciousness and self-consciousness, exclusively as a ‘transcendental’ pattern of the mind and the will that realises this pattern.

And if this is so, then the Platonic-Hegelian conception of ‘ideality’ begins to appear as merely an inadmissible projection of forms of consciousness and will (forms of thought) onto the ‘external world’, and the ‘critique’ of Hegel is reduced to reproaches for his having ‘ontologised’, ‘hypostatized’ (i.e., interpreting as facts of the existing world outside individual consciousness) purely subjective forms of human mental activity. This leads to the entirely logical conclusion that all categories of thought (‘quantity’, ‘measure’, ‘necessity’, ‘essence’, and so on) are only ‘ideal’, that is to say, only transcendental-psychological patterns of the subject’s activity and nothing else.

Marx, of course, had quite a different conception, where all logical categories without exception are only the idealised (i.e., reflected, transformed into forms of human life-activity, which are primarily external, sensuously-objective, and also ‘mental’), universal forms of existence of objective reality, of the external world, which exist independently of man and humanity.

And in no way are they projections of forms of the mental world onto the ‘physical’ world. A conception, as can easily be seen, that is just the reverse in sequence from its ‘theoretical deduction’.

This understanding of ‘ideality’ is in Marx based, above all, on the materialist understanding of the specific nature of the social – human – relationship to the world (and its fundamental difference from the animal’s relationship to the world, from a purely biological relationship):

The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is *its life activity*. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness.<sup>30</sup>

This means that the animal’s activity is directed only towards external objects. The activity of man, on the other hand, is directed not only upon them, but also upon his own forms of life-activity. It is activity directed upon itself – what German classical philosophy presented as the specific feature of the ‘spirit’, as ‘reflection’, as ‘self-consciousness’.

In the above passage quoted from Marx (precisely because it is taken from his early works), he does not emphasise sufficiently the fundamentally important detail that distinguishes his position from the Fichtean-Hegelian interpretation of ‘reflection’ (the relationship to oneself as to the ‘other’). In light of this, the cited passage may be understood to mean that man acquires a new, second plane of life-activity because he possesses consciousness and will, which the animal does not possess.

However, just the opposite is the case: consciousness and will appear in man only because he already possesses a special plane of life-activity that is absent in the animal world – activity directed toward mastering specifically social, purely social in origin and essence, forms of life-activity, which are therefore not biologically encoded in him.

The animal that has just been born is confronted with the external world. The forms of its life-activity are inborn along with the morphology of its body and it does not have to perform any special activity in order to ‘internalise’ them. It needs only to exercise the

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<sup>30</sup> Marx 1975b, p. 277.

forms of behaviour encoded in it. Development consists only in the development of instincts, innate reactions to things and situations. The environment merely corrects this development.

Man is quite a different matter. The child that has just been born is confronted – outside itself – not only by the external world, but also by a very complex system of culture, which requires of him ‘modes of behaviour’ which are not genetically (morphologically) ‘encoded’ in his body, and do not appear in any way. Here it is not a matter of adjusting ready-made patterns of behaviour, but of assimilating modes of life-activity that do not bear any relationship at all to the biologically necessary forms of the reactions of his organism to things and situations.

This applies even to the ‘behavioural acts’ directly connected with the satisfaction of biologically inborn needs: the need for food is biologically encoded in man, but the need to eat it with the help of a plate and spoon, knife and fork, sitting on a chair, at a table, etc., is no more innate than the syntactical forms of the language he learns to speak. In relation to the morphology of the human body, these are purely external conditions, just like the rules of chess.<sup>31</sup>

These are purely forms of the external (existing outside the individual body) world, forms of the organisation of this world, which he has yet to convert into the forms of his individual life-activity, into the patterns and modes of his activity, in order to become human.

This is the world of the forms of social-human life-activity that confronts the newborn child (specifically, the biological organism of the species *homo sapiens*) as the objectivity to which he is compelled to adapt all his ‘behaviour’, all the functions of his organic body, as that object towards assimilation of which adults guide all his activity.

The presence of this specifically human object – the world of things created by man for man, and, therefore, things whose forms are reified forms of human activity (labour), and certainly not the forms naturally inherent in them – is the condition for the existence of consciousness and will. And certainly not the reverse: it is not consciousness and will that are the condition and prerequisite for the existence of this unique object, let alone its ‘cause’.

