

CHAPTER TWO
THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE OF EMPIRIO-
CRITICISM AND OF DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM. II

1. THE "THING-IN-ITSELF," OR V. CHERNOV REFUTES FREDERICK ENGELS

Our Machians have written so much about the "thing-in itself" that were all their writings to be collected they would result in mountains of printed matter. The "thing-in-itself" is a veritable *bete noire* [44] with Bogdanov and Valentinov, Bazarov and Chernov, Berman and Yushkevich. There is no abuse they have not hurled at it, there is no ridicule they have not showered on it. And against whom are they breaking lances because of this luckless "thing-in-itself"? Here a division of the philosophers of Russian Machism according to political parties begins. All the would-be Marxists among the Machians are combating Plekhanov's "thing-in-itself"; they accuse Plekhanov of having become entangled and straying into Kantianism, and of having forsaken Engels. (We shall discuss the first

accusation in the fourth chapter; the second accusation we shall deal with now.) The Machian Mr. Victor Chernov, a Narodnik and a sworn enemy of Marxism, opens a direct campaign against Engels because of the "thing-in-itself."

One is ashamed to confess it, but it would be a sin to conceal the fact that on this occasion open enmity towards Marxism has made Mr. Victor Chernov a more principled literary antagonist than our comrades in party and opponents in philosophy.[45] For only a guilty conscience (and in addition, perhaps, ignorance of materialism?) could have been responsible for the fact that the Machian would-be Marxists have diplomatically set Engels aside, have completely ignored Feuerbach and are circling exclusively around Plekhanov. It is indeed circling around one spot, tedious and petty pecking and caviling at a disciple

of Engels, while a frank examination of the views of the teacher himself is cravenly avoided. And since the purpose of these cursory comments is to disclose the reactionary character of Machism and the correctness of the materialism of Marx and Engels, we shall leave aside the fussing of the Machian would-be Marxists with Plekhanov and turn directly to Engels, whom the empirio-critic Mr. V. Chernov refuted. In his *Philosophical and Sociological Studies* (Moscow, 1907 -- a collection of articles written, with few exceptions, before 1900) the article "Marxism and Transcendental Philosophy" bluntly begins with an attempt to set up Marx against Engels and accuses the latter of "naive dogmatic materialism," of "the crudest materialist dogmatism" (pp. 29 and 32). Mr. V. Chernov states that a "sufficient" example of this is Engels' argument against the Kantian thing-in itself and Hume's philosophical line. We shall begin with this argument.

In his *Ludwig Feuerbach*, Engels declares that the fundamental philosophical trends are materialism and idealism. Materialism regards nature as primary and spirit as secondary; it places being first and thought second. Idealism holds the contrary view. This root distinction between the "two great camps" into which the philosophers of the "various schools" of idealism and materialism are divided Engels takes as the cornerstone, and he directly charges with "confusion" those who use the terms idealism and materialism in any other way.

"The great basic question of all philosophy," Engels says, "especially of modern philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being," of "spirit and na-

ture." Having divided the philosophers into "two great camps" on this basic question, Engels shows that there is "yet another side" to this basic philosophical question, viz., "in what relation do our thoughts about the world surrounding us stand to this world itself? Is our thinking capable of the cognition of the real world? Are we able in our ideas and notions of the real world to produce a correct reflection of reality?"¹

"The overwhelming majority of philosophers give an affirmative answer to this question," says Engels, including under this head not only all materialists but also the most consistent idealists, as, for example, the absolute idealist Hegel, who considered the real world to be the realisation of some pre-

page 107

mundane "absolute idea," while the human spirit, correctly apprehending the real world, apprehends in it and through it the "absolute idea."

"In addition [i.e., to the materialists and the consistent idealists] there is yet a set of different philosophers -- those who question the possibility of any cognition, or at least of an exhaustive cognition, of the world. To them, among the more modern ones, belong Hume and Kant, and they have played a very important role in philosophical development....' [46]

Mr. V. Chernov, quoting these words of Engels', launches into the fray. To the word "Kant" he makes the following annotation:

"In 1888 it was rather strange to term such philosophers as Kant and especially Hume as 'modern.' At that time it was more

¹ Fr. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, etc., 4th Germ. ed., p. 15. Russian translation, Geneva ed., 1905, pp. 12-13. Mr. V. Chernov translates the word 'Spiegelbild' literally (a mirror reflection), accusing Plekhanov of presenting the theory of Engels "in a very weakened form" by speaking in Russian simply of a "reflection" instead of a "mirror reflection." This is mere caviling. 'Spiegelbild' in German is also used simply in the sense of Abbild [reflection, image].

natural to hear mentioned such names as Cohen, Lange, Riehl, Laas, Liebmann, Goring, etc. But Engels, evidently, was not well versed in 'modern' philosophy" (op. cit., p. 33, note 2).

