

What Does A. Öcalan's “Social Sociology” Mean?

A Marxist Critique of the Subjectivist and Utopian Left



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Introduction

“Most creations of the intellect or of the imagination disappear from history within a period ranging from an after-dinner conversation to a generation. But not all do so. Some suffer eclipse, but return; and they return not as unrecognizable elements of a cultural inheritance, but in their own personal garments and with their own personal wounds, visible and tangible to human beings. We may well call such ideas ‘great’—and it is no disadvantage that the greatness in this definition is associated with vitality. Taken in this sense, the word that undoubtedly completes Marx’s message is this.”[1] (J. A. Schumpeter)

If we take as our starting point *The German Ideology [Feuerbach]*, which Marx and Engels described as a “settling of accounts with our former philosophical conscience”, then Marx’s “message”, that is, Marxism, has for exactly 180 years remained the most important theory in the hands of the peoples of the world as a “great” idea. But if we refer to Schumpeter’s formulation, according to some, Marxism answered the problems of the peoples and created value in the previous century. Today, however, because capitalism has achieved “development and progress” in science and technology, the changes that have emerged in social relations have supposedly made Marxism a “cultural inheritance” that has lost its explanatory power, a nostalgic “creation of reason or imagination”. Yet, during these 180 years, all individuals and

currents that have had anything scientific, philosophical or political to say about social being—whether in order to criticise, slander or appropriate it—have been forced to touch upon Marxism and formulate a response to its theses.

This alone is clear proof that Marxism, from the moment of its emergence, continues to preserve its importance in a “living” manner, with the “personal garments and personal wounds” that bear the marks of class struggles, great social movements, revolutions, defeats and retreats.

Marxism emerged scientifically, philosophically and politically through a critique of classical economics and utopian socialism, by defining a new ontology and advancing a new epistemological approach. Like every effective scientific theory, philosophical approach and political current, it has been in constant struggle with other theories and currents. Empiricism, as the dominant philosophy of science, has lost very much of its strength from classical economics to the present.

This means the following: under the name of science, appearances and experiences are taken as the starting point. It is called science the generalization and absolutization of the connections between appearances and experiences.

Criticisms directed at Marxism are also made from this front, principally by approaches that place the “subject”—the “individual”, the “event”—at the centre of their ontological theses. The proponents of this approach, which we may generalise as the “subjectivist and utopian left”, may be counted in the nineteenth century as the utopian socialists, Proudhon and Dühring; in the twentieth century, as those currents that emerged as “Western Marxism”, beginning in certain respects with Gramsci and including Lukács, Korsch, the Frankfurt School and J. P. Sartre; and in the last half-century as Laclau-Mouffe, M. Bookchin, I. Wallerstein, Habermas and F. Braudel. The list of these names, among whom there are theoretical differences, may be extended, and their being brought together for various reasons may be criticized. Yet, from the standpoint

taken in this article, even if they do not all possess an “individualist” ontology, the common features of their critiques of Marxism in general justify discussing them together.

The Marxism critiques of those approaches that may be called the “subjectivist and utopian left” concern “class”, “class struggle” and “the dictatorship of the proletariat”. In Marxist theory these are central concepts produced on the basis of “surplus value”, which Engels called a “key” concept. In their place are put such concepts as the “individual”, “the rights struggles of workers and various sections”, “moral principle”, “democracy”, “pluralism” and so on.

Thus an activity is imagined that embraces the whole of society without class distinction and is carried out within cultural-ideological fields. This is not, as is sometimes claimed, the “development” or “advancement” of Marxism; it is the abolition of the science of history in favor of the bourgeoisie.

In Marxism, the key concept of surplus value explains the exploitation of the working class and makes possible a scientific analysis of the economic structure of capitalism. Within this framework, and in accordance with the materialist principle that “capitalist society possesses antagonistic class contradictions and that the base (infrastructure) determines the superstructure”, it is shown that the entire political-cultural structure is shaped on this axis.

In Marxism, one of the fundamental positions is the linking of the questions of classes and class struggle to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Marx, speaking of “what I did that was new”, stated that “class struggles necessarily lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat”. This stage is, of course, reached by targeting and overthrowing the “structure” that is the collective power of the ruling classes.

The subjectivist and utopian left, by bringing to the fore the “consciousness” and “will” of each individual under the names of “libertarianism” and “democracy”, empties of meaning in various ways the three elements stressed by Marx and by his

successors Lenin and Mao. By spreading the empiricist ideology that the individual's experiences are sufficient for grasping reality, it obstructs the possibility of doing science.[2]

The “subjectivist and utopian left” frequently repeats that Marxism can no longer answer an increasingly “complex”, “globalised” and “uncertain” world; that it has become “insufficient” in the face of newly emerging social problems; indeed, that it has no analysis of them at all. Abdullah Öcalan, who may be evaluated within the “subjectivist and utopian left”, constantly repeats these kinds of criticisms. In the face of “new problems”, he repeats the basic arguments of the subjectivist and utopian left: that turning one's face back two centuries for theoretical analyses is reactionary and conservative, whereas there are now many “new” and “current” theories capable of answering the present. The principal reason such arguments can be made is that, in the approaches classified within the “subjectivist and utopian left”, it is assumed that a science of societies made up of human beings, the “noblest of creatures”, cannot be produced; and, of course, this is bound up with anti-materialism.[3]

The common feature of these critiques is that they do not distinguish between science, philosophy and politics, and for this reason they treat the sciences in a normative manner. While lawfulness and subjectlessness in extra-social nature are recognized, the possibility of a science of the history of societies is rejected. The “subjectivist and utopian left” is able to present as “new” the oldest and most common-sense ideas in the history of thought—the idea that “extra-economic coercion”, that is, political action, is the determining factor in history—and these ideas can be embraced by broad circles without question.

When we look at the history of Marxism, we see that historicism and humanism, that is, the currents taken in this article under the broad category of the “subjectivist and utopian left”, developed as reactions against economism and historical progressivity (for example Kautsky's criticisms of the

revolution in Russia). The reverse also occurs: in order to stand against historicism, some slide into economism and classism. Yet there exists a critical line, stretching from Marx to Lenin and Mao, which repeatedly re-established the unity of Marxism as science, philosophy and politics and left behind a rich heritage. Of course, once this “line” has been set out, the responsibility of communists does not end. Like all other theories, Marxism too must constantly be “examined” (Lenin). Since matter is infinite, motion is also infinite, and the production of knowledge is continuous. The reason Marxism has remained “living” for 180 years, despite many right and left deviations, is that, in Foster’s words, it is an “open-ended theory”.

“... the reason for the longevity of historical materialism is precisely the open-endedness of Marx’s ‘ruthless criticism of everything existing’—an open-endedness that liberal theory cannot possess immanently. This openness can be seen in Marxism’s capacity continually to reinvent itself by expanding its empirical and theoretical content in order to embrace broader aspects of historical reality in an increasingly interconnected world.”[4]

Because Marxism has a political dimension, theory has sometimes been treated schematically on the basis of practical needs, which has allowed dogmatism to develop. Theory has been schematised for political purposes. This procedure is legitimate so long as it is not forgotten that it is done for political purposes. In all other cases it can lead either to dogmatism or to revisionism. The inability of Marxists to make these distinctions is one reason why they have been unable to take the necessary stand against both historical-progressivist and historicist critics, and have even constantly oscillated between these two poles.

It is necessary to say something about the supposed “newness” of the theses defended by the “subjectivist and utopian left” and therefore by A. Öcalan. Dühring claimed that “extra-economic

coercion” (political actions) was the determining force in history and that this “not at all original idea” was an “original” theory that he himself had developed. Engels answered him as follows:

“The idea that political acts, acts of the first order, are the decisive factor in history is as old as history-writing itself; and it is the main reason why so little has been preserved to us of the development of peoples, which takes place quietly in the background behind these noisy scenes and really pushes things forward. This idea dominated the whole previous conception of history and was only shaken by the bourgeois French historians of the Restoration period. The only ‘original’ point in this matter is, once again, that Herr Dühring knows nothing about all this.”[5]

A “correction” that cannot be relegated to a footnote must be made to Engels’s words. In the shaking of the idea that political acts in the first instance—that is, reason, thought, cunning, morality, religion, politics, ideology and so forth, what are called “extra-economic” factors—are the decisive factors in history, the work of Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, must be emphasised as a solid theoretical foundation. It is not known whether Engels encountered this work.[6] Therefore, Engels’s failure to mention Ibn Khaldun is not a “shortcoming” on his part. But today it would be a serious shortcoming not to give Ibn Khaldun the place he deserves.

Ibn Khaldun openly condemns the conception that he calls “the visible face of history”, which limits history to the stories of rulers, viziers and judges:

“When composing their works, they repeat in full the stories that circulate among the people; thus they follow the path of those who practiced this craft before them. If they do not recount the history of a dynasty, they simply gather all the elements together, without distinguishing truth from falsehood, and present events in a monotonous narrative. They do not show the reasons that drove that dynasty to war and to the display of

its power, nor the reasons that prevented it from developing. Thus the reader tries in vain to learn the origins of events, their positions in relation to one another, and the causes that produced them simultaneously or successively.”[7]

“The differences seen in the customs and institutions of various peoples derive from each people’s way of securing its livelihood.”[8]

It is clear that “the visible face of history”, these “noisy scenes”, is not “new” in explaining history. Likewise, the criticism of these ideas is not new either. Therefore this article will not be “new”. It is not surprising that these “old” positions, criticised several times by the masters of Marxism, reappear again and again, because the dominant ideology of capitalism is based on the subject. Marxists must not take the easy road. They must learn to make correctly the very difficult distinctions between science, philosophy and politics, and above all they must carry out the necessary concretion required for political success. Otherwise, as history shows, they cannot avoid being tossed to the right and to the left by every passing wind.

In this study, a partial response has been given to the views of the “subjectivist-utopian left” (and therefore of A. Öcalan), which merge science, philosophy and politics without recognizing any distinction between them, and which could in fact be called “Dühring-like”. It should be stressed at the outset that the article is not about practical political positions. Nevertheless, starting from Lenin’s concise formulation that “without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice”, it may be said that the criticisms made in this article offer important clues about the meaning of general political positions.

The study does not take up all the theses of A. Öcalan’s “Sociology of Society”. [9] To do so would require a more comprehensive work. Engels, in essence, compared the writing of *Anti-Dühring* to “biting into a sour apple”. He explained the long duration of that work by saying that “[t]his sour apple was

indeed one of those apples which, once bitten into, must be swallowed whole.” The time required for a comprehensive study would have meant falling too far behind current developments. Therefore, a general evaluation has been made on the basis of the main line of A. Öcalan’s theoretical views.

Again and Again: “Use Your Own Reason!”

