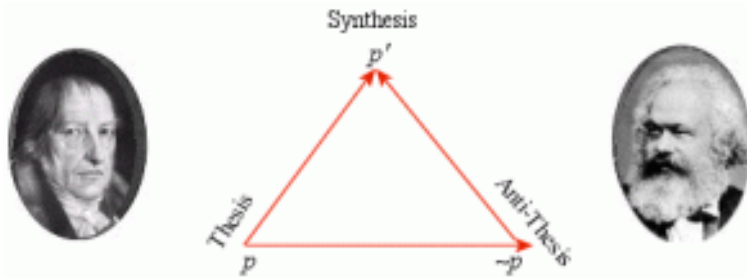


Thesis / Antithesis / Synthesis



What is dialectics?

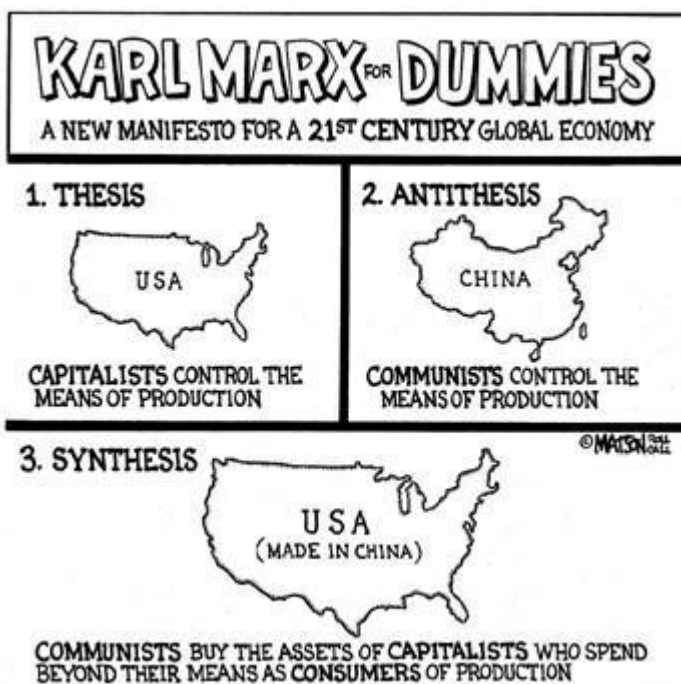
Dialectics of any sort is a means of trying to resolve a paradox.

It's important first of all to understand the difference between a paradox and a contradiction. Two things contradict if they CANNOT co-exist. A person cannot have a broken leg AND not-have a broken leg. That is a contradiction. A paradox is something that SEEMS to contradict but which may possibly have some middle ground. For instance "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others" or "You can save money by spending it".

That, in a nutshell, is what dialectics does. To learn about something, it considers something that is almost its opposite, and then tries to figure out what the compromise is between the two. So perhaps you'd figure out the meaning of life by comparing it to the meaning of death. But that's getting off-topic. [a](#)

What is dialectical materialism?

Marx was a materialist. To him, the only things worth considering were real, physical things that you could see and lay your hands on. So ideas and knowledge were pointless, unless those ideas were put to work and produced results. This is why most of Marx's work has to do with money and work, instead of some of the more airy ideas that are usually associated with philosophy.



So if you're a materialist, one of the dialectics you are going to be really interested in is the contrast between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. How is it that some people have lots of material stuff and some people don't? And what is the inevitable outcome of such a situation? Marx even went so far as to describe all of human history in the terms of this materialist dialectic.

Feudalism, to Marx, was a struggle between the aristocrats (haves) and the peasants (have-nots). Slave labour works to produce things to an extent, but skilled labour produces things better. A capitalist system recognises and rewards skilled workers more

highly than unskilled ones, so in his view all feudal systems were doomed to eventually become capitalist ones.

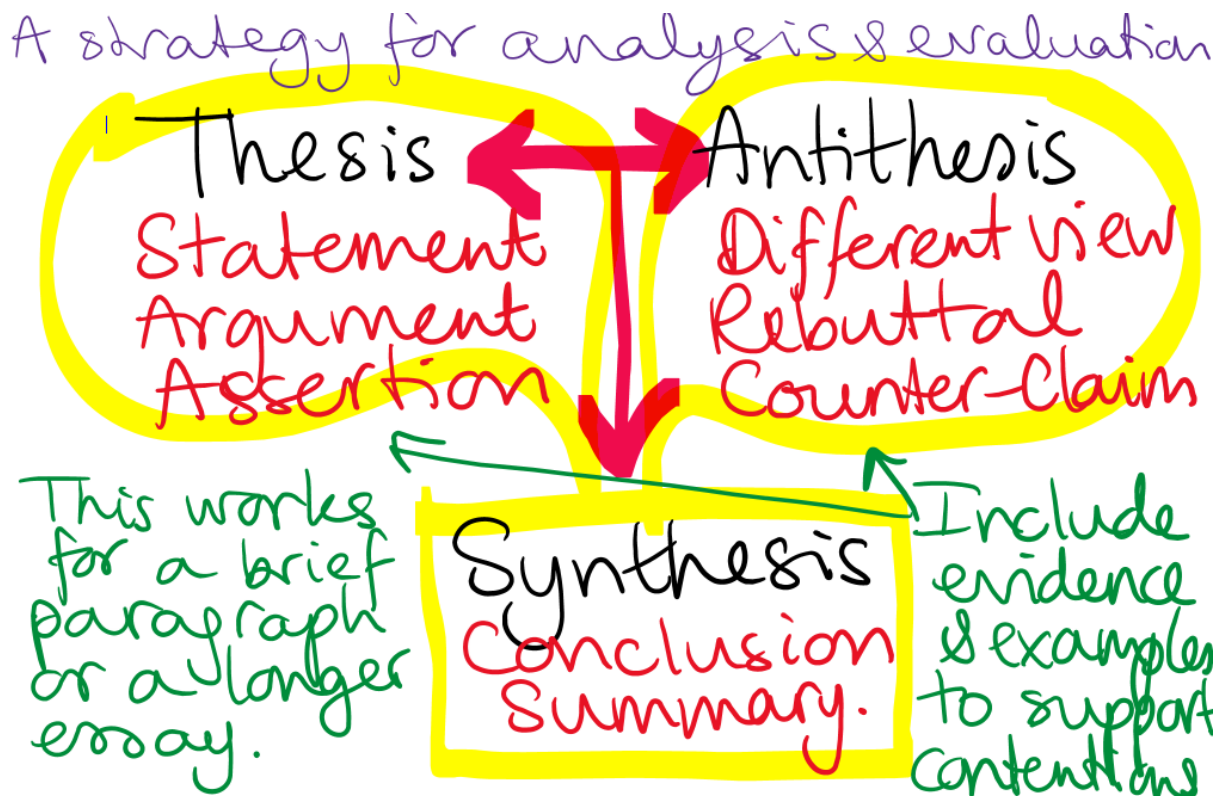
But a capitalist system still has a dialectic. There are haves (the owners of the factories, which he called 'bourgeoisie') and the have-nots (the workers). So how will this inevitably be resolved? Marx thought that eventually the workers would simply stop working for the bourgeoisie and work only for themselves. All workers would then be owners, and there would be no more dialectic – a permanent, stable system that he called 'socialism'.

