

A REPLY TO MATIVO<sup>1</sup>

by

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The following is a fraternal critique, a complementary support of comrade Mativo's ideological class struggle. In his article, "Ideology in African Philosophy and Literature<sup>2</sup>," he rightfully exposes the theoretically deficient and politically reactionary aspects of African Philosophy and literature espoused by Kunene, Mbiti, Jahn, etc. However, as is often the case, "support" is more effective when it is "critical support comradely criticism which seeks the adoption of "correct" class positions; in this instance, a proletarian class position in the domain of theory. This article will also take up some new points related but not equivalent to the subject of Mativo's discussion.

An examination of two of Mativo's basic theses reveals a contradictory discourse:

*Thesis 1:* "African philosophy as expounded by Prof. Kunene corresponds to a very low level of social development. . . antiquated and out of tune with the requirements of present day reality in Africa itself." (p.75) That is, technological development induces changes in philosophical discourse. But further, that these changes constitute a *cummulative process*. He says, "through this progress a certain amount of knowledge is accumulated, so that 'each substantial knowledge gained. . . (serves as) a basis for further advancement'." (p.74) Only given a cumulative nature of philosophy, i.e. the premise that philosophy has a history of its own, and seeks to produce a body of knowledge concerning material reality, can Mativo ask the following question: "How do these philosophical notions stand in relation to things as they are. . . ?" (p.73)

*Thesis 2:* "The philosophical *battle* is fought on two fronts: on the one hand, there is struggle between idealism and materialism, and on the other, there is a war going on between mechanical and dialectical materialism." (p.77-78) Philosophy is, according to *thesis 2*, essentially a repetition. Philosophy is constituted by a repetition of the clash between four fundamental tendencies. The forms and arguments vary but reductions can still be made to immutable tendencies. As Althusser remarks: "A game for nothing."

How can *thesis 1* and *thesis 2* be simultaneously main-

tained? They can not. Philosophy cannot be both cumulative and repetitive in the senses expressed by the above theses. This logical contradiction leads Mativo into a lengthy diatribe with many vicissitudes and further inconsistencies. For example, the inability to express the relation between philosophy and technology: "Philosophy whose technological response takes . . ." (p.83), but two pages later. . ."History does not offer a single example where technology was a function of ideology. . . ."

The first revolutionary step is the partial affirmation of *thesis 2*: Philosophy has no object and no history. That is, *philosophy is not a science*, and possesses *categories* distinct from scientific concepts. Philosophical discourse *does not* produce knowledge of a particular object of analysis as is the case with a science, and its categories do not reproduce reality as a "concrete in thought" as Marx says. Instead, philosophical categories are "reflections" on the processes of scientific production and class practices. Thus philosophy is defined by this double relation: the intimate relation to the concepts and discourse of science, and as part of an objective social level where class struggle is fiercely fought as a repetition of certain "positions."

The distinction is further clarified by Lenin's discussion in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. He writes, "Matter is a philosophical category. . ." (p.152) What can he mean by this? Only that the general philosophical category of matter is not equivalent to scientific concepts of mass (matter). The materialist philosophical category of "matter" is a *position* taken conjointly in support of scientific production and objectivity of theory. That is, philosophical discourse does not produce any knowledge of matter, and it follows from this that the philosophical category does not change, it is intransitive and immutable. On the contrary, sciences delimit structures and systems of mass to produce specific bodies of knowledge of their respective delimited objects. These scientific objects are not general categories as in philosophy, but specific and precisely defined. The content of science, its theories, change with development, i.e., there exists a deepening and expanding of scientific knowledge. In fact, science actually redefines mass as new theories sublate old theories and theory expands and deepens. (Note the difference between the Bohr model of the atom and its present definition as a "state of a system"). It is in this sense that science possesses both a history and a cumulative nature. It is evident that, given the distinction between philosophy and science, *thesis 1* is a description of the attributes of a science, not philosophy as Mativo claims.