Mr. V. Chernov is true to himself. Equally in economic and philosophical questions he reminds one of Turgenev's Voroshilov, [47] annihilating now the ignorant Kautsky,² now the ignorant Engels by merely referring to "scholarly" names! The only trouble is that all the authorities mentioned by Mr. Chernov are the very Neo-Kantians whom Engels refers to on this very same page of his *Ludwig Feuerbach* as theoretical reactionaries, who were endeavouring to resurrect the corpse of the long since refuted doctrines of Kant and Hume. The good Chernov did not understand that it is just these

page 108

authoritative (for Machism) and muddled professors whom Engels is refuting in his argument!

Having pointed out that Hegel had already presented the "decisive" arguments against Hume and Kant, and that the additions made by Feuerbach are more ingenious than profound, Engels continues:

"The most telling refutation of this as of all other philosophical crotchetts (Schrullen) is practice, namely, experiment and industry. If we are able to prove the correctness of our conception of a natural process by making it ourselves, bringing it into being out of its conditions and making it serve our own purposes into the bargain, then there is an end to the Kantian incomprehensible [or ungraspable, unfassbaren -- this important word is omitted both in Plekhanov's translation and in Mr. V. Chernov's translation] 'thing-in-itself.' The chemical substances produced in the bodies of plants and animals remained just such 'things-in-themselves' until organic chemis-

² V. Ilyin, *The Agrarian Question*, Part I, St. Petersburg, 1908, p. 1908.

try began to produce them one after another, where upon the 'thing-in-itself' became a 'thing for us,' as, for instance, alizarin, the colouring matter of the madder, which we no longer trouble to grow in the madder roots in the field, but produce much more cheaply and simply from coal tar" (*op. cit.*, p. 16). [48]

Mr. V. Chernov, quoting this argument, finally loses patience and completely annihilates poor Engels. Listen to this: "No Neo-Kantian will of course be surprised that from coal tar we can produce alizarin 'more cheaply and simply.' But that together with alizarin it is possible to produce from this coal tar and just as cheaply a refutation of the 'thing-in-itself' will indeed seem a wonderful and unprecedented discovery -- and not to the Neo-Kantians alone.

page 109

"Engels, apparently, having learned that according to Kant the 'thing-in-itself' is unknowable, turned this theorem into its converse and concluded that everything unknown is a thing-in-itself" (p. 33).

Listen, Mr. Machian: lie, but don't overdo it! Why, before the very eyes of the public you are misrepresenting the very quotation from Engels you have set out to "tear to pieces," without even having grasped the point under discussion!

In the first place, it is not true that Engels "is producing a refutation of the thing-in-itself." Engels said explicitly and clearly that he was refuting the Kantian ungraspable (or unknowable) thing-in-itself. Mr. Chernov confuses Engels' materialist conception of the existence of things independently of our consciousness. In the second place, if Kant's theorem reads that the thing-in-itself is unknowable, the "converse" theorem would be: the unknowable is the thing in-itself. Mr. Chernov replaces the unknowable by the unknown, without realising that by such a substitution he has again confused and distorted the materialist view of Engels!

Mr. V. Chernov is so bewildered by the reactionaries of official philosophy whom he has taken as his mentors that he raises an outcry against Engels without in the least comprehending the meaning of the example quoted. Let us try to explain to this representative of Machism what it is all about.

Engels clearly and explicitly states that he is contesting both Hume and Kant. Yet there is no mention whatever in Hume of "unknowable things-in-themselves." What then is there in common between these two philosophers? It is that they both in principle fence off "the appearance" from that which appears, the perception from that which is perceived the thing-for-us from the "thing-in-itself." Furthermore,

page 110

Hume does not want to hear of the "thing-in-itself," he regards the very thought of it as philosophically inadmissible, as "metaphysics" (as the Humeans and Kantians call it); whereas Kant grants the existence of the "thing-in-itself," but declares it to be "unknowable," fundamentally different from the appearance, belonging to a fundamentally different realm, the realm of the "beyond" (Jenseits), inaccessible to knowledge, but revealed to faith.