To him, this was inevitable. Trying to resist this transition would only make the transition harder. There are, however, many criticism of dialectics as a whole and Marx's conclusions in specific, so exactly how inevitable it really is can still be a matter of protracted debate. [b](#)

What is thesis/antithesis/synthesis?

In our case, we are going to use thesis, antithesis and synthesis as an argumentative tool; it can be used very effectively as an essay writing or paragraph framework:

- Thesis – a statement or theory that is put forward as a premise to be maintained or proved
- Antithesis – the negation or contradiction of the thesis
- Synthesis – the resolution of the conflict between thesis and antithesis



Russian Revolution Theses:

1. Judgement and mismanagement by the Tsar and Tsarina in February 1917 contributed to the overthrow of Tsarism.
2. The fall of Tsarism in February 1917 should not be called a revolution.

3. The formation of the Petrograd Soviet and the issuing of its Order Number One was a fatal challenge to the Provisional Government.
4. The Provisional Government was doomed from the start. (Kerensky: The Provisional Government had “authority without power” while the Petrograd Soviet had “power without authority”.)
5. Without the ‘July Days’ and the Kornilov affair, the Bolsheviks would not have been able to lead the Revolution.
6. Trotsky was a more effective leader than Lenin.
7. The overthrow of the Provisional Government in October 1917 was a Bolshevik-engineered coup, not a popular revolution.

Some examples of thesis, antithesis and synthesis

Example 1: The Provisional Government was doomed from the start.

Thesis

The Provisional Government was doomed by its inability to resolve the very pressures responsible for the collapse of tsarism, as seen by Russia’s continued involvement in WW1 and the illegitimacy of its power. This “impossible and paradoxical situation”: as argued by Lynch, was therefore, its downfall in the face of the more powerful alternative of the Petrograd Soviet which provided the true promise of revolution as a body of the people and for the people.

Antithesis

However, the promise of democratic change following the February Revolution gave an initial sense of credibility to the Provisional Government, as it “gave rise to a short-lived mood of national unity and optimism” (Smith). As stated by Alexander Berkman: “It must always be remembered — and remembered well — that revolution does not mean destruction only. It means destruction plus construction” which arguably is the power that the Provisional Government had at the start of 1917.

Synthesis

Even though the Provisional Government was the promised democratic change of the February revolution, it was doomed from the start due to the paradox of its political power as rather than being a “popular mandate” (AJP Taylor), it was the imposition of a powerless authority which saw no change to Russia’s political structure. These fundamental weaknesses therefore profited the rivaling authority of the Petrograd Soviet and resulted in its ultimate downfall. [c](#)

Example 2: The outbreak of World War 2 was the fault of Britain and France

Thesis

It was the weakness of Britain and France that caused the outbreak of WW2, as they chose appeasement and allowed Hitler and the Nazis to get away with aggressive behaviour, until ultimately they had no choice but to go to war. This occurred because of a number of reasons, such as the fear of communism and general belief that the Treaty of Versailles had been too unfair. This led to German rearmament and territorial gains, which were allowed and ignored by the Western powers until they had no other choice but war.

Antithesis

The war was the result of Hitler and Nazi aggression. Hitler always intended on making further territorial gains and to embark on rearmament, regardless of what Britain and France did to stop

him. Furthermore, Hitler ignored the Treaty of Versailles, among other treaties, and so the Allies were left with no choice but to fight him.

Synthesis

Ultimately, it was the Nazis who broke international treaties and agreements, and it was them who made the territorial advancements beyond where they were allowed. However, it was Britain and France who were weak and chose to appease and not step in, until their only option was to go to war. So, to an extent the outbreak of war was the fault of Britain and France, as they could have stepped in earlier and stopped the situation before war, but most of the blame is on Hitler, because of his decisions to invade territory and ignore the Treaty of Versailles. [d](#)