The word socialism derives from “social”, that is, “society”. There is no one who claims to be a “socialist” and yet denies that the human being/individual is part of society. The simplest and most common expression of this is: “Human beings are social beings.” But because it is often thought that this expression keeps “the human being” in a passive and determined position, an addition is felt to be necessary: “But society too is the sum of individuals. The society-individual dialectic operates.” Once this emphasis is made, there is a sense of relief, because it becomes possible to express the subject-position of the human being and the privilege of being “conscious”. Thus, “society and the human being” are placed outside nature, and the relation of the human subject to nature is, when the time comes, described as the “subject-object dialectic”. [10]

It is now easy to arrive at the definition of “free human nature”. According to A. Öcalan, the basic feature of this “nature” is its ability “to choose its own history”. “There will be as many histories as there are different modes of existence.” History has shown what happens to those who cannot choose their history. This way of thinking gushes out from every part of A. Öcalan’s theory: the cunning man oppressed and sexually enslaved “women” who could not display “free human nature”; “distinguished individuals” oppressed slaves and workers; civilised nations oppressed and exploited other nations. In this approach there is no answer to the question of why “free human nature” did not affect the cunning man, distinguished

individuals and nations, and why different “natures” emerged. In the “noblest of creatures”, both good and evil are somehow given from the very beginning.

Here it is necessary to point to a paradox that appears in different forms in the person of A. Öcalan. A. Öcalan frequently repeats that Marxism strengthened capitalism, that it could not break with modernity and Enlightenment thought, and that it is a part of them. Yet the ideas on which his own theory rises—“free human nature”, “the ability to choose one’s history”, the notion that “thought is beyond matter”, and the claim that there can be no science of society—are clearly identical with the Enlightenment ideas of the “free individual” and the “human being who makes history”.

The following well-known formulations of Vico and Kant will show this continuity:

“Our first indubitable principle is that the historical world is entirely made by us human beings, and therefore that this world is formed within the modifications of our own spirit. There is no greater certainty than this.”[11]

“Enlightenment is humanity’s emergence from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own reason without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause lies not in lack of reason, but in the lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. Sapere aude! ‘Have the courage to use your own reason!’ is therefore the motto of Enlightenment.”[12]

Enlightenment thought is the philosophy of the bourgeoisie. The human-subject, the main element of bourgeois ideology, rose on the basis of this philosophy. Therefore, A. Öcalan’s philosophy clearly runs parallel to bourgeois ideology and philosophy. The basic feature of Enlightenment thought is that while it accepts that extra-social nature is subject to certain laws, it defends the determining role of human morality, politics and reason in societies.

So, is A. Öcalan's claim that Marx could not break with Enlightenment thought and bourgeois philosophy correct?

A break from a theory is possible first of all by rejecting its ontological ground and its epistemological approach. While the same ground and approach are shared, definitions made by A. Öcalan and by all previous subjectivist-utopian left currents through ethical approaches (morality, good-evil, right-justice, useful-harmful and so on) do not bring about a "separation" either on scientific or philosophical grounds or in theory-politics. Such attempts have until now, and will in the future, end in the elimination of ethical differences with the dominant ideology—in other words, in being dissolved within it. Marxist theory, by contrast, was formed by rejecting the atomistic, individualist approach of classical economics and bourgeois philosophy. According to Marxism, the world, with its layered, complex and differentiated structure, changes and is transformed according to definite laws. None of this is explained by the "individual", "spirit" (reason), "free human nature", "morality" and so on.[13]

Enlightenment thought emerged in Europe during the free-competition period of capitalism and played an important role in the struggle of the bourgeoisie against the feudal classes. But to revive these ideas under the claim of making a critique of capitalist modernity is of no benefit to oppressed, exploited and denied nations and classes in the age of imperialism and proletarian revolutions. It is a fact that imperialist exploitation and plunder have sought an ideological cover precisely through Enlightenment-based discourses of "bringing civilisation", that is, teaching people "to use their own reason".

Why Can Human Activity Not Be Objectified?

The problem is very deep and important. It is an open conflict between materialism and idealism. About 2,400 years ago, Plato made a very basic division in philosophy between "Gods and

Giants”. This was a division based on the answer to the question of whether true being is material or spiritual. Plato called those who argued that being emerged from, and was determined by, ideas—ideas in unknown, different worlds, with the help of the soul—“idealists”, or “Gods”. Those who said, “There can be nothing in the universe outside matter. Thought and soul are also matter”—in the terminology of many centuries later, “materialists”—he called “Giants”. For Plato, philosophy was the battlefield of the Gods and Giants. It is clear that the Gods were superior to the Giants. Kant would also say that philosophy is an “arena of struggle”, and Lenin would adopt this formulation.

Lenin emphasizes that there is no philosophy other than materialism and idealism. The theses advanced are either materialist or idealist. That is, one cannot be “materialist below and idealist above”, or the reverse, “idealist below and materialist above”.^[14] By “below” Lenin means nature; by “above” he means “societies”. Consistent materialism maintains ontologically that everything is matter. Accordingly, matter determines thought. In relation to society, Marx expressed this as: “social existence determines social consciousness”.

All theses that say thought is qualitatively different (“It is known that thought is beyond matter”, A. Öcalan^[15]), that grant thought a separate existence, that defend the view that thought determines being, or that define thought as “unknowable” and remain somewhere in between, fall under the umbrella of idealism. Ontologically, theses that begin from the claim that thought has a different quality arrive at the conclusion that societies composed of people who possess a thought that has not yet been defined or “photographed” (A. Öcalan), that forms itself or receives a share from the idea/universe and so on, and who are regarded as the “noblest of creatures”, cannot be scientifically studied, and therefore that Marxism has “failed”.

This line of reasoning is correct according to its own principles. Indeed, where there is a “subject” and a “will”, science cannot be done. For the subject cannot be objectified and studied. Precisely for this reason, the *Theses on Feuerbach*, which Marx and Engels described as “settling accounts with our former consciousness”, begins with the necessity of treating “human activity itself as objective activity” and condemns all “materialisms” that cannot do so.

In this respect, with the theses he puts forward, A. Öcalan defends the very plane from which Marxism made its break. Philosophically, this qualitative difference granted to thought has been identified and known since Plato’s time as idealism.

Today science is not as inadequate as A. Öcalan suggests on the question of what “thought” is and how it is produced. But even if it were inadequate—that is, even if science had not yet produced a causal explanation—would it be necessary to assume the existence of a “realm of thought” or something “beyond matter” outside the laws of nature? The history of materialism beginning with Democritus shows that this is not so. Even if a definitive answer is perhaps never found, materialism means refusing to retreat from the proposition that everything is a form of matter in favor of idealism. The fact that the scientific answer has not been set out with complete clarity does not mean that something “supernatural” exists.

At the same time, important developments have been made in science concerning brain activity, the formation of the sense of “I”, and the unconscious and conscious evaluation of thoughts; answers that strengthen the materialist position have been produced. Even the stage reached in artificial intelligence may be taken as evidence that “thought” is not, as is supposed, a very special, supernatural ability.

A. Öcalan presents the ability to think, purposeful movement and “flexibility” as reasons why societies cannot move according to laws, and writes as if Marxists were unaware of

various features of “cognition” and as if they could not see “conscious” and “purposeful” action.

In *Dialectics of Nature*, written in 1876-1878, about 150 years ago, Engels, who closely followed the sciences, wrote the following:

“Needless to say, it is not our intention to dispute the capacity of animals for methodical, premeditated action. On the contrary ... wherever, however simple, certain movements arise as a result of certain external stimuli, there is already present in embryo a methodical mode of action ... In animals, the capacity for conscious and methodical action develops in proportion to the development of the nervous system and reaches a high level in mammals.”[16]

From Engels to the present, as studies in biology and ethology [ethology: the science that examines the behaviour of animals in their natural environment on evolutionary and biological bases.

- Editor’s note] have deepened, the prevalence of cognitive phenomena previously presented as a qualitative difference of the human species has been more clearly defined.

Damasio defines consciousness as follows:

“In the crudest form, it can be defined as mental organisation focused on the organism that produces contents and initiates action ... Consciousness is a mind that has the capacity to know that this living and behaving organism exists.”[17]

There is nothing extraordinary about the conscious mind.

“[T]he conscious mind merely makes available practical knowledge concerning the management of life.”[18]

With the conscious mind, the “management possibilities” of the human species in relation to socially developed culture, economy and so on have increased. Despite all this, *“the survival goal of eukaryotic cells and the common survival goal in human consciousness are in fact the same thing.”*[19]

There are very strong theories concerning the operation of the mental structures of the brain, a system of incomparable

complexity.[20] These theories ascribe no special mission or quality either to the human being or to the capacity to think.

Science Is Not the Guarantor of “Truth” and “Legitimacy”

The confusion created by the failure to define correctly the relation between science and philosophy, and by the failure to make the necessary distinctions, appears at every step in A. Öcalan’s work. Marx and Engels became aware of these dangers early on and drew limits to the relation between scientific activity and philosophy. For this reason, in *The German Ideology*, they stated that they would begin the study of history not with philosophical speculations and dogmas but with material premises.

Methods of investigation that are not separated from philosophy and ideologies are subjective; therefore they lead to the mystification of reality and conceal the mechanism of the capitalist system. Like physics, chemistry and biology, the science of history too was formed through an epistemological break from ideologies. Scientific activity is “to explain an event or a regularity, to place it within a new schema of concepts, and to identify the structures, generative mechanisms or actors that produce it.”[21]

Starting from this definition of scientific activity, we see that the purpose of science is not to legitimize an event or phenomenon, to evaluate it as “truth”, or to declare it illegitimate. Categories such as “legitimacy” and “truth” belong to philosophy. Yet A. Öcalan states that Marx’s scientific work served to legitimize the system, and he claims that Marx did not follow a method based on “moral and political society” when examining societies, and that he treated class formation as “progressive, a requirement of freedom”.

These criticisms by A. Öcalan are not scientific but entirely ideological. If Marx’s theory is to be criticized, it must be

criticized scientifically. A. Öcalan's reasoning resembles being angry at Newton for discovering the law of gravity. Gravity did not come into being because Newton discovered the law of gravity. What A. Öcalan says about Marx's theory is equivalent to saying that Newton legitimized gravity.

“What should we think of a chemist who, instead of studying the actual laws of molecular changes in the composition and decomposition of matter and solving definite problems on this basis, claimed that the composition and solutions of matter are regulated by ‘eternal ideas’, ‘naturalness’ and ‘affinity’? When we say that ‘usury’ develops through ‘eternal justice’, ‘eternal equality’, ‘eternal mutual aid’ and other ‘eternal truths’, do we really know more than the church fathers who said that it was incompatible with ‘eternal grace’, ‘eternal faith’ and ‘the eternal will of God’?”[22]

If A. Öcalan were merely doing ethical philosophy, it might not be necessary to dwell on this issue. But if ideology is being put in the place of science and if the aim is to render meaningless the historical materialism of Marxism, which investigates “the ultimate cause of the driving force of historical events”, then exposing this ideologization becomes a necessity.