What is the kernel of Engels' objections? Yesterday we did not know that coal tar contained alizarin. Today we learned that it does. The question is, did coal tar contain alizarin yesterday?

Of course it did. To doubt it would be to make a mockery of modern science.

And if that is so, three important epistemological conclusions follow:

1) Things exist independently of our consciousness, independently of our perceptions, outside of us, for it is beyond doubt that alizarin existed in coal tar yesterday and it is equally beyond doubt that yesterday we knew nothing of the existence of this alizarin and received no sensations from it.

2) There is definitely no difference in principle between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself, and there can be no such difference. The only difference is between what is known and what is not yet known. And philosophical inventions of specific boundaries between the one and the other, inventions to the effect that the thing-in-itself is "beyond" phenomena (Kant), or that we can and must fence ourselves off by some philosophical partition from the problem of a world which in one part or another is still unknown but which exists outside us (Hume) -- all this is the sheerest nonsense, Schrulle, [49] crotchet, invention.

page 111

3) In the theory of knowledge, as in every other branch of science, we must think dialectically, that is, we must not regard our knowledge as ready-made and unalterable, but must determine how knowledge emerges from ignorance, how incomplete, inexact knowledge becomes more complete and more exact.

Once we accept the point of view that human knowledge develops from ignorance, we shall find millions of examples of it just as simple as the discovery of alizarin in coal tar, millions of observations not only in the history of science and technology but in the everyday life of each and every one of us that illustrate the transformation of "things-in-themselves" into "things-for-us," the appearance of "phenomena" when our sense-organs experience an impact from external objects, the disappearance of "phenomena" when some obstacle prevents the action upon our sense-organs of an object which we know to exist. The sole and unavoidable deduction to be made from this -- a deduction which all of us make in everyday practice and which materialism deliberately places at the foundation of its epistemology -- is that outside us, and independently of us, there exist objects, things, bodies and that our perceptions are images of the external world.

Mach's converse theory (that bodies are complexes of sensations) is nothing but pitiful idealist nonsense. And Mr. Chernov, in his "analysis" of Engels, once more revealed his Voroshilov qualities; Engels' simple example seemed to him "strange and naive"! He regards only gelehrte fiction as genuine philosophy and is unable to distinguish professorial eclecticism from the consistent materialist theory of knowledge.

It is both impossible and unnecessary to analyse Mr. Chernov's other arguments; they all amount to the same pretentious rigmarole (like the assertion that for the materialists the

page 112

atom is the thing-in-itself!). We shall note only the argument which is relevant to our discussion (an argument which has apparently led certain people astray), viz., that Marx supposedly differed from Engels. The question at issue is Marx's second *Thesis on Feuerbach* and Plekhanov's translation of the word 'Diesseitigkeit'. [50]

Here is the second Thesis:

"The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory, but is a practical question. In practice man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the 'this-sidedness' of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question." [51]

Instead of "prove the this-sidedness of thinking" (a literal translation), Plekhanov has: prove that thinking "does not stop at this side of phenomena." And Mr. V. Chernov cries: "The contradiction between Marx and Engels has been eliminated very simply.... It appears as though Marx, like Engels, asserted the knowability of things-in-themselves and the 'other-sidedness' of thinking" (loc. cit. p. 34, note).

What can be done with a Voroshilov whose every phrase makes confusion worse confounded! It is sheer ignorance, Mr. Victor Chernov, not to know that all

materialists assert the knowability of things-in-themselves. It is ignorance, Mr. Victor Chernov, or infinite slovenliness, to skip the very first phrase of the thesis and not to realise that the "objective truth" (gegenstandliche Wahrheit) of thinking means nothing else than the existence of objects (i.e., "things-in-themselves") truly reflected by thinking. It is sheer illiteracy Mr. Victor Chernov, to assert that from Plekhanov's paraphrase (Plekhanov gave a paraphrase and not a translation) "it appears as though" Marx defended the other-sidedness

page 113

of thought. Because only the Humeans and the Kantians confine thought to "this side of phenomena." But for all materialists, including those of the seventeenth century whom Bishop Berkeley demolished (see Introduction), "phenomena" are "things-for-us" or copies of the "objects in themselves." Of course, Plekhanov's free paraphrase is not obligatory upon those who desire to know Marx himself, but it is obligatory to try to understand what Marx meant and not to prance about like a Voroshilov.