{The consciousness and will that arise in the mind of the human individual are the direct consequence of the fact that he is confronted not by nature as such, but nature that has been transformed by the labour of previous generations, shaped by human labour, nature in the forms of human life-activity (as an object of his life-activity).}

Consciousness and will become necessary forms of mental activity only where the individual is compelled to control his own organic body in answer not to the organic (natural) demands of this body but to demands presented from outside, by the ‘rules’ accepted by the society in which he was born. It is only in these conditions that the individual is compelled to distinguish himself from his own organic body. These rules are not passed on to him by birth, through his ‘genes’, but are imposed upon him from outside, dictated by culture, and not by nature.

It is only here that there appears the relationship to oneself as to a single representative of an ‘other’, a relationship unknown to animals. The human individual is compelled to subordinate his own actions to certain ‘rules’ and ‘patterns’ which he has to assimilate as

<sup>31</sup> Leontyev 1972; Meshcheryakov 1974.

a special object in order to make them rules and patterns of the life-activity of his own body.

At first they confront him precisely as an external object, as the forms and relationships between things produced and reproduced by human labour.

It is by mastering the objects of nature in the forms produced and reproduced by human labour that the individual becomes for the first time human, becomes a representative of the 'human race', whereas before this he was merely a representative of a biological species.

The existence of this purely social inheritance of forms of life-activity, that is to say, a legacy of forms that is in no way transmitted through the genes, through the morphology of the organic body, but only through education, only through assimilation of the available culture, only through a process in the course of which the individual's organic body transforms into a representative of the human race (i.e., the whole specific aggregate of people connected by the ties of social relationships) – it is only the existence of this specific relationship that brings about consciousness and will as specifically human forms of mental activity.

Consciousness only arises where the individual is compelled to look at himself as if from the side, as if with the eyes of another person, the eyes of all other people – only where he is compelled to correlate his individual actions with the actions of another person, that is to say, only within the framework of collectively performed life-activity. It is only here that there is any need for will, in the sense of the ability to forcibly subordinate one's own inclinations and urges to a certain law, a certain demand dictated not at all by the individual organics of one's own body, but by the organisation of the 'collective body', the collective, that has formed around a certain common task.<sup>32</sup>

It is here and only here that there arises the ideal plane of life-activity unknown to the animal. Consciousness and will are not the 'cause' of the manifestation of this new plane of relationships between the individual and the external world, but only the mental forms of its expression, in other words, its effect. And, moreover, it is not an accidental but a necessary form of its manifestation, its expression, its realisation.

We shall go no further in examining consciousness and will (and their relationship to 'ideality') because here we begin to enter the special field of psychology. The problem of 'ideality' in its general form is equally significant for psychology, linguistics, and any socio-historical discipline, and naturally goes beyond the bounds of psychology as such and must be regarded independently of purely psychological (or purely political-economic) details.

Psychology must necessarily proceed from the fact that between individual consciousness and objective reality there exists the 'mediating link' of the historically formed culture, which acts as the prerequisite and condition of individual mental activity. This comprises the economic and legal forms of human relationships, the forms of everyday life and forms of language, and so on. For the individual's mental activity (consciousness and will of the individual) this culture appears immediately as a 'system of meanings', which have been 'reified' and confront him quite objectively as a 'non-psychological', extra-psychological reality.

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<sup>32</sup> Leontyev 1975.

The fundamental meaning of this fact is specifically underscored by A.N. Leontyev:

Thus, meaning refracts the world in the consciousness of man. Although language is the bearer of meanings, it is not their demiurge. Behind linguistic meanings hide socially produced methods (operations) of activity, in the course of which people alter and cognise objective reality. In other words, meanings represent the ideal form of the existence of the objective world, its properties, connections and relations, transformed and folded in the matter of language, which are disclosed in the aggregate of social practice. This is why meanings themselves, that is to say, abstracted from their functions in individual consciousness, are by no means 'mental', as is that socially cognised reality, which lies behind them.<sup>33</sup>

Hence, the transformation of the problem of 'ideality' into a psychological (or worse, into a psycho-physiological) problem leads materialist science straight toward a dead end, since the secret of ideality is sought not where it actually arises, not in the space where the history of the real relationships between social man and nature is played out, but in the human skull, in the material relationships between neurons. And this approach is just as silly as the attempt to discover the form of value by chemical analysis of the gold or banknotes in which this form presents itself to the eye and sense of touch. It is the same fetishism, the same attribution of properties to natural substance, which in fact do not belong to it as such, but are only forms of social-human labour expressed in it, forms of social relations between people.

