

Quality and Quantity

Dialectical contradiction is the central concept of dialectical philosophy. Contradictions cause change, become more intense and are eventually resolved and replaced by new contradictions. Dialectics also has other laws that help explain what happens in processes that are driven forward by contradictions.

Two important concepts for describing things and processes are **quantity** and **quality**. A **quantity** is a property that can be measured in numbers, like temperature, age, hourly wage, rate of profit, number of *Red Flags* sold, etc. One feature of quantities is that when they change, they usually go through intermediate stages. If the temperature falls from 90° at noon to 50° at midnight, it goes through the temperatures between 90° and 50°. A large change of quantity doesn't usually happen in an instant, even if it happens fast.

A **quality** is a property that cannot be measured in numbers. Qualities include being square, beautiful, green, unemployed, at war, etc. Change of quality can often happen quickly, without going through intermediate stages. When you heat water, its temperature (a quantity) gradually increases. At a certain temperature bubbles suddenly appear and boiling starts. The change from not-boiling to boiling is a qualitative change in the water.

It is a law of dialectics that change of quantity (an increase or a decrease) eventually leads to a qualitative change if it goes far enough. If you add enough heat to ice, intensifying its internal contradictions, liquid water will result: a change of quality from solid to liquid. If you continue adding heat, the liquid water will eventually turn into steam, a second qualitative change.

Each quality has quantitative limits, and when it goes beyond them, the quality changes into another quality. Although people live to different ages, increasing age eventually leads to death, a qualitative change from life. Life eventually reaches a limit, and death results. While humans are alive, the quality of being healthy has quantitative limits. Consistently overeating makes a person fat and can eventually lead to death; consistently eating too little results in malnutrition and eventually death.

Many scientists recently combined their data on Alzheimer's patients into one huge database. This made it possible to find biological markers for the disease that no research group could have found alone. When the number of Party members increases enough, some old forms of organization and leadership will not work any longer, and new ones must be developed.

When one quality of a thing or process changes into an opposite quality, some other qualities change along with it and some do not. Qualitative change preserves some qualities and changes others. Water that boils is still water. A worker who gets laid off is still a member of the working class, despite the change of quality from employed to unemployed.

The development of the contradictions inside the capitalist system produces qualitative change, as some aspects of the system change from minor features to major ones, and vice-versa. As intensifying rivalry among capitalist empires--the US, Russia, China, Europe, etc.--produces larger wars, the US capitalists need to make a qualitative change into fascism within the US itself, lowering the living standard of US workers, increasing repression, and calling this "patriotic" and "sacrifice for the common good."

The idea that quantity eventually changes into quality helps us understand how the communist movement grows. Consistent political work, especially distributing the Party press and recruiting members in key sectors like industry and the military, eventually changes the quality of the movement from merely opposing the capitalist class to defeating it and taking state power.

Before the revolution, however, our movement will go through many qualitative changes. If a shop goes from one or two Red Flag readers to, say, 10% readers, it will mean a qualitative change in the political understanding of the workers in that shop. It would probably mean the party becoming the actual leader of the workers in that shop, another qualitative change. When this happens in enough shops, schools and military units, the result will be a qualitatively new stage at which mass recruitment to the party is possible, and communist revolution is closer.