It is interesting to note that while among people who call themselves socialists we encounter an unwillingness or inability to grasp the meaning of Marx's "Theses," bourgeois writers, specialists in philosophy, sometimes manifest greater scrupulousness. I know of one such writer who studied the philosophy of Feuerbach and in connection with it Marx's "Theses." That writer is Albert Levy, who devoted the third chapter of the second part of his book on Feuerbach to an examination of the influence of Feuerbach on Marx.³ Without go-

ing into the question whether L´vý always interprets Feuerbach correctly, or how he criticises Marx from the ordinary bourgeois standpoint, we shall only quote his opinion of the philosophical content of Marx's famous "Theses." Regarding the first Thesis, L´vý says: "Marx, on the one hand, together with all earlier materialism and with Feuerbach, recognises that there are real and distinct objects outside us corresponding to our ideas of things...."

page114

As the reader sees, it was immediately clear to Albert Levy that the basic position not only of Marxist materialism but of every materialism, of "all earlier" materialism, is the recognition of real objects outside us, to which objects our ideas "correspond." This elementary truth, which holds good for all materialism in general, is unknown only to the Russian Machians. Levy continues:

"... On the other hand, Marx expresses regret that materialism had left it to idealism to appreciate the importance of the active forces [i.e., human practice], which, according to Marx, must be wrested from idealism in order to integrate them into the materialist system. But it will of course be necessary to give these active forces the real and sensible character which idealism cannot grant them. Marx's idea, then, is the following: just as to our ideas there correspond real objects outside us, so to our phenomenal activity there corresponds a real activity outside us, an activity of things. In this sense humanity partakes of the absolute, not only through theoretical knowledge but also through practical activity; thus all human activity acquires a dignity, a nobility, that permits it to advance hand in hand with theory. Revolutionary activity henceforth acquires a metaphysical significance...."

Albert Levy is a professor. And a proper professor must abuse the materialists as being metaphysicians. For the professorial idealists, Humeans and Kantians every

³ Albert Levy, *La philosophie de Feuerbach et son influence sur la littérature allemande* [Feuerbach's Philosophy and His Influence on German Literature] Paris, 1904, pp. 249-338, on the influence of Feuerbach on Marx, and pp. 290-98, an examination of the "Theses."

kind of materialism is "metaphysics," because beyond the phenomenon (appearance, the thing-for-us) it discerns a reality outside us. A. Levy is therefore essentially right when he says that in Marx's opinion there corresponds to man's "phenomenal activity" "an activity of things," that is to say, human practice has not only a phenomenal (in the Humean

page 115

and Kantian sense of the term), but an objectively real significance. The criterion of practice -- as we shall show in detail in its proper place (§ 6) -- has entirely different meanings for Mach and Marx. "Humanity partakes of the absolute" means that human knowledge reflects absolute truth (see

2. "TRANSCENDENCE," OR BAZAROV "REVISES" ENGELS

But while the Russian Machian would-be Marxists diplomatically evaded one of the most emphatic and explicit statements of Engels, they "revised" another statement of his in quite the Chernov manner. However tedious and laborious the task of correcting distortions and perversions of the meaning of quotations may be, he who wishes to speak of the Russian Machians cannot avoid it.

Here is Bazarov's revision of Engels.

page 116

In the article "On Historical Materialism,"⁴ Engels speaks of the English agnostics (philosophers of Hume's trend of thought) as follows:

"... Our agnostic admits that all our knowledge is based upon the information

below, § 5); the practice of humanity, by verifying our ideas, corroborates what in those ideas corresponds to absolute truth. A. Levy continues:

"... Having reached this point, Marx naturally encounters the objections of the critics. He has admitted the existence of things-in-themselves, of which our theory is the human translation. He cannot evade the usual objection: what assurance have you of the accuracy of the translation? What proof have you that the human mind gives you an objective truth? To this objection Marx replies in his second Thesis" (p. 291).

The reader sees that Levy does not for a moment doubt that Marx recognised the existence of things-in-themselves!

(Mitteilungen) imparted to us by our senses...."

Let us note for the benefit of our Machians that the agnostic (Humean) also starts from sensations and recognises no other source of knowledge. The agnostic is a pure "positivist," be it said for the benefit of the adherents of the "latest positivism!"