Indeed, fetishism is the most crude, the most primitive and savage form of idealism, conferring (in fantasy, of course) all attributes of 'spirit' to a log decorated with shells and feathers. This most crude form of idealism in no way differs from the behaviour of animals that attempt to lick and eat a light-bulb, which serves for them (from the easy hand of the experimenter) as a signal that it is time to eat. For the animal, as for the fetishist, the light-bulb and the log are in no way 'signals', not designations of 'something other', but the actual physical part of a physical situation, directly determining their behaviour. And so the Chinese mercilessly would beat a clay-idol if it did not wish to send rain upon their fields.

The riddle and solution to the problem of 'idealism' is to be found in the peculiarity of a mentality that cannot distinguish between two fundamentally different and even opposed categories of phenomena of which it is sensuously aware as existing outside its brain: the natural properties of things, on the one hand, and those properties that they owe not to nature but to social-human labour embodied and realised in these things.

This is the very point where such opposites as crudely naïve materialism and no less crudely naïve idealism directly merge. That is to say, where the material is directly identified with the ideal and vice versa, arising not from great minds on the scale of Plato or Hegel, but exactly from a lack of such minds, which thoughtlessly regard all that exists outside the head, outside mental activity, as 'material', and everything that is 'in the head', 'in consciousness', as 'ideal'.

This is precisely how Marx understands the essence of this confusion, which bourgeois political economy has not been able to resolve. In the draft-notes to *Capital*, he writes: 'The

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<sup>33</sup> Leontyev 1975, p. 134.



crude materialism of the economists who regard as the *natural properties* of things what are social relations of production among people, and qualities which things obtain because they are subsumed under these relations, is at the same time just as crude an idealism, even fetishism, since it imputes social relations to things as inherent characteristics, and thus mystifies them.<sup>34</sup> Real, scientific materialism, unlike crude materialism, lies not in declaring everything that is outside the brain of the individual to be 'primary', in describing this 'primary' as 'material', and declaring all that is 'in the head' to be 'secondary' and 'ideal'. Scientific materialism lies in the ability to distinguish the fundamental borderline in the composition of sensuously palpable, sensuously perceptible 'things' and 'phenomena' themselves, to see the difference and opposition between the 'material' and the 'ideal' there and not somewhere else.

It is this materialism that compels one to understand this distinction not as the commonly held distinction between 'real and imaginary talers' (dollars, roubles, or yen), but as a distinction that lies far deeper, namely in the very nature of social-human life-activity, in its fundamental differences from the life-activity of some animal, as from the biological life-activity of one's own organism.

The 'ideal' plane of reality comprises exclusively only that which is created by labour both in man himself and in the part of nature in which he lives and acts, which has been produced and reproduced by his own social-human and, therefore, purposeful transforming activity, daily and hourly, ever since man has existed.

Hence, one cannot speak of the existence of an 'ideal plane' among animals (or in an uncivilised, purely biologically developed 'human') without departing from the rigorously established philosophical meaning of the term. This is why there can be no talk of any 'ideal' among animals, despite the undeniable existence of mental activity, and even some glimmers of 'consciousness' (which are very difficult to deny among domesticated dogs). Man acquires the 'ideal' plane of life-activity only through internalising the historically developed forms of social life-activity, only together with the social plane of existence, only together with culture. 'Ideality' is nothing but an aspect of culture, one of its dimensions, determining factors, properties. In relation to mental activity it is just as much an objective component as mountains and trees, the moon and the stars, as the processes of metabolism in the organic body of an individual.