We have already answered to some extent in the “Introduction” the claim that the “method must be based on political society”. This idea is not only “as old as history-writing itself” (Engels), but is also an idea that has become dominant in historical writing and serves the ruling classes.

Although Thucydides (460-395 BCE) took the first steps toward causal historical writing in antiquity, historical writings from Ancient Greece to China, Mesopotamia and Egypt remained confined to the “visible face of history” (Ibn Khaldun). Ibn Khaldun is a beginning in the search for real causes. Both Ibn Khaldun and Marx recognized that a science of history cannot be made through “moral and political” determinations, that such a method would remain subjective and could not constitute “historical witnessing”. They carried out their work on this

basis. The 450 years between them enabled Marx to fill many “gaps” and to break with the subjective method based on “extra-economic coercion”.

In Ibn Khaldun’s work we see that the places where he appeals to “extra-economic coercion” are “gaps” that could not be filled under the conditions of his time. Ibn Khaldun held the “cowardly and morally corrupt” character of urban dwellers responsible for the crises of his period.

Yves Lacoste comments as follows on Ibn Khaldun’s explanation, based on “moral” criteria, while he was searching for the real causes behind the “visible face of history”:

“... what he actually demonstrated was the absence of the bourgeoisie ... What is striking is that Ibn Khaldun indicated this gap with complete precision ... What led Ibn Khaldun to indicate this gap was the precision and objectivity of his reasoning; but under the conditions then prevailing it was impossible for him to go further, that is, to explain the situation. Therefore, in order to explain the things that remained unexplained, he resorted to metaphysical proofs and moral criteria.”[23]

The filling of causal “gaps” with various ideologies (subjective approaches) is not specific to Ibn Khaldun. Because the “transitive dimension” of knowledge (existing technologies, theories, social practices—whether scientific or non-scientific premises) is produced socially, the sciences display a form of existence intertwined with ideologies. For the sciences to reveal the “intransitive dimension” of knowledge (the knowledge of things not produced by human beings)[24], they must free themselves from ideological factors by operating materialist philosophy.

Philosophy intervenes in the sciences in two ways: *“Either in order to present the ideological as if it were scientific and to dress it up as ‘truth’, or in order to distinguish the ideological from the scientific. The first is the practice of idealism; the second is the practice of materialism.”[25]*

A. Öcalan does the first; Marx did the second. A. Öcalan reverses the break that Marx achieved in the science of history. He paradoxically defines this reversal as “going beyond Marx”. This is as absurd as returning the modern sciences, which discarded subjectivity and teleology, to Aristotle’s subject-teleological approach and then saying that Galileo and Newton have been “surpassed”.

As can be seen in this discussion, when the relations between science and philosophy are not correctly defined and their functions are confused, the question “What is reality?” can, after a point, lead nowhere other than to explanations by fictions and subjective demands. There will always be “gaps” in the sciences, because matter is infinite. A materialist approach must refuse to deny these gaps, refuse to ignore them, and refuse to fill them with various fictions. Becoming aware of the “gap” and accepting it is the path to new research, that is, to developing science. Marxism has strong foundations as a science. But Marxism, like the other sciences, is incomplete and can never be completed; it is an “open-ended” theory. Being “open-ended” does not mean that all kinds of fiction and subjective approaches can be attached to it in the name of “developing” or “surpassing” it. There will always be many theses, conjectures and so on concerning the “gaps” in theories. Marx and Engels showed how to approach such “new theories”. Engels stated the basic principle in the founding process of historical materialism as follows:

“... we live not only in nature, but also in human society, and human society too, just like nature, has its own history of development and its own science. Thus what was involved was to bring the science of society, that is, the entire group of so-called historical and philosophical sciences, into harmony with the materialist basis and to reconstruct them on this basis.”[26] The existence of “gaps” does not justify idealist fictions or subjective approaches. The correct path is to approach problems

on the basis of materialism, which inevitably “has to change its form” with the development of the sciences.[27]

Sociology or Historical Materialism?

“Can there be a science of history?” This is the essence of the present debate. Marxism’s answer to this question is “yes”. But, to repeat Lenin’s expression, those who are “materialist below and idealist above” answer “no”. Sometimes this is said openly, sometimes by creating conceptual confusion. But in the final analysis, the subjectivist and utopian left, if it is to be consistent with itself, cannot say “yes” to this question and therefore rejects Marxism.

A. Öcalan states that there can be “valid tendencies” in societies, but there can be no laws.[28] According to him, because societies are based on the human mind, and because there are no “rigid laws” in the human mind, there can be no “laws” in societies; there can only be “tendencies and thoughts”. For this reason, the “healthiest societies” are those that accept “freedom of thought” the most (in various writings, the countries of the European Union are given as examples). Since “the sociology on which Marx relied” is “positivism”, just as in Durkheim, Marx too was mistaken in saying that “the laws of nature are also valid in society”.

It should be noted that A. Öcalan always carries out his own work under the heading of “sociology”; he does not use the concepts of “historical materialism” or “science of history”. This is, of course, a very conscious choice. What unites all those who may be grouped under the heading of sociology—from Comte to Durkheim, from Simmel to Parsons, and in our time Bookchin and others—is the idea that societies are created by principles of ideas and morality, that the thoughts of individuals shape and constitute societies. “Backward” and “unhealthy” societies, genders and so on are those that do not possess the necessary “principles of ideas and morality” or have lost them.

We may state that sociology was founded on the same ontological and epistemological approach as classical economics. For this reason, historical materialism and sociology have diverged from one another from the moment of their foundation, with the distance between them widening.[29]

“These two ‘sciences’ have not been able to define an object of knowledge of their own. They have not possessed an ‘intransitive object’, independent of ‘human activity’, that would make them ‘objective’. This has turned them into engineering practices that perform the technical-practical tasks required for the modification of the system.”[30]

At the stage reached today, sociology has become a “discipline” that, instead of theories, develops through various modelizations and social research into family, everyday life, shopping habits, education, work relations and so on, focusing on the “personality model” needed by the bourgeoisie.

“As the ideology that ends ideologies, sociology confines social classes to the status of economic agents acting within market relations, while expelling all kinds of material contradictions and conflicts from scientific procedures. Once class struggle is denied, tradition, culture and its by-product religion are constructed as the causal chain that will explain political struggle: on the one hand as the ‘ethos’ that secures social order, and on the other as the ‘pathos’ that is the source of local political struggles and social conflicts.”[31]

Historical materialism and sociology are therefore diametrically opposed. Consequently, the theories on which “Marx relied” have nothing to do with any sociology. Since A. Öcalan specifically mentions Durkheim, a brief comment is needed.[32] Durkheim and his successors say that society is the product of “collective consciousness” and “social conscience”. Let H. Kivilcimlı answer what this means: *“Durkheim took ‘collective consciousness’ to be something sometimes ‘ideological’ (arising from ideas), sometimes ‘moral’ (arising from spirituality) ... Thus the most blustering sociology was putting forward the*

thesis that had circulated since the Epic of Gilgamesh. It was not society that created 'idea-morality-opinion' in the human being; it was 'idea-morality-opinion' that created society. This was the belief that fabricated social upper strata had injected into classes for seven thousand years. They did not say it openly like the priests; they translated it into sociological 'constraint'."[33]

The commonality between A. Öcalan's defences of "moral and political society" and "society based on the human mind" and the leading figures of sociology and positivism, especially Durkheim, is clear. The "elite theory" that he says he adopts instead of class theory also derives from this commonality.

A. Öcalan identifies Marxism with Enlightenment thought, the proper philosophy of capitalism, just as he identifies it with sociology, which comes from the same root. It is clear that he evaluates this negatively. But what is paradoxical here is that A. Öcalan's ideas are the same as the ideas he criticises, down to their shared categories.

Just as in his identification of Enlightenment thought with Marxism, A. Öcalan falls here too into a paradox.[34] It is clear that so long as he cannot distinguish science from philosophy, cannot objectify human activity, and cannot be materialist "both below and above", he cannot escape these paradoxes.

Having set out these distinctions and contradictions, let us look in general at the conditions for the possibility of scientific activity.

Science Cannot Be Made from Singulars

The justification for the claim that there can be no science of society is that the human being possesses "reason" and "free will",[35] and therefore cannot be the object of science. The individual has thoughts and tendencies that differ from person to person. Societies too are the sum of human beings possessing "free human nature". Where there is a subject there is

contingency and arbitrariness. If there is contingency and arbitrariness, there can be no “determination”, and therefore no “law”. We can trace these ideas systematically from the Sophists onward. Protagoras said, “Man is the measure of all things.” The sceptics doubted whether a science not only of societies but also of nature could be produced because being changes at every moment.

Sociologies that are based on the defence of the subject and of “idea-conscience-morality”, and that may also be described as “empiricist/individualist”, are disturbed by Marxism’s claim that a science of societies can be produced and that there is therefore “determination”. Yet, very interestingly (indeed, again paradoxically), they are not disturbed by the “determination” of society by those “values” they define as spiritual in character and absolutely non-material—“morality”, “reason”, “collective consciousness”, “free human nature”. This means that the problem is not with the principle of “determination” itself, but with what determines.

We return again and again to the basic question of philosophy. These defenses are nothing other than idealism, which says “thought determines matter”. When the opposite is stated, they immediately rise up and say that “the human being/society cannot be determined”.

Let us return to the argument that because society consists of individuals with free will, no science of it can be produced. What is meant here is that each individual cannot be examined one by one, but because each has their own will, desires, approaches and so on, at most there can be statements of tendency. Indeed, sociology tries to reach conclusions through surveys and modelisations addressed to individuals one by one for precisely this reason.

Those who defend these positions do not doubt that physics, chemistry and biology are sciences. Then the question is this: in physics, are individual objects (singulars) examined one by one in order to reveal the laws of motion? Or in biology, was the

theory of evolution formulated on the basis of the daily change of each flower, its exposure to the sun, or the singular movements of every monkey? Of course not. One reason why a common theory has not been established in quantum physics is the dominance in the scientific world of the tendency that takes the movement of individual atoms as its basis. Yet, as Einstein defended until the end of his life, as the Schrödinger equation[36] shows, and as Penrose also states, quantum physics is comprehensible not through the motion of the “single atom”, but through process, through their organisation.

The most important reason for the birth of science and philosophy in Ionia (at least according to the evidence presently available) was the abandonment of the view of nature as a sum of particular things and the turn toward the universal. They also realized that the universal was not like the sum of things thrown into a sack. Listing the size, smallness, color and shape of individual apples and tomatoes did not yield the concept of “fruit”.

Ancient Greek philosophers were able to pass into the scientific field because they broke with the practical-technical abstraction and mode of thinking that dealt with individual events, phenomena or mere sensations. One of the basic questions of Ancient Greek philosophy was this: could a science be made of animate and inanimate nature, which changes before our eyes at every moment, in which every thing displays different properties, and where no one thing resembles another?