The second thesis, consistent with the distinction be-

tween science and philosophy, further claims that by variation of the double combination; materialism vs. idealism, and mechanical materialism vs. dialectics, non-proletarian philosophical positions can be isolated and identified, and a proletarian philosophical position in support of a Marxist science can be established. This latter claim is one of the propositions of the later Frederick Engels, uncritically adopted and accepted without any theoretical demonstration of its connections with Marx's thought or its consequences in theoretical practice. In fact, it can be demonstrated, although the first dualism, materialism vs. idealism, must be accepted and is an integral part of Marxism, that the second opposition, mechanical materialism vs. dialectics, is alien to the Marxist problematic and is instead an untransformed import from the radically different Hegelian problematic. If dialectics is taken to mean, not simply the establishment of interconnections (*Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*), but the primacy of the "law of contradiction" (*Dialectic of Nature, Anti-Duhring*). i.e. the proposition that opposites do not conflict and oppose but merge to form syntheses, then dialectics is not a conceptual representative and support of the sciences, including the Marxist science: Historical Materialism. Rather, dialectics is indeed metaphysics and idealism!! The argument for this is that sufficient transformation did not take place previous to the importation of the concept of dialectic from Hegel (i.e. Marxism = Hegel on his head). The law of contradiction is the methodology which Hegel adopts for the projects of the "Phenomenology of Mind" and "The Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences," i.e. the construction of an all inclusive system, the subsuming or collapsing of what exists into a non-being infinite. Since non-contradiction necessarily stands one category in a mutual exclusive relation to others, the law of *non-contradiction* ("understanding" in Hegelian terminology) is inadequate for this project and the downfall of philosophy previous to Hegel. That is, opposites don't dissolve but remain "eternal." With such a method the project of construction of an infinite all inclusive spirit is doomed to failure since the existence of opposing categories is unending. Hegel himself rightfully says that "understanding" (non-contradiction) is the method proper for the "finite" sciences. For simply the demarcation of an object for analysis pre-supposes its exclusivity from other objects, its non-mergence into one isomorphic "infinite." The basic taxonomic work that exists in *Capital*, as in all authentically constituted sciences, presupposes the non-contradiction and exclusivity of certain classifications. For example, the Capitalist Mode of Production is precisely defined (as is demonstrated later) and never "merges" into any other mode (only transformations or mutations occur); and further, all of the economic concepts are structurally determined and distinct: "surplus-value" is not "constant capital"; measurements in "physical units" are distinct from "value units,"

"time units," etc. Thus, contrary to a "dialectics of nature," to turn Hegel on his head is not simply adopting Hegel's methods to a new materialist content. A double turn is required, a change of content to materialism, the adoption of scientific methodology, and the recognition that method is not abstractable from content, but is intimately connected.

Even given double dualism of *thesis 2* and a modified definition of dialectic as the interconnection of phenomena (as Mativo seems to suggest), how is the ideological war to be carried on against the most powerful and dominant bourgeois ideology: Positivism? For positivism holds to non-contradiction as does Marxism, and further conforms to the dual criteria of materialism and interconnection of phenomena. How are all the positivist theories of "stages" to be philosophically critiqued? For example, in W.W Rostow's "Stages of Economic Growth" (p.4) the following can be found: "It is possible to identify all societies, in their dimensions, as lying within five categories: the traditional society, the preconditions for take off, the take off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass-consumption." Further, functionalist theory is similarly established on the basic premise of social integration or interconnection. Thus, the inadequacy of the second dualism of *thesis 2* is decisively assessed by the fact that both positivism and functionalism are partisan weapons in the camp of the non-proletarian classes. Third world people's are well aware of this fact as concerns Rostow!

The battle positions of the theoretical class struggle are constituted on other grounds than the simple dualisms which constitute *thesis 2*. For example, positivism denies the scientific value of anything which cannot be directly observed. Among others, this set of unobservable scientific concepts includes "value" and "surplus value," the basic premises upon which Marx's theory of Historical Materialism is built. Thus, positivism presumes for social science, by the denial of unobserved structures, the *homogeneousness* of its theoretical space, its *planar* character, the property of a *givenness*. Likewise, psychologistic theories, Weberian derivatives, functionalisms, etc., starting from the same empiricist premises of positivism relegate to "human subjects" the privileged place of social science. That is, the knowledge of social reality is constructed from the perceptions, values, mores, etc. of its human participants. The critique and war against these and other ideologies which claim scientific status is the ongoing task of "Dialectical Materialism" or proletarian philosophy. Conceived and founded as a distinct discipline by Karl Marx, the constitution of Historical Materialism, i.e. the constitution of the science of history, led to the definition of both a science (Historical Materialism) and the recognition of a

philosophy as a *class struggle in theory* (Dialectical Materialism). Dialectical Materialism seeks to support proletarian class positions and scientific production--the uncovering of scientific structures which render visible (intelligible) the gap, the boundary between the condition of the constitution of empirical reality, and the conditions of the human subject's perceptions. That is, it theoretically supports the production of science which hypothesizes unobservable structures and systems which underlie and determine the mechanisms of the empirical social and physical world; and secondly, instead of taking human perceptions as givens (positivism and idealism), it seeks out the sources of these perceptions at the level of the structures. (For example, it explains perceptions of individualism by reference to the isolation and competition that exists at the economic level in a social formation dominated by the Capitalist Mode of Production.