{This is why – and not because of the 'foolishness of idealists' – people (and not only philosophers) often confuse the 'ideal' with the 'material', taking one for the other. Philosophy, even Platonic-Hegelian philosophy, is the only path to the disentanglement of this naïve primitive-commonsensical confusion, even though the common person boasts more than anyone of the superiority of his 'sober mind' over the 'mystical constructions of Plato and Hegel'.}

Idealism is not the fruit of some thoughtlessness, but the legitimate and natural fruit of a world where 'things acquire human properties while people are reduced to the level of a material force',<sup>35</sup> where things are endowed with 'spirit', while human beings are utterly deprived of it. 'Commodity-fetishism, and all shades of this phenomenon that arise at a particular stage of economic analysis, is an actually-existing product of a real historical

<sup>34</sup> Marx 1987, p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> Lifshits 1972, p. 130.

metamorphosis',<sup>36</sup> as Mikhail Lifshits accurately formulates the issue in his book on Marx. The objective reality of 'ideal forms' is no mere invention of insidious idealists, as it seems to pseudo-materialists who recognise, on one side, the 'external world' and on the other, only the 'conscious brain' (or 'consciousness as a property and function of the brain'). This pseudo-materialism, despite all its good intentions, has both feet firmly planted in the same mystical swamp of fetishism as its opponent – principled idealism. This is also fetishism, only not that of a log, a bronze-idol or 'Logos', but a fetishism of nervous tissue, a fetishism of neurons, axons and DNA, which in fact possess as little of the 'ideal' as any rock lying on the street, and just as little as the 'value' of a diamond that has not yet been discovered, no matter how huge and heavy it might be.

However, the brain, worked over and reproduced by labour, *becomes an organ – moreover, the authorised representative of 'ideality', the ideal plane of life-activity – characteristic only of man, an entity that socially produces his own material life.* This is the essence of real scientific materialism that is capable of resolving the problem of the 'ideal'.

And when Marx defines the 'ideal' as 'the material when it has been transposed and translated inside the human head', he means precisely the human head, not the bodily organ of '*homo sapiens*' growing out of the neck of the individual thanks to Mother Nature. Many 'materialists' often forget this difference.

Inside the human head – when understood naturalistically (i.e., as it is examined by a physician, an anatomist, a biologist, a physiologist of the higher nervous activity, a biochemist, and so on...) – there is no 'ideal', there never was and there never will be. What exist there are material 'mechanisms', which provide, with their complex dynamics, for the activity of man in general, including activity on the ideal plane, according to the 'ideal plane', which confronts the brain as a special object, which is, in one way or another, the reified form of social-human life-activity, as purpose (the inseparable component of this life-activity), as the human meaning of a thing.<sup>37</sup>

This is why 'materialists' – who push physiologists on silly adventures after the 'ideal' in the brain itself, in the bulk of the nerve-fabric of the cerebral cortex, in the depth of 'cerebral microstructures' and similar things – in the end achieve only one thing: the complete discredit of materialism as a principle of scientific thought. Since physiologists cannot find the 'ideal' in the skull, therefore, they do not look for it. Since it is not there {, therefore, pseudo-materialists do far greater harm to scientific thought about humanity and about the 'ideal' than Plato and Hegel put together. The latter, with an intelligent reading, even provide some benefit, which silly 'materialism' is in no way capable of providing, that is to say, those materialists who are not well-versed in philosophy, unschooled in the school of dialectics, who nevertheless boast about their imaginary materialism}.

'Ideality' is, indeed, necessarily connected with consciousness and will, but not at all in the way that the old, pre-Marxist materialism describes this connection. It is not ideality that is an 'aspect', or 'form of manifestation' of the sphere of consciousness-will but, on the contrary, the consciously-wilful character of human mentality is a form of manifestation,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> [This paragraph does not appear in the Daglish translation – A.L.]

an 'aspect' or mental manifestation of the ideal (i.e., socio-historically generated) plane of relationships between man and nature.

{Ideality is a characteristic of things, not as they are determined by nature but as they are determined by labour, the transforming and form-creating activity of social man, his purposeful, sensuously objective activity.}

The ideal form is the form of a thing created by social-human labour, reproducing forms of the objective material world, which exist independently of man. Or, conversely, the form of labour realised in the substance of nature, 'embodied' in it, 'alienated' in it, 'realised' in it and, therefore, presenting itself to man, the creator, as the form of a thing or as a special relationship between things, a relationship in which one thing realises, reflects another, in which man has placed these things, his labour, and which would never arise on its own.

This is why man contemplates the 'ideal' as being outside himself, outside his own eyes, outside his own head – as existing objective reality. It is only because of this that he frequently and easily confuses the 'ideal' with the 'material', assuming those forms and relations between things that he created himself {, forms that have been 'placed' in them socio-historically, as natural-innate properties, historically transient forms and relations, as eternal and unalterable forms and relations between things, as relations dictated by 'laws of nature'}.