Philosophers differed according to the answers they gave to this question. In addition to being classified as idealist or materialist, they may also be classified according to their answer to this question. For example, the starting point of the Sophist Protagoras, who based himself on sensation, is materialistic insofar as it recognizes the objective world. But because of the limits of sensuousness, the Sophists said that nothing outside “appearance” can be known and, since appearances change at every moment, that science cannot be done.

Plato, who is considered a turning point because he systematized philosophy, was an idealist. He accepted that all beings in the world—animate, inanimate, including human beings—are appearances and that they change at every moment. But Plato was a master of geometry, and one would not expect him to doubt the possibility of the sciences. He argued that the sciences can be made in the world of ideas, which he regarded as prior to matter. In this way he tried to formulate a scientific answer to the question “What is thought?”[37]

Plato, by taking thought as primary and accepting a substance outside matter, was ontologically an idealist; but by separating the object of knowledge from the real object and showing that the sciences can be done, he was epistemologically a materialist. Socrates, however, treated “morality” as a rational and universal field of knowledge that everyone could reach through self-questioning and rational reasoning. In this way Socrates spoke of making a science of “morality”, but Plato saw that this could not be done. In this respect, the fact that the subjectivist-utopian left often cites Socrates as an example must be due to their shared emphasis on “morality”.

We will not evaluate each philosopher or current here, but what must be seen is that this debate too has a history of thousands of years. Yet, especially in the last 500 years, when physics, chemistry, biology and the science of history have developed in many directions, the questions of the Sophists or sceptics are repeated as if none of this had happened. The only difference is the level reached by science. Every new product of science is picked apart by the two currents of philosophy. It must be admitted that idealist philosophy, benefiting from its accordance with common sense and caring little about consistency, is always a few steps ahead.

Science is made not from singulars but from universals. Science is the activity of uncovering the structures and mechanisms that produce a regularity or events that exist not merely in one part

of the world/universe but universally, independently of whether they are perceived by the senses.

The theory of evolution could not have been developed by looking at the individual (or group) behaviour of a species of monkey, at how they spent their days differently, or at whether one was more aggressive or more passive. Likewise, when we speak of “social science”, it should not be understood as examining one by one (or group by group) individuals who act differently, think, question or do not question, laugh, enjoy themselves, or remain indifferent, and then drawing a conclusion. But because this is the dominant understanding, sociologists and psychologists spring up like mushrooms and carry out ideological activity under the name of “science”.

These approaches derive from the bourgeois ideological view of society as the sum of individuals.[38] In classical economics and in every kind of bourgeois ideology, the “individual-subject” is ontological reality itself. Homo economicus, homo rationalis and homo moralis—that is, the “economic”, “rational” and “moral” individual—will, through each one’s effort, carry society toward the better and the more advanced. This assumption has no option other than to bring “elites” to the fore instead of “classes” and “class struggle”. There will always be more economic, more rational and more moral elites. The struggle between these elites and the non-elites—those who are not economic, rational or moral—will determine the fate of societies. At this point history becomes the struggle (in fact, reconciliation) of “the good and the bad”. Who can claim that T. Barrack, who says that the Middle East needs benevolent monarchies, “elites”, is nourished by a very different ideology?[39]

Historical Materialism Distinguishes Between Fields of Knowledge

Scientific activity produces appropriate categories for ontological stratification (levels) and differentiation and, through its own methods, turns these into a theory. S. Timpanaro gives a very clear materialist account of what these levels are:

“By materialism we understand, first of all, the recognition of the priority of nature over ‘mind’. If you wish, this may be called the priority of the physical stage over the biological stage, and of the biological stage over the socio-economic and cultural stage. Both priorities are chronological priorities (the very long period before life appeared on earth, and the period between the beginning of life and the beginning of humanity). The priority of nature means that nature determines humanity, that nature still works upon humanity and will continue to work upon it, at least in the foreseeable future.”[40]

Taking this layered and differentiated structure of nature into account, Engels divides fields of knowledge into three and discusses the differences between them.

Accordingly, the first field (or class) of knowledge “embraces all the sciences dealing with inanimate nature and more or less capable of mathematical treatment: mathematics, astronomy, mechanics, physics, chemistry”. Engels states that, if one likes grand words like Dühring, it may be accepted that these sciences give “exact” knowledge and are therefore also called “exact sciences”. Yet even here the possibility of reaching absolute truth without setting limits becomes rarer with every new scientific development. Even mathematics, known for its “exact” results, ceased to be able to give exact results when “variable magnitudes”, “infinitely small” and “infinitely large” quantities entered the field, and the era of “scientific debates” opened. In astronomy, mechanics, physics and chemistry the situation is much worse than in mathematics, and one finds

oneself “in the midst of hypotheses as if in the middle of a swarm of bees”.

The second class of sciences is “the class that embraces the investigation of living organisms”. Because of the diversity of interrelations and causalities in this field, even a single problem can sometimes be solved only over centuries. Engels states that in this field of knowledge, in order to grasp the connections systematically, the “ultimately exact truths” must at every moment be surrounded by countless hypotheses:

“Therefore, anyone who wants to establish in this field truly genuine and immutable truths will have to be content with banalities such as: all human beings are mortal; all female mammals possess mammary glands; and so on ...”

Engels defines the third field of knowledge as “the historical sciences”, which investigate “the conditions of life of human beings, social relations, forms of law and state, together with their ideal superstructures consisting of philosophy, religion, art and so forth, in their historical sequence and their present results”. In the field of the historical sciences, science is even worse off than biology with regard to “exact truths”.

Since the main field of discussion in this article is “the science of history”, we shall reproduce Engels’s words at length:

“In organic nature, at least insofar as we can observe it directly, we are dealing with a series of processes which, within very broad limits, repeat themselves fairly regularly. Since Aristotle, the species of organisms have remained roughly the same. By contrast, in the history of society, once we have passed beyond the primitive condition of humanity, the so-called Stone Age, the repetition of conditions is the exception rather than the rule; and wherever such repetitions occur, they never take place under the same conditions. Examples include the existence among all civilised peoples of primitive collective ownership of land and the manner of its dissolution. Therefore, in the field of human history, our solid knowledge is much further behind than in biology. Moreover, if the internal connection of the social

and political forms of existence of a period is once accidentally discovered, this invariably happens when these forms have already lived out more than half their life and are moving toward decline. Thus knowledge in this field is essentially relative, since it is confined to grasping the connections and consequences of certain forms of society and state existing at a particular time and for particular peoples, and which are by their nature temporary. Therefore, anyone hunting in this field for ultimately exact truths, for absolutely unchangeable pure truths, will return with little beyond the worst kind of banalities and commonplaces, such as that human beings generally cannot live without working, that up to now they have often been divided into rulers and ruled, or that Napoleon died on 5 May 1821.”[41]

In these long quotations we see, leaving no room for contradiction, that Engels distinguishes the sciences according to their fields, that he thinks “absolute truth can be reached only within definite limits”, and that laws are “only approximately true”.

Years later Lenin would deepen this question further. According to Lenin, the possibility of science depends on accepting that “the distinction between the relative and the absolute is itself directly and definitely relative”. “According to objective dialectics, there is an absolute within the relative.”[42]

Marxism’s defense of the existence of “absolute truth” means the rejection of all subjectivity and the acceptance of objective truth. “Absolute truth” exists objectively, but the ability of the human being as a “singular individual subject” to reach absolute truth is relative. This relativity is valid not only for the science of history but for all sciences. Materialism is to maintain that the objectively existing absolute truth can be reached only relatively, precisely because matter is infinite. Even in physics, most laws are “*ceteris paribus*” laws, meaning “when all conditions are the same” or “everything is equal”. [43]

Despite these clear positions of the **masters** of Marxism, A. Öcalan states that Marxists apply the laws of the natural sciences (physics and chemistry are meant) to the social sciences in the same way, and that they expect the laws of the social sciences to appear in an absolute form.[44]

Marxism is a theory constituted by condemning subjectivist-utopian philosophies and ideologies that possess “eternal concepts and categories” such as “absolute truth”, “absolute reality” and “absolute morality”. A. Öcalan’s claim that Marxism searches for “absolute laws” does not reflect reality. Either A. Öcalan has not read the Marxist **masters** in detail, or he proceeds from economicist-reductionist interpretations of Marxism and from those who distort Marxism (its opponents).

To say that A. Öcalan knows Marxism incorrectly does not mean that, if this “error” were corrected, he would share the same standpoint as Marx. A. Öcalan’s conception of science belongs to the interpretive/explanatory (hermeneutic) school. This school was developed, in essence, against Marxism. Since it defends a subjectivist ontology, it maintains that scientific activity cannot be carried out independently of normative values (justice, right, goodness/evil, morality, reason and so on). Once the approach is this, Marx’s effort to uncover objective laws (without forgetting, as Lenin put it, that “the distinction between the relative and the absolute is itself definitely relative”) is criticized as “legitimizing capitalism” or as failing to distinguish between fields of knowledge. This approach arrives at the conclusion that “human objective activity” cannot be made the subject of science. In short, Marxism and every kind of subjectivist/utopian approach have no possibility of meeting on any theoretical ground.

Sociology Rejects Determination

Empiricism and various subjective/utopian philosophies do not take account of the stratification we indicated through the

quotation from Timpanaro; therefore they argue that everything is only as it appears on the uppermost layer, and that surface-level constant connections, or what Ibn Khaldun called “the visible face of history”, are sufficient for understanding nature and societies.

Marxism, by contrast, begins above all by recognizing no substance other than matter and the forms of matter.[45]

Its second fundamental concern is that there is a hierarchy between the levels of matter according to the relation of determination.[46] The universe, the earth, living beings and societies did not all appear at the same time; there is “chronological priority” among them. In the most simplified form, the conclusion to be drawn from this priority and relation of determination is that there is no escape from “the external situation that imposes itself on us”, that is, from “nature”. The existence and objectivity of this “external situation that imposes itself” is given above all by the “plasticity of the brain” and the “neural representation model”, perhaps the most important theories of recent decades concerning the formation of thought and of the “I”, and by the fact that the human being possesses a biological structure that cannot be “transcended”.

Modern philosophy is constantly engaged in setting “epistemological traps” in order “to make the external world exist only as an activity of the subject”. Since the basic function of modern philosophy has become the abolition of “external reality” and the construction of human freedom, it becomes increasingly “complex”, unintelligible and self-consuming.[47]

According to this view, there is no external reality that conditions or determines the human being; the human being is “free” and first constructs itself and then society. It is assumed that nature too can be shaped as desired and placed at humanity’s service. History then becomes the history of good or bad “elites” who construct themselves and come to the fore. In this case, “backwardness”, “oppression” and “exploitation”

become matters of “immaturity” and the inability “to use one’s own reason”, just as Kant said.