## II

*My analytic method, which does not start from man but from the economically given period of society. . . (Karl Marx, "Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner," p.52.)*

Since Copernicus, we have known that the Earth is not the "center" of the universe. From Marx, we learn that the human subject, the economic, the political or philosophical ego is not the "center" of history--that history has no center but possesses a *structure* which has no necessary "center" except in ideological misrecognition. Like Freud, for whom the individual in his/her uniqueness has not the form of an ego, but is instead decentered and constituted by a psychic structure, Marx rejects explanation founded on the motivation of individual actors, (positivism, Weber), in favor of the discovery and identification of structures which produce the relations for which individuals act in the capacity as "supports" or "bearers" of these relations. This is what Marx means when he says that "men" are never to be found outside of relations. *The true constitutive subjects* of social science are therefore not these "occupants"; are not, despite all appearances, the "obviousness" of the given "concrete individuals," or "real men" but the definition and distribution of these places and functions. The true "subjects" are the definers and distributors: *The Relations of Production* and the political and ideological social relations! But since these definers are relations, they cannot be thought within the category of the subject. For in Marx's thought, these relations of production are irreducible to any anthropological inter-subjectivity, to "human relations. Rather, these relations combine humans and nature and are a part of a specific combination of elements which constitute an

economic base: A regional structure of a mode of production which together with political and ideological regions distribute agents into classes and generate the relations which they "live."

Historical Materialism, like every authentically constituted science, confronts a theoretical space which has no trace of planar character but instead is multi-level and complex. That is, the duality of the real is recognized: The real with respect to perception, i.e. the space in which the determinations of the structures manifest themselves, and the real movement which constitutes the real with respect to scientific analysis, i.e. the level of the structures. This epistemological break has the crucial consequence that the subjects no longer hold the privileged place in social science. The empirical level is relegated to a subordinate moment of the science elaborated as a whole.

Thus, the "field" of "social phenomena" no longer has the homogeneity of an infinite plane, and is no longer susceptible to uniform correlation (of "social facts"), comparison, and measurement. No amount of scrutiny of "economic facts," prices, exchanges, wages, profits, rents, etc., none of these "measurable facts" will enable the economic regional structure to be seen at that level, any more than the pre-Newtonian physicist could "see" the law of attraction in falling bodies. The non-uniformity of social phenomenon means that its scientific exposition cannot be simple comprehensive observations of a transparent system of meaning. Social phenomena appears to perception as a "hieroglyphic" to be "deciphered."

For Marx, the "sensuous perceptions," the "concrete," the "empirical society" reflected in thought is a *social formation*, the "concrete in thought," i.e. the most determined structure. A social formation is defined at the conceptual level as the articulation of the matrix of *modes of production*: Not existing together in a *balance* (structuralism), or as a fusion (Hegelian totality), but in a specified order of dominance and subordination. The concept of a *mode of production* on the other hand, simply denotes the Global Structure constituted by three regional structures (The Ideological, The Political, and The Economic) existing in a dual connexion of dominance, with one region holding the dominant site (i.e. the region which exhibits the most effects on the other regions and the holder of this site receiving its designation from the particular reproductive requirements of the economic region. This is what is meant by determination in the last instance by the economic.

*My view. . . that the mode of production of material life dominates the development of*

social, political and intellectual life generally. . . is very true for our own times, in which material interests predominate, but not for the middle ages, in which Catholicism, nor for Athens and Rome, where Politics, reigned supreme. In the first place it strikes one as an odd thing for anyone to suppose that those well-worn phrases about the middle ages and the ancient world are unknown to anyone else. This much, however, is clear, that the middle ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on Politics. On the contrary, it is the economic conditions of the time that explain why here politics and there Catholicism played the chief part. (Capital Vol. 1, p.86n.)

A social formation, the empirical fabric, at any one conjuncture in time is defined as one of a set of finite but many differential determination of forms, i.e. one particular variation of these elements (modes of production, regions, combinations of elements in these regions). Directly analogous reasoning can also be found in the natural sciences. For example, in chemical theory purely conceptual elements (which designate a concrete reality): *Electron, Neutron, Proton*, in combination comprise the structured reality: *The Atom*. In turn, atoms combine to produce Global Structures: *Molecules*.

A social science constituted on this new epistemological terrain, imported by Marx from the natural sciences, has injurious consequences for any Bourgeois Sociology which delimits as its object of analysis "society in general" or any of its variants. For the field of analysis correctly delimited cannot be "society," but instead "this society" or "this region of the mode of production." It is in this context that the project of Marx's *Capital* can be understood. His entire object of analysis is defined as the exposition of the structure of the *Capitalist Mode of Production*, and thus located in reference to all the other structures. The analysis in *Capital* thus remains purely at the conceptual level:

*In a general analysis of this kind, it is usually always assumed that the real relations correspond to their concept, or, what is the same, that the real relations are represented to the extent that they express their general type.* (Capital, Vol.III, p. 141.)