It is here {and not in people's 'foolishness' or ignorance} that lay the cause of all idealist Platonic-Hegelian illusions. This is why the philosophical-theoretical refutation of objective idealism (conceptions where the ideality of things precedes their material being and acts as their cause) was able to be achieved only in the form of the positive understanding of the actual (objective) rôle of the 'ideal' in the process of social-human labour transforming the material of nature (including his own 'organic body', his biologically innate morphology with its hands and brains).

In the process of labour, man, while remaining a natural being, transforms both external things and (in doing so) his own 'natural' body; he shapes natural matter (including the matter of his own nervous system and the brain, which is its centre), converting it into a 'means' and an 'organ' of his purposeful life-activity. This is why from the start he looks upon 'nature' (matter) as the material in which his aims are 'embodied', as the 'means' of their realisation. This is why he sees in nature primarily what is 'adequate' for this rôle, what plays or may play the part of a means towards his ends, that is to say, what he has already drawn, in one way or another, into the process of his purposeful activity.

Thus at first he directs his attention upon the stars exclusively as a natural clock, calendar and compass, as means and instruments of his life-activity, and observes their 'natural' properties and regularities only insofar as they are natural properties and regularities of the material in which his activity is being performed, and with which he must, therefore, reckon as completely objective (in no way dependent on his will and consciousness) components of his activity.

But it is for this very reason that he takes the results of his transforming activity (the forms and relations of things given by himself) as the forms and relations of things as they are. This gives rise to fetishism of every kind and shade, one of the varieties of which was and still is philosophical idealism: the doctrine which regards the ideal forms of things (i.e., the forms of human activity embodied in things) as the eternal, without premises, primordial and 'absolute' forms of the universe, and takes into account all else only insofar

as this 'all else', that is to say, all the actual diversity of the world, has already been drawn into the process of labour, already been made the means, instrument and material of the realisation of purposeful activity, already been refracted through the grandiose prism of 'ideal forms' (forms of human activity), is already premised upon (represented in) these forms, already shaped by them.

For this reason the 'ideal' exists only in man. Outside man and beyond him there can be nothing 'ideal'. Man, however, is to be understood not as one individual with a brain, but as a real ensemble of real people collectively realising their specifically human life-activity, as the 'ensemble of all social relations' arising between people around one common task, around the process of the social production of their life. The ideal exists 'inside' man thus understood, because 'inside' man thus understood are all the things that 'mediate' the individuals that are socially producing their life: words, books, statues, churches, social clubs, television-towers, and (above all!) the instruments of labour, from the stone-axe and the bone-needle to the modern automated factory and computer-technology. It is in these 'things' that the ideal exists as the 'subjective', purposeful form-creating life-activity of social man, embodied in the material of nature. {And not inside the 'brain', as well-meaning, but philosophically ignorant, materialists believe.}

The ideal form is a form of a thing, but outside this thing, namely in man, as a form of his dynamic life-activity, as goals and needs. Or conversely, it is a form of man's dynamic life-activity, but outside man, namely in the form of the thing he creates, which represents, reflects another thing, including that which exists independently of man and humanity. 'Ideality' as such exists only in the constant transformation of these two forms of its 'external incarnation' and does not coincide with either of them taken separately. It exists only through the unceasing process of the transformation of the form of activity into the form of a thing and back – the form of a thing into the form of activity (of social man, of course).

Try to identify the 'ideal' with any one of these two forms of its immediate existence – and it no longer exists. All you have left is the 'substantial', entirely material body and its bodily functioning. The 'form of activity' as such turns out to be corporeally encoded in the nervous system, in intricate neurodynamic stereotypes and 'cerebral mechanisms' by the pattern of the external action of the material human organism of the individual's body. And you will discover nothing 'ideal' in that body, no matter how you try. The form of the thing created by man, taken out of the process of social life-activity, out of the process of the metabolism between man and nature, also turns out to be simply the material form of the thing, the physical shape of an external body and nothing more. A word, taken out of the organism of human intercourse, turns out to be nothing more than an acoustic or optical fact. 'In itself' it is no more 'ideal' than the human brain.

And only in the reciprocating movement of the two opposing 'metamorphoses' – forms of activity and forms of things in their dialectically contradictory mutual transformations – does the ideal exist.

Therefore, it was only dialectical materialism that was able to solve the problem of the ideality of things.

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