This mode of thought assumes that the oppression of classes, genders and nations is due essentially to their not having possessed throughout history a sufficient “moral and political stance” capable of “constructing themselves”.

Some sections that claim to be in the field of Marxism want to escape this trap by using the concept of “class” instead of the individual or subject constructing itself and becoming conscious; they speak instead of “the class constructing itself”. After all, *The Communist Manifesto* begins with the sentence “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” If the layered, differentiated and structured character of the world/societies, and the relation of priority/determination connected to it, are not accepted, then merely substituting the concept of “class” for “individual” or “human being” does not free one from idealism and therefore from the critique of Marxism. This approach ignores the economic structure that gives rise to classes. Therefore, being a Marxist does not mean assigning an “elite” place to any class, group or individual by skipping over materialist theses. As we quoted from Engels at the beginning of the article, what is at stake is “bringing the science of society, that is, all the so-called historical and philosophical sciences, into harmony with the materialist basis and reconstructing them on this basis”. Otherwise, accepting classes and class struggle means nothing. Marxism cannot lose sight of materialist principles in social science for even a moment. The moment it does so, it becomes an ordinary “philosophy” and loses its scientific character.

There Is an Absolute Within the Relative

Marxism accepts contingency and the fact that sensations are subjective. This contingency and subjectivity, it must be repeated, become comprehensible only when the world is

grasped as a multilayered, structured, differentiated and open system. Motion, including the social, is infinite, and “appearances” (“the visible face of history”) are one of the determinations of this infinity—the most recently emerged level. To remain stuck at this level (appearances) is to fail to see the different poles of contradictions and to fail to establish the connections between them. To recognise nothing but the relative on the basis of the objective fact that subjective sensations vary according to time, place, conditions and person is to attach everything to chance, unknowability or mysticism. “Objective dialectics”, by contrast, says that “there is an absolute within the relative”. [48]

In this section, drawing on Engels’s *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, we shall try to discuss how Marxism should approach the level on which appearances arise, where only individuals and their movement—their wills, desires, caprices and morality—seem to dominate, and how the determination of this level should be understood.

As a materialist, Engels’s starting point is the rejection of “connections derived by the philosopher’s brain” and the disclosure of “real interconnections”. The history of the development of society presents itself “at one point as fundamentally different from the history of the development of nature”. This does not mean “lawlessness” or “indeterminacy”; it means that laws manifest themselves in a different way. [Recall Engels’s distinction between the three fields of science.] Engels first expresses the dominant view of his time:

In nature, “unconscious and blind factors” are dominant. But when one looks at the history of society, it appears that human beings “possessing consciousness, acting with deliberation or passion and pursuing definite aims” are dominant. History has witnessed many wars, many heroes, traitors and cowards. Great empires and states have acted with many aims. They have confronted other states, defeated them or been defeated by them. Peoples have united and gained strength or lost it.

Engels explains that this visible history of societies does not contradict Marxism's claim that social laws exist, by referring to two very basic points.

The first is the “accidents” that arise “on the surface, in appearance” from the collision and intersection of countless individual wills. Engels emphasizes that these accidents are no fewer than those produced by blind and unconscious factors in nature. If this determination were left there, one would arrive at the same conclusions as the Sophists or sceptics. But Engels continues his reasoning and operates the materialist thesis. Social being is not outside nature. Just as in nature, behind these accidents lie laws that lead to the emergence of results independently of the wills of all individuals:

“The aims of actions are intended aims, but the results that actually follow from these actions are not intended results; or, even if at first they appear to correspond to the intended aim, in the end they arrive at results quite different from those intended. Thus historical events too appear, on the whole, to be governed by chance. But wherever chance appears to play on the surface, it is always under the command of hidden inner laws; and the task is only to discover and reveal these laws.”[49]

Engels thus speaks of two different levels in societies too: what is visible “on the surface” and “hidden inner laws”. As we shall examine in detail in the next section, Marx and Engels divide social formation into two levels: “base and superstructure”. In the superstructure, which corresponds to the “visible face of history”, the purposiveness of individuals, accidents, ideologies and politics are visible. Many emperors and sultans, with their “wills” and “aims”, organised countless conspiracies, issued laws and fought wars. Despite all this “power”, the “hidden inner laws” of history operated; they were defeated by historical revolutions born of the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production.

The second point is the issue set out in the First Thesis on Feuerbach, something no materialist before Marx and Engels

could accomplish, and which therefore caused them to fall into idealism when “societies” and the “human being” were in question. It is clear that human beings have ambitions, motives and wills (that is, they carry aims and are intentional), and that these features are effective in “historical events”, even if they cannot ultimately exceed “the rule of the general inner laws of the course of history”. It is precisely this obviousness that has dazzled all philosophies. But science is not made at the level of events/phenomena (or appearances). Establishing fixed correlations between events-phenomena and generalizing them is empiricism, and this activity does not give real causes.

Because Marx and Engels are not empirical in this sense (that is, because they do not remain stuck in appearances), Engels asks the following question:

“On the other hand, one may ask what are the driving forces hidden behind these motives, and what historical causes are transformed into such motives in the brains of active human beings.”[50]

Engels emphasizes that motives too do not appear as if by revelation. Although in the nineteenth century the manner in which emotions/motives arose and the structural causes behind them had not been explained, Engels, as a consistent materialist, did not doubt that they too, like thoughts, are determined by “matter”. Materialism is *“also the recognition of the physical nature of the subject and of the physical nature of activities traditionally considered ‘spiritual’.”[51]* Proceeding from this materialist principle, Engels does not try to fill the “gap” that appears in theory with a fiction. He leaves the filling of the gap to the flow of scientific activity.

Engels concludes his answer to the question as follows:

“To uncover the driving causes that are reflected as conscious motives in the thought of acting masses or of their leaders—those called great men—this is the only path that can lead us to the trace of the laws that dominate history as a whole, in other epochs and in other countries as well. Whatever sets human

beings in motion must necessarily pass through their brains, but the form it takes in the brain depends very much on the circumstances.”[52]

At the present stage of science, important evidence and theories have been produced concerning the “material” determinations of the emergence of motives and thoughts, especially neuroplasticity and the neural representation model. While the gaps have been reduced much more than in Engels’s time, we see A. Öcalan sliding into idealism by treating thought as non-material because its “photograph cannot be taken”.[53] As in Kant’s agnosticism, there is a need to make room for belief and the sacred. One reason for this need may be said to be political. A. Öcalan’s political mastery, his success in bending theory to the service of politics and making it acceptable to broad masses, is beyond dispute. But when this bending and twisting of theory for politics, this distortion, reaches the point of ideologizing the sciences, one cannot escape the covering of reality by mystery.

It is also necessary to dwell on the illusion that the human being has established domination over nature. While the human being imagines that, through “will” and “reason”, it changes and domesticates nature and “constructs” society, it forgets each time that the laws of nature (and of social being) are dominant.

“Let us not, however, flatter ourselves too much on account of our victories over nature. For each such victory, nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory indeed achieves in the first instance the results we expected, but in the second and third instances it has quite different, unforeseen effects, which very often cancel the first results. The people who destroyed the forests in Mesopotamia, Greece, Asia Minor and elsewhere in order to obtain cultivable land did not imagine that, by removing the forests, they were also removing centres for the preservation and accumulation of moisture and thus preparing the way for the present desolated condition of those countries ... We are reminded at every step that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing

outside nature; on the contrary, with our flesh, blood and brain we belong to nature and exist in its midst, and all our mastery over it consists only in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to know and correctly apply its laws.”[54]

Engels continues to guide us in showing the connections and differences between the historicity of nature and of society. Engels’s contributions to Marxism are foundational.

Marx and Engels sought to separate the real interconnections of “the history of society and human affairs” from ideologies and various philosophies and to find the general laws of motion in social history. Marx truly devoted his life, in the full sense of the word, to *Capital*. Engels, on the other hand, concentrated on generalizing to the whole of nature the conclusions Marx had reached in political economy, and on setting out the connections and differences between the historicity of nature and that of human society. It is concretely known that they produced their work by discussing with each other, writing supplementary texts, and acting within a “basic agreement”.

“This does not mean that they thought like twin souls on every issue; rather, they complemented one another. It is no accident at all that those who try to construct a ‘Marxism without Engels’ arrive, if they are consistent, at a ‘Marxism without Marx’.”[55]

The fact that Marxism is an “open-ended theory” means that, alongside Marx and Engels, contributions made in the context of science-philosophy-politics from Lenin and Mao in particular up to the present must also be taken within Marxism. As Timpanaro says, it is an expected result that those who try to separate Engels from Marx will consistently arrive at the point of a “Marxism without Marx”. For Marx and Engels complement each other.

A. Öcalan’s evaluation of Engels separately from Marx, and his desire to restrict Marxism only to Marx, means denying or ignoring Marxism’s scientific character and the fact that it is an

open-ended theory. For this reason, the claim in his theses to “go beyond Marxism” means nothing other than a “Marxism without Marx”.

The Role of Productive Forces and Class Struggles in the Determination of History

Historical materialism investigates, from the state of “[human] existence in the herd condition” (Marx) to the present, the economic development of society, the changes in the forms of production and exchange, the division of society into different classes on this basis, and “the ultimate cause of the driving force of all important historical events in the struggle between these classes”. [56] Historical materialism, in order to identify “certain laws that are always valid”, first “examines separately the laws peculiar to each stage in the evolution of production and exchange”. [57] Only as a result of these investigations are certain general laws reached.

For Marxism, “the production and reproduction of life” is the determining factor. The production of life (“the production of the means of life, food, clothing, shelter and the tools necessary for these”) and the reproduction of life (“the production of human beings, the propagation of the species”) must be taken as adjacent to nature, as a part of it, and as something the human being cannot “biologically” transcend. Thus everything that appears hierarchically at higher levels—property relations, the state, politics, the family, the division of labor, classes, capital, credit and so on—is determined in this framework.

For Marxism, it is a wrong method to examine these categories in themselves, to set out the relations between them, and then to explain how production is carried out within these relations. According to Marx, these relations must not be taken as given (as the entire subjectivist and utopian left does; as we see in A. Öcalan, who sees capital throughout all history, views the state as a deviation, claims that the “commune” will appear in every

mode of production, and so on). Instead, it is necessary to explain “how these relations themselves are produced, that is, the historical movement that gives rise to them”. For the moment the tracing of the historical movement of the relations of production is abandoned, fictions and speculations are invoked to explain history, and the source of relations is assumed to be the “movement of pure reason” tied to humanity or to God.[58]

As a result of these assumptions, categories such as the state, class and division of labor are treated as “good and bad”, “natural and artificial” institutions. The “good” and “natural” are embraced; the “bad” and “artificial” are declared illegitimate, and so on. The criterion of naturalness, goodness and so forth is morality, justice and a conception of politics. “Angry protests”, such as shouting that the “bad” and “artificial” are not legitimate or exposing their injustice, replace scientific critique.