The focus of *Capital* is on the *economic region*, because in capitalism it is both dominant and determinant in the last instance. (However, the political and ideological regions are also present in their "pertinent effects" on the economic domain. For this, see the chapters on "Factory Legislation.")

In Volume I of *Capital* in the chapter on the "Labour Process," Marx reveals the economic base (region) or capitalism as a specific combination of five immutable elements. The particular "code" of these elements which accrues to the capitalist mode of production sets the parameters for the degrees of autonomy or intervention of the other regions, the "rhythms" of growth and accumulation, and delimits the role played by certain substructures such as the state apparatuses. But more importantly, the isolation of the "elements" makes possible the process of location of the capitalist mode of production along an entire spectrum of invariant states of this structure, i.e. in the set of all possible economic regions.

According to Marx, all production (the determining moment of the economic region) is characterized by two indissociable elements: The Labour Process, and the Relations of Production.

*The labour-process. . .the activity whose aim is the production of use-values, the appropriation of external substances for needs, is the general condition for exchanges of matter between man and nature, a physical necessity of human life, and is therefore independent of all its social forms, or rather common to all of them. (Capital, Vol 1, p.183-4.)*

The labour process can be reduced to a combination of three simple elements:

*The elementary factors of the labour-process are 1, the personal activity of man, i.e. work itself, 2, the subject of that work, and 3, its instruments." (Capital, Vol. 1, p.174.)*

These are the three *forces of production* which exist in all modes of production in some particular order. If assigned numbers, the exact number of theoretically possible labour processes can be determined:

1. *Instruments of Labour* (tools, machines, plant)
2. *Objects of Labour* (raw materials, unfinished goods)

3. *Labour Power* (human capacity to work measured in time units)

The forces of production always exist in one of six permutations of three elements in an order of dominance/subordination. In capitalism the largest amount of "value" (labour-time) is relegated to the reproduction of the instruments of labour relative to the other two forces. From Marx we learn in addition that labour-power assumes the most "degraded" role relative to the other forces. Thus, the order of dominance the forces of production assume in capitalism is "123" (as in socialism). Communism, on the other hand, is characterized by a "312" order of forces of production, the vastly dominant quantum of value earmarked for the reproduction of labour-power at a high cultural, educational, and material level.

Regardless of the specific order of dominance in the labour-process, production never exists outside of -detached from- the relations of production. These relations are not reducible to mere relations between humans, (recognition, prestige, struggle, master-slave relation) but instead are relations between human agents and nature:

*The labour-process, turned into the process by which the capitalist consumes labour-power, exhibits two characteristic phenomena. First, the labourer works under the control of the capitalist. . . Secondly, the product is the property of the capitalist and not that of the labourer; its immediate producer." (Capital, Vol. 1, p.180.)*

In these "two phenomena" we find the two connexions, i.e. the relations of production, and the specific form they take in the capitalist mode of production. The "appropriation" connexion (control of the on going labour-process), and the "property" connexion (possession/ownership of the output) distributed between the labourers and non-labourers, constitutes the relations of production. Each mode of production exhibits one of four possible combinations of these relations. In capitalism non-labourers (bourgeoisie) hold auto-centric dominance over appropriation and property relations in the labour process. This dual capacity, or homology which is characteristic of capitalism is not the general case in pre-capitalist modes of production. The feudal labourers control the conceptions and resources of their labour-process, that is they own their means of production, while a portion of their output accrues to the non-labourers. (And thus the requirement of coercion for extraction of surplus-value.) Only in socialism and communism is exploitation annihilated and an homology restored

under the collective control of the labourers.

The four theoretically possible relations of production (two connexions varied around two classes) combined with six orders of forces of production results in a set of all the theoretically conceivable economic regions (the Range) equal to *twenty four* (six multiplied by four). Not only the concept of those economic bases as yet historically discovered, and those for which it is possible to foresee the general conditions for their future existence, but also those economic regions which will never exist as such, are part of this comprehensive index of the possible forms.

Historical Materialism breaks with empiricisms of all types and conforms to the structure of all sciences. It conceives its object as multi-level and posits a set of scientific concepts which exist in the form of a rigorous system (the systematic form which makes them a theory). These concepts designate the non-empirical reality, which certainly exists, but cannot be "seen" or "touched"; a reality which "underlies" and renders the empirical level intelligible. Only by reference to these concepts, the results of scientific production, can explanation and prediction occur with the status of knowledge.

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Footnotes:

1. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the tremendous contribution which Frederick Pobirs Jr. has made, not only to this article since many of the concepts expressed below derive directly from his work, but to the intellectual development of myself and many other aspiring Marxist sociologists. No brief acknowledgement can express our appreciation.
2. *Ufahamu*, Vol.VIII, No.1, 1977.

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Hezbon Owiti, *Ploughing the Garden of God.*\*