Historical materialism was founded by refuting these idealist conceptions. It shows that every category in question is always the product of relations of production and exchange. With the founding of historical materialism, after physics, chemistry and biology, idealism was also “expelled” from the conception of history. With the emergence of the materialist conception of history, *“a way was found to explain people’s consciousness by their being, instead of, as had hitherto been done, explaining people’s being by their consciousness.”*[59]

We find the cornerstones of the path opened in the “Preface” to the 1857 Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, which Marx described as “the general result at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding thread of my studies”. We can write the “Preface” in a more understandable way by dividing it into sentences:[60]

1. “In the social production of their life, human beings enter into definite relations” that are “indispensable and independent of their will”. These are the “relations of production”.

2. The “relations of production” “correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces”.
3. “The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society.”
4. The economic structure constitutes “the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness”.
5. “It is not the consciousness of human beings that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness.”

Thus Marx locates at the lowest level the “material productive forces”, which he treats within “nature”. The economic structure, which is formed by the totality of the relations of production corresponding to the material productive forces, is the second level, corresponding to the “base”. In Marx’s theory, the “material productive forces” are the matter, the “content”, of society. The productive forces are the means of production (tools of production and raw materials) and labour-power (the productive capacities of the agents of production: strength, skill, knowledge, creativity and so on).[61]

The economic structure formed by the totality of the relations of production, which Marx calls the “base”, is the “form”; it is the social. We may give the following example from Marx concerning the “materiality” of the productive forces and the “sociality” of the relations of production (the economic structure):

“A negro is a negro. Only within certain relations does he become a slave. A cotton-spinning machine is a cotton-spinning machine. Only within certain relations does it become capital. Torn from these relations [torn from its ‘form’ - Editor’s note] it is no more capital [it is only ‘matter’, a ‘machine’ - Editor’s note], just as gold in itself is not money.”[62]

The “chronological priority” that begins with the lowest layer, “material productive forces”, is thus ordered as the stage of the

relations of production (economic structure - base), and thirdly the superstructure (legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical—in short, ideological forms). In this way the schema “matter of society: productive forces / social being / social consciousness” is obtained, and the thesis that “social being determines social consciousness” is reached.

The rest of the “Preface” is as follows:

6. “At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production” ... “or with the property relations within which they have hitherto moved.”
7. The relations of production are “forms of development of the productive forces”. But as a result of the development of the productive forces, the relations of production become their “fetters”.
8. When the relations of production (economic structure, base) become fetters on the development of the material productive forces, “an era of social revolution begins”.
9. “Social revolution” is the more or less rapid transformation of “the whole immense superstructure” together with the change in “the economic foundation”.
10. “In considering such transformations”, two forms must be distinguished. It is necessary to distinguish “the material transformation of the economic conditions of production” from the “legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical—in short, ideological—forms” in which this conflict is consciously grasped and fought out.
11. “The material transformation of the economic conditions of production” can be determined “with the precision of natural science”.
12. Social transformation cannot be judged (or explained) by “ideological forms”, that is, by “that period’s own consciousness”.

13. “Consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production.”

Many books have been written on the meaning of the statements in the “Preface”.[63] They have been compared with Marx’s other works, Engels’s explanations and so forth. There is therefore much that could be said. But here we shall limit ourselves to drawing attention to the points relevant to the scope of this study.

Marx links the beginning of the “era of social revolution”, or in his own words “social transformation”, to the contradiction between the productive forces (matter-content) and the relations of production (economic social structure-form). According to Marx’s theory, the productive forces develop. The relations of production take “form” according to their development. But a time comes when the relations of production become fetters on this development. This state of becoming a “fetter” inaugurates an “era of social revolution” whose duration cannot be predicted and which may last for centuries. As a result, the relations of production, that is, social forms (primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism), change.

At the same time, in *The Communist Manifesto*, prepared jointly by Marx and Engels, it is written that “the history of all societies is the history of class struggles”. There are “different” approaches to the existence of these two “different” theses. Some accept only the first (historical progressivists), others only the second (most subjectivist/utopian approaches). The basic error of both approaches is that they do not grasp, or they overlook, historical materialism’s treatment of nature and societies as layered, differentiated and structured.

Taking only the first thesis as the basis, as in Kautsky, renders political revolutions and class struggles meaningless. According to this, what must be done is to wait until the “productive forces” reach the level that will initiate the “era of social

revolution”. This approach, as seen in Russia, leads to becoming a reserve force behind the bourgeoisie, which is seen as “the force that will liquidate feudalism”.

The most important reason for taking only the second thesis as the basis is usually opposition to determinism. In other words, among the defenders of this thesis there is a widespread inability to accept that the human being and therefore any social element, especially the productive forces described as “material”, can be determining. Because they consider themselves “communist”, the “subject” to which they give determination is not the individual-human being and so on, but “class”. Yet, as we emphasised in the previous section, Marx does not take categories such as “property relations, classes, the state, politics ...” and their relations as given. By analogy, we can repeat here the question Engels asked concerning the causes of motives: “One may ask what historical causes in social relations of production are transformed into these classes.” Once this is asked, it is seen that “classes” too do not appear as an eternal and everlasting reality.

It is thus seen that these two theses cannot be treated by setting them against each other. Yet they are not “equivalent” either. The first thesis comes before the second. To understand this better, it is necessary to determine the place of “classes” in social formation (being). This determination will show that one cannot arbitrarily say “classes exist”, “classes do not exist” and so on.

Marx’s “New Contribution”

Marx’s 1852 letter to J. Weydemeyer is like a summary of the Marxist approach to “class”, “class struggle” and “the dictatorship of the proletariat”. The concept of “class” has been used since Roman public law. As Marx also emphasized, the honor of having discovered the existence of “classes” and of “class struggle” does not belong to him. Before him, bourgeois

historians had set out “the historical development of class struggle”, and bourgeois economists had set out “the economic anatomy of classes”. While establishing the science of history through an epistemological break, Marx did not use some of the concepts produced before him at all; he took others without change and redefined them appropriately within his own system. For the concepts of class and class struggle, Marx defines three points when speaking of “what I did that was new”:

“first, that the existence of classes is bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production; second, that class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; and third, that this dictatorship is only the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.[64]”

It is impossible for the individualist-atomistic ontologies of bourgeois historians and economists to arrive at these conclusions. The highest social approach their theories could reach is found in the utopian socialists of the period. The ontology of the individual reduces the contradictions of capitalism to everyday life and relationships. It assumes that individual interests will reconcile spontaneously. Utopian socialists assume that individuals from every section of society can come together and create communes or phalansteries. Whether proletarian or bourgeois, their solution to the existence of classes and class struggles is the rationality and morality of individuals.

The claim that “humanity” has advanced from the beginning of history on the basis of common interests, and that even “slaves” improved their situation thanks to “peaceful” approaches, was formulated by the Saint-Simonians in 1831:

“... undoubtedly the exploitation of man by man has become lighter today; it is no longer a matter of the slave breaking his chains; but the progress of the idea of unity and the relative reduction of oppositions is a complete expression of the development of humanity (...) Thus it may be said that the past

consisted of two different species, slaves and masters (...) The more numerous slave class improved its position in society relatively through its peaceful labour (...) This improvement took place through the successive admission of the foremost individuals of the exploited class into the ranks of the privileges that constituted the class of masters. The human species will finally break the chains of all the oppositions imposed on it (...).”[65]

Locating A. Öcalan’s positions within the “subjectivist and utopian left” becomes more understandable through the explanation of Saint-Simonian doctrine. According to A. Öcalan, the necessity, in Marxism, of carrying class struggle to the dictatorship of the proletariat is “going too far”. [66]

A. Öcalan thinks just like the Saint-Simonians: “the slave gains consciousness by working alongside the master”. With the consciousness gained over time, the slave becomes “equal” with the master and becomes a “free citizen”. What separates slave and master is “consciousness”. We must ask again: did not imperialist colonizers always speak of bringing “civilization”, “consciousness” and so on? As long as slaves, feudal classes and others do not possess sufficient consciousness, they are deemed to deserve their position.

Of course, this line of reasoning does not apply only to this question. It can be extended in the same way to the national question. The problem is thereby reduced from being “national” to the level of “free citizenship”. [67]

If in the Saint-Simonian doctrine the word “human being” is replaced with words such as “nation”, “gender” or “class”, the essence and summary of A. Öcalan’s ideas emerge:

“... undoubtedly the exploitation of one nation by another has become lighter today; it is no longer a matter of a nation breaking its chains; but the progress of the idea of unity and the relative reduction of oppositions is a complete expression of the development of humanity. Thus ... it may be said that the past consisted of two different species, the oppressed nation and the

oppressor nation ... the oppressed nation ... relatively improved its position in society (...). This improvement occurred through the successive admission of the foremost individuals of the exploited nation into the ranks of the privileges that constitute the dominant nation. The human species will finally break the chains of all the oppositions imposed on it.”

It must be stressed immediately that every approach which does not take the thesis stated in the previous section—“because the productive forces develop and come into contradiction with the relations of production, the era of social revolution begins”—as the determining principle for “social transformation”, even if it defends “classes” and “class struggle”, cannot avoid falling into the dark corridors of the subjectivist/utopian left and reconciliation with the bourgeoisie.

As Lenin stated, accepting “classes” and “class struggle” is not “the essence of Marxism”.

Marx’s criticism of Proudhon resolves the problem:

“In place of the great historical movement arising from the contradiction between the productive forces already acquired by human beings and their social relations, which no longer correspond to these productive forces; in place of the terrible wars preparing between the different classes of every nation; in place of the practical and violent action of the masses, which alone can resolve these contradictions—in place of this rich, long and complex movement, Monsieur Proudhon sees the absurd movement inside his own head. Thus those who make history are the learned people, those who know how to steal God’s secret thoughts. Ordinary people have only to apply what they have discovered. You must now understand why M. Proudhon declares himself the enemy of every political movement.”[68]

“The slave becoming a free citizen by attaining the consciousness of the master; history being the history of elites (learned people); ordinary people needing to do nothing other

than apply what they say... Yes, in Marx's words, the essence of the matter 'must now have been understood'."

The "existence", "non-existence" and "struggle" of classes are not matters of categories imagined in the head or of intentions. Classes are defined at the level of the relations of production.

"Classes are large groups of people distinguished from one another by their place in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation—often fixed and formulated in law—to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labor, and consequently by the dimensions of the share of social wealth which they receive and by the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labor of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy. It is clear that, in order to abolish classes completely, it is not enough to overthrow the exploiters, the big landowners and capitalists, and to abolish their property; it is also necessary to abolish all private ownership of the means of production, and also to abolish the distinction between town and country, as well as between manual and mental workers (...)." [69]

Have the exploiters, big landowners and capitalists been overthrown and their property abolished? Has every form of ownership of the means of production been abolished? Have the distinctions between town and country, and between manual and mental workers, been eliminated? If the answer to these questions is "no", that is, if exploiters, property, differences among laborers and so on continue, then classes and class struggle also continue, and the goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat—the only condition for abolishing them—also continues and must continue.

It should now be "understood" that class, class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat are not targeted for no reason. The "gap" created by emptying one of these concepts of meaning will empty out the whole terminology, ideas and system of Marxist theory (historical materialism), including the "key"

concept of surplus value. The gap that emerges means the ideologisation of Marxist science, that is, its “disappearance”.

Of course, in the sciences too, categories and theories that have been falsified must be discarded; whatever must “disappear” should disappear. When scientific activity is being carried out, discarding theories that have become invalid is not “frightening”; it is necessary for understanding the universe and the world with more valid theses.

But if claims that can be empirically falsified are advanced (for example, that classes have disappeared), that is, if what is said to have “disappeared” in fact “exists”, then there is certainly a problem. Does an oppressed nation cease to exist when it is declared “non-existent”? Of course not.

And if the only meaning of this “non-recognition” is to leave the oppressed defenseless through categories drawn from ideology, to absolutize capitalism and to reconcile with the bourgeoisie, then it is necessary to unmask these claims.

When the totality of the criticisms is considered, it is seen that Marxism is being made indistinguishable from classical economics. These positions argue that, regardless of whether classes continue to exist or not, classes can no longer be social agents, and that what is necessary is not a struggle for power but the creation of a field of influence spread through cultural-ideological areas—as if culture and ideologies were independent of historical stages in the development of production.

To define classes not within social relations of production but within the superstructure means not questioning the economic structure (property relations) and tying everything to “consciousness”. Just as the slave rises to the consciousness of the master, today too, if the proletariat, by working alongside the bourgeoisie, acquires its consciousness, then “the human species will finally break the chains of all the oppositions imposed on it”...

The Nature of Changes in Capitalism

It is often claimed that Marxism is an ‘ideology’ belonging to the 19th century and perhaps the first half of the 20th century. In those days, the situation of the working class made it possible to place the classes at the centre of the theory. However, today there are no longer workers who can barely scrape by on their labour alone, as was the case in that era, and the number of productive workers has also declined. Although Marx predicted that capitalist society would be divided into two opposing poles—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—the number of middle classes has increased. This serves to diminish ‘class division’; to the extent that the number of workers decreases, the capacity of classes to act as agents is lost, and so on.

These claims will not be addressed within this article; they will be dealt with in a separate study. However, we shall touch upon the common thread running through these claims. This is that the proponents of these criticisms have not researched or read Marx and his successors, but act on the basis of their own fabrications.

For example, in his ‘Theories of Surplus Value’, Marx criticises Ricardo as follows:

“(Ricardo) failed to emphasise... the increase in the number of the middle classes, who occupy a position exactly midway between the workers on the one hand and the capitalists and landowners on the other... spreading its full weight over the labouring masses at the bottom whilst simultaneously enhancing the social security and power of the top ten thousand....”^[1]

It is impossible to express more clearly than in these words the relationship of the middle classes to the ‘lower classes’ and the ‘elite’, and the growth in their numbers under capitalism. The growth in the number of the middle classes is not at odds with the ‘constant tendency and law of development of the capitalist mode of production’, as Marx described it, whereby the means of production are increasingly separated from labour, transforming labour into wage labour and the means of

production into capital. The majority of white-collar workers, referred to as the middle class, fall within the definition of ‘productive workers’ in a way that increases capital accumulation.

In the 19th century, a significant proportion of those considered part of the ‘middle class’ were independent of any capital owner and owned their own workplace and means of production. Today, however, the middle classes largely do not own the means of production, but in terms of income, they are in a ‘better’ position than blue-collar workers. Yet this ‘better’ situation is also gradually disappearing. The rate of exploitation and working conditions of doctors employed in hospitals owned by capitalists, lawyers in law firms, and office workers in business centres are increasingly coming to the fore. Today’s middle classes, having been severed from the means of production and reduced to wage labourers, are—despite all their ‘endless fluctuations’—the classes with whom an ‘alliance’ must be forged, as emphasised not only by Marx but also by Lenin and Mao.

The lack of homogeneity within the middle classes, their ideological demands—such as freedom, equality and fair distribution—which are not grounded in the fundamental conflict between labour and capital, and the existence of concerns regarding social status are all points raised by those who advocate defining classes in terms of their ideological and cultural dimensions. This is akin to the claim that the working class cannot be considered a class unless it possesses ‘class consciousness’. Such assessments remove the definition of class from the context of social relations of production. The aspect that should be emphasised is the form of appropriation of surplus labour that distinguishes capitalism from all other forms of society, and, consequently, the intensification of the labour–capital contradiction.

From a Marxist perspective, whilst the middle class and alliance with it have been ‘properly’ resolved in theoretical terms, the

problem arises in ‘practice’. *‘But theory and practice are two different things, and resolving this problem in practice is by no means the same as resolving it theoretically.’*[2]

Establishing a theoretical link with the movements of the middle classes/petit bourgeoisie amounts to a drift towards a subjectivist/utopian left and getting lost within the middle class’s illusions. Over the past decade, whilst the middle classes have become more visible due to the growth in their numbers and the associated increase in their problems, it has become apparent that the Communist Parties have remained weak both theoretically and politically and have fallen under their influence. This is due not only to the fact that the cadre structure of these Communist Parties draws significantly from the petty-bourgeois classes, but also to a range of reasons—including the retreat of Marxism, particularly following the collapse of the USSR and the rise of revisionism in China; their inability to address the new situation that has emerged, either theoretically or politically; and their tendency to equate theory with politics—a list that could be extended further.

The trend that has emerged within Marxist movements over the last decade has been, to the extent that political tasks have not been fulfilled, a turning a blind eye to political reality and a ‘greater reliance on theory’. However, for the most part, this theory—rather than being developed in a manner befitting Marxism’s ‘open-ended’ nature—takes the form of a dogmatic structure that seeks to apply existing ideas to every circumstance and era; consequently, it falls into a cycle of repetition, and as it repeats itself, it falls behind the times and eventually withers away.

Marxism acknowledges that various structural changes can occur within the same social form—such as the transition from manufactories to factories, to artificial intelligence technology, or from a period of free competition to imperialism. Just as in the natural sciences, periods in which the social structure—which we can only recognise within certain limits—changes and

new boundaries emerge are also perceived as crises in the study of history. It becomes clear that characteristics previously thought to be ‘unchanging’ have in fact changed, and that all knowledge is ‘relative within the absolute’. During such periods, the sciences experience a ‘theory inflation’. This inflation continues until a theory emerges that firmly re-establishes the ‘nature’ of these new boundaries.

When the divisibility of atoms was discovered, Lenin set out the path that must be followed during the shifting of the boundaries of the sciences in response to those who claimed that ‘matter had disappeared’. This path not only demonstrates the inseparable nature of the relationship between science and philosophy but also sets out how it should function. He stated that the ‘unique’ characteristic of matter—namely, that it is an ‘objective reality’ and exists ‘outside our minds’—is the condition for the recognition of ‘philosophical materialism’. Beyond this ‘unique’ characteristic, the ‘disappearance of matter’s boundaries’ and the ‘penetration of knowledge to greater depths’ are what are meant. [3]

Following this example, the characteristics of social existence—the object of the science of history, which this article seeks to explain—can be listed as the theses of philosophical materialism as follows:

“There is nothing that cannot be the object of science, including the recognition of ‘human activity itself as an objective activity’ (Marx).”

Nature (and consequently society) is a layered, structured and differentiated entity.

Nature is structured within a relationship of ‘chronological priority’ and determination (determinism), with the physical layer at the very bottom and the layers above it. [Schematised for societies: Material productive forces → relations of production (=economic structure) → superstructure (politics, consciousness, culture...)]

Social existence determines social consciousness. This thesis means that matter is an ‘objective reality’.”[4]

The fact that history as a science experiences stagnation and crises is a consequence of its very nature as a science. If it is claimed that ‘there are no crises’, then what is being discussed is not science or the development of the sciences, but ideologies.

Historical materialism recognises not only the general laws of production but also the laws specific to the ‘forms of production in a particular historical/social period’. In capitalism, the production of surplus value and the appropriation of this surplus value by the minority classes who own the means of production in order to expand their capital is a defining characteristic. From manufacture to large-scale industry, and right up to the development of ‘artificial intelligence’ today, what remains unchanged amidst these revolutionary changes in the forces of production is the appropriation of surplus value for the accumulation of capital. The fact that changes in the forces of production give rise to a contradiction with the relations of production (the economic structure) is the law expounded by Marx in the Preface. The 500-year history of capitalism is the history of this contradiction becoming ever more acute. Although there have been changes in the structure of the classes and in the accumulation of capital, the fundamental contradiction and the existence of the classes have remained unchanged. The changes taking place must be analysed by Marxists.

However, the sole obstacle facing the sciences is not the inability to analyse ‘new’ changes or the emerging new boundaries. As seen in the initiatives of the subjectivist and utopian left—which should be regarded as ideological rather than ‘theoretical’—the presentation of practices such as the dismantling of the theoretical foundation, the failure to recognise or apply the theses of philosophical materialism, and

a return to a pre-scientific era as if they were highly ‘original’ can also constitute a significant obstacle.

The changes in the forces of production from Lenin’s analysis of imperialism to the present day, the contradictions arising alongside these changes, and the class relations that have disappeared and those that have emerged anew must be analysed. Marx has left behind a robust guide that can be followed in all studies to ensure that all these ‘new’ situations can be analysed scientifically.

In Conclusion

As emphasised in the ‘Introduction’, the subject of this article is ‘the production of politics’, not the policies of A. Öcalan, etc. It concerns the structure of the ‘theories’ of the subjectivist and utopian left—of which A. Öcalan is a part—and their approach to Marxism in its even more narrow form. The aim is to demonstrate that there is no ontological or epistemological common ground between this ‘theoretical’ structure and Marxism. The absence of such common ground is also expressed by A. Öcalan himself, albeit in different ways. In setting out his ideology, A. Öcalan bases his argument on a distortion of Marxism. The primary reason for this distortion is to highlight the distinction between his new claims and the Marxist theory he previously claimed to have taken as his foundation. This is an understandable approach. However, what has been put forward does not remain within this framework. Since the scientific nature of Marxism has been targeted—and since this targeting is of an ideological nature—we see smear campaigns, equating it with fascism, claims that it empowers capitalism, attempts to portray it as a ‘pile of unnecessary accusations’, and so on. Moreover, all of this is being done in the name of “*transcending Marxism*” and “advancing” it.

As noted in the article, the issue is profound and significant, particularly due to the strong “liquidationist” winds that have been blowing over the last decade. The reason Marxism is

targeted is, as indicated at the beginning of the article with a quotation from Schumpeter, its ‘vitality’. Even if it is regarded as outdated, it is known that, due to the harmony of its foundations with reality, it will return once more ‘with its personal trappings and personal wounds’.

Like all sociologies, A. Öcalan’s sociology lacks scientific status; with its subjective/utopian structure, it aligns with bourgeois philosophy and remains confined to the realms of ‘philosophy’ and ‘technical modelling’. Consequently, it attempts to survive by ‘exploiting’ the sciences (primarily the science of history). This is not the same as the idea—also defended by Marxists—that theory should serve practice. Rather, it involves distorting and disregarding the theory to make it serve the interests of the ruling classes, and thereby turning it into a tool for politics. These two approaches are fundamentally different.

A final word must be directed specifically at the error of equating theory with politics, particularly within communist organisations. As Mao pointed out, this erroneous identification destroys the ability to ‘swim with the masses’. This identification stems from approaching classes through the lens of class consciousness. Given the dogmatisation of theory over the past few decades, the imposition of theory upon practical politics—upon the ‘visible face of history’ where the concrete prevails—has exacerbated the situation. Politics takes shape around categories such as ‘concrete conditions’, ‘balance of power’ and ‘grasping the weak link’. In determining the ‘nature’ of politics and the formation of political understanding—as seen in Lenin’s **What Is To Be Done?**—approaches must be adopted that, without reducing the political line to the ‘degree of class character’, aim to grasp the weak link and are capable of fostering even temporary alliances amongst bourgeois parties based on developments within their own ranks.

Marxism is a comprehensive theory with a political dimension that scientifically demonstrates that social change takes place

within certain laws, without compromising on the theses of philosophical materialism. The necessity of reuniting science, philosophy and politics is becoming increasingly pressing with each passing day.

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Endnotes

- [1] J. A. Schumpeter, quoted in J. B. Foster, Teori ve Politika 89: 5.
- [2] For a detailed discussion of how empiricist ideology makes scientific activity impossible, see Polat F., 2025: 82.
- [3] “Eşref-i mahlukat”: “the noblest and most valuable of creatures” - Editor’s note.
- [4] Foster J. B., Teori ve Politika 89: 6.
- [5] Engels F., 1977: 266-267.
- [6] For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Hassan Ü., 2019: 237-343.
- [7] From The Muqaddimah, quoted in Lacoste Y., 2012: 167-168.
- [8] Ibid., 175.
- [9] For A. Öcalan’s views, see: “A. Öcalan, Barış ve Demokratik Toplum Manifestosu”, PDF.
- [10] Dialectics is one of the categories most abused and consciously misused. Concepts that have no dialectical relation with one another are used to give cultural legitimacy to ideas.
- [11] Vico, quoted in Kayaoğlu M., Teori ve Politika 3: 11.
- [12] Kant, quoted in Kayaoğlu M., Teori ve Politika 32-33: 73.

- [13] For Marxism's break with classical economics, see Polat F., 2025: 153-175.
- [14] Lenin V. I., 2001: 381-382.
- [15] "It is known that thought is beyond matter; it cannot be photographed, it cannot be proven." A. Öcalan, *Barış ve Demokratik Toplum Manifestosu*, p. 51.
- [16] Engels F., 2002: 196.
- [17] Damasio A., 2020: 10.
- [18] *Ibid.*, 37.
- [19] *Ibid.*, 62.
- [20] For more detailed information, see Polat F., 2025, Sections I and III.
- [21] Bhaskar R., 2015: 145.
- [22] Marx, quoted in Lukes S., 1998: 24-25.
- [23] Lacoste explains Ibn Khaldun's phrase "the absence of the bourgeoisie" as follows: "A large part of the population was organised in tribes; the cities contained only a non-tribal, weak and unstable section. The absence of the ownership of the means of production by a minority and the continued supremacy of tribal structures made the existence of the bourgeoisie impossible. In such an economic and social system, the absence of the bourgeoisie is normal and logical." Ibn Khaldun was trying to analyse the crises of recent centuries and the weakness of the empire. In North Africa at that time he noticed "the political weakness of urban communities that had broken from tribal structure but were far from forming a new force capable of balancing the role of tribal nobility." This political weakness derived from the inability to increase production and develop the productive forces. Empires were based on forcibly extracted taxes from peoples and tribes. Conflicts between tribes had become permanent. Ibn Khaldun sensed the absence of a "new" force that could end these conflicts. This resembles Machiavelli's treatment of conflicts among princes. In Italy, after a time, an economic structure emerged that would unite all the cities.

[24] Polat F., 2025: 91.

[25] Ibid., 98.

[26] Engels F., 2011: 29.

[27] Ibid., 26.

[28] “There may be tendencies that are valid in society, but there can be no laws.” A. Öcalan, *ibid.*, p. 46.

[29] It is of course clear that what is meant here is essentially bourgeois sociology and subjectivist sociology.

[30] Polat F., 2025: 112.

[31] Güney A., 2019: 25.

[32] “He says: ‘The laws in nature are also valid in society’; this is present in Marx and Durkheim too.” A. Öcalan, *ibid.*, p. 46.

[33] Kırılcımlı H., 2008: 27-28.

[34] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “paradox” means “a statement that is seemingly self-contradictory and absurd.” [Lukes S., 1998: 17]

[35] This study will not enter into debates on “free will” and the “I”. For this subject, see Polat F., *Materyalizm, Marksizm ve Özne Sorunu*.

[36] The Schrödinger equation is a fundamental differential equation in quantum mechanics that explains the behaviour, energies and changes over time of atoms and subatomic particles. It is the quantum-world counterpart of Newton’s laws of motion in classical physics.

[37] The striking point is this: Plato speaks of making a science of “thought”, while today’s subjectivists regard thought as the reason why science cannot be done. It is very clear that they have fallen behind even the pre-Platonic level.

[38] At this point too it is impossible not to agree with Kırılcımlı’s definition: “Sociology is not the innocent, pure and truth-seeking science that the ‘great sociologists’ try to present it as. Sociology is at the service of free-competition capitalism in the nineteenth century and monopoly finance-capitalism in the twentieth century; today the name sociology is given to the multitude of sects invented by those who sweat blood to justify

capitalism at all costs.” Kırılcımlı H., 2008, *Metafizik Sosyolojiler*.

[39] U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and Special Representative for Syria Tom Barrack: “... but in this region, whether you like it or not, the thing that has worked best has actually been a benevolent monarchy. That is the model that works” and “If you look at the region, the only thing that has worked has been these strong-leadership regimes: either benevolent monarchies or some form of monarchical republic.” BBC, 23 April 2026.

[40] Timpanaro S., 2020: 42.

[41] Engels F., 1977: 168-171.

[42] Lenin V. I., 2013: 304.

[43] “*Ceteris paribus*” is a Latin expression meaning “all other things being equal” or “other things remaining the same”.

[44] A. Öcalan, *ibid.*, p. 46.

[45] After the discovery of the “law of conservation and transformation of energy” in the 1840s, and after the term energy began to be used in its modern sense in 1853, idealist interpretations of the concept spread widely. Some (for example Mach) did not accept the universal existence of this law. W. Ostwald, meanwhile, saw this law as the only universal law of nature and tried to reduce all appearances of nature, society and thought to energy, denying the objective reality of matter, ignoring the concept of matter and trying to prove that energy exists without matter. A. Bogdanov tried to define social changes as an increase or decrease in energy. Lenin criticised “energetics” as a sign of “physical idealism” and showed that attempts to transfer laws of natural science to social appearances are in principle indefensible. It should be noted that A. Öcalan likens society and women to “energy” and uses the concept of “energy” in a way similar to Ostwald, in order to ignore the concept of matter.

[46] On determinism as one of the principles of materialism, see Polat F., 2025: 54-58.

[47] Timpanaro S., 2020: 42-43.

[48] “... in dialectics (objective dialectics), the difference between the relative and the absolute is itself directly and definitely relative. According to objective dialectics, there is an absolute within the relative.” Lenin V. I., 2013, Felsefe Defterleri.

[49] Engels F., 2011: 50.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Timpanaro S., 2020: 93.

[52] Engels F., 2011: 52.

[53] “It is known that thought is beyond matter; it cannot be photographed, it cannot be proven.” A. Öcalan, *ibid.*, p. 51.

[54] Engels F., 2002: 196-197.

[55] Timpanaro S., 2020: 154.

[56] Engels, quoted in ed. Bottomore T., 2020: 572.

[57] Engels F., 1977: 250.

[58] Marx K., 2011: 105.

[59] Engels F., 1977: 78.

[60] The relevant section of the “Preface” has been taken from Cohen G. A., 1998: 9. The idea of dividing the much-debated “Preface” into sentences also derives from Cohen.

[61] Cohen G. A., 1998: 47.

[62] *Ibid.*, 111-112.

[63] One of these books is G. A. Cohen’s work used in this article.

[64] Marx, quoted in Aytaç V., *Teori ve Politika* 19-20: 217.

[65] From Explanation of the Doctrine of Saint-Simon (1831), quoted in Labica G. and Bensoussan G., 2016: 837.

[66] “Here Marx is being crafty; he says ‘class contradiction’, he says ‘History is the struggle of classes’. There may be such a thing here, but he takes it too far.” A. Öcalan, *ibid.*, p. 41.

[67] It should undoubtedly be underlined here that criticism of A. Öcalan’s theses does not contain any criticism of the national-democratic rights of the Kurdish nation. On the contrary, with his “new paradigm”, A. Öcalan ignores the rights of the Kurdish nation arising from its being a nation. The

problem is not “free citizenship”, but the nation and national consciousness.

[68] Marx K., 2011: 188.

[69] Lenin, quoted in Bensoussan G. and Labica G., 2016: 846.

[70] Marx, quoted in ed. Bottomore T., 2020: 518.

[71] Lenin, quoted in Bensoussan G. and Labica G., 2016: 608.

[72] Lenin V. I., 2001: 303.

[73] For the grounding and explanation of these theses, see Polat F., 2025.

[74] After all that has been written, it should be clear that it would be more accurate to say “ideology” rather than “theory”. For when his works are examined closely, they are constructed by bringing together, for the benefit of his own political line, various empirical facts that Bhaskar calls “transitive knowledge”, social practices such as ideological, philosophical, political, religious and legal practices, and technical information—that is, “pre-scientific” knowledge.

[75] In the sciences, expressions such as “surpassing Newton” or “surpassing Einstein”, just like the expression “truth”, are incorrect usages. The difference between scientific theories is either a theory constructed on a new ground and with new concepts as an “epistemological break”, as Althusser states, or a theory produced on the same ontological ground and epistemological approach. Since A. Öcalan’s sociology is not science, it is understandable that he says “surpass”; however, because the thing he claims to have “surpassed” is science, the usage is wrong.

Link: <https://www.tkpml.com/what-does-a-ocalans-social-sociology-mean-a-marxist-critique-of-the-subjectivist-and-utopian-left/?swcfpc=1>