"... But, he [the agnostic] adds, how do we know that our senses give us correct representations (Abbilder) of the objects we perceive through them? And he proceeds to inform us that, whenever he speaks of objects or their qualities, he does in reality not mean these objects and qualities, of which he cannot know anything for certain, but merely the impressions which they have produced on his senses...." [52]

What two lines of philosophical tendency does Engels contrast here? One line is that the senses give us faithful images of things, that we know the things themselves, that the outer world acts on our sense-organs. This is materialism -- with which the agnostic is not in agreement. What then is the essence of the agnostic's line? It is that he does not go beyond sensations, that he stops on this side of phe-

⁴ This article forms the Introduction to the English edition of Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* and was translated by Engels himself into German in the Neue Zeit XI, I (1892-93, No. 1), S. 15 et seq. The only Russian translation, if I am not mistaken, is to be found in the symposium *Historical Materialism*, p. 162, et seq. Bazarov quotes the passage in the Studies "in" the *Philosophy of Marxism*, p. 64.

nomena, refusing to see anything "certain" beyond the

page 117

boundary of sensations. About these things themselves (i.e., about the things-in-themselves, the "objects in themselves," as the materialists whom Berkeley opposed called them), we can know nothing certain -- so the agnostic categorically insists. Hence, in the controversy of which Engels speaks the materialist affirms the existence and knowability of things-in-themselves. The agnostic does not even admit the thought of things-in-themselves and insists that we can know nothing certain about them.

It may be asked in what way the position of the agnostic as outlined by Engels differs from the position of Mach? In the "new" term "element"? But it is sheer childishness to believe that a nomenclature can change a philosophical line, that sensations when called "elements" cease to be sensations! Or does the difference lie in the "new" idea that the very same elements constitute the physical in one connection and the psychical in another? But did you not observe that Engels' agnostic also puts "impressions" in place of the "things themselves"? That means that in essence the agnostic too differentiates between physical and psychical "impressions"! Here again the difference is exclusively one of nomenclature. When Mach says that objects are complexes of sensations, Mach is a Berkeleyan; when Mach "corrects" himself, and says that "elements" (sensations) can be physical in one connection and psychical in another, Mach is an agnostic, a Humean. Mach does not go beyond these two lines in his philosophy, and it requires extreme naiveté to take this muddlehead at his word and believe that he has actually "transcended" both materialism and idealism.

Engels deliberately mentions no names in his exposition, and criticises not individual representatives of Humism (profes-

sional philosophers are very prone to call original systems

page 118

the petty variations one or another of them makes in terminology or argument), but the whole Humean line. Engels criticises not particulars but the essential thing; he examines the fundamental wherein all Humeans deviate from materialism, and his criticism therefore embraces Mill, Huxley and Mach alike. Whether we say (with J. S. Mill) that matter is the permanent possibility of sensation, or (with Ernst Mach) that matter is more or less stable complexes of "elements" -- sensations -- we remain within the bounds of agnosticism, or Humism. Both standpoints, or more correctly both formulations, are covered by Engels' exposition of agnosticism: the agnostic does not go beyond sensations and asserts that he cannot know anything certain about their source, about their original, etc. And if Mach attributes such great importance to his disagreement with Mill on this question, it is because Mach comes under Engels' characterisation of a professor-in-ordinary: Flohknacker. [53] Ay, gentlemen, you have only cracked a flea by making petty corrections and by altering terminology instead of entirely abandoning the basic, half-hearted standpoint.

And how does the materialist Engels -- at the beginning of the article Engels explicitly and emphatically contrasts his materialism to agnosticism -- refute the foregoing arguments?

"... Now, this line of reasoning seems undoubtedly hard to beat by mere argumentation. But before there was argumentation there was action. *Im Anfang war die That* [In the beginning was the act]. And human action had solved the difficulty long before human ingenuity invented it. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. From the moment we turn to our own use these objects, according to the qualities we perceive in them, we put to an infallible test the correctness or otherwise of our sense-

page 119

perceptions. If these perceptions have been wrong, then our estimate of the use to which an object can be turned must also be wrong, and our attempt must fail. But if we succeed in accomplishing our aim, if we find that the object does agree with our idea of it, and does answer the purpose we intended it for, then that is positive proof that our perceptions of it and of its qualities, so far, agree with reality outside ourselves...."

Thus, the materialist theory, the theory of the reflection of objects by our mind, is here presented with absolute clarity: things exist outside us. Our perceptions and ideas are their images. Verification of these images, differentiation between true and false images, is given by practice. But let us listen to a little more of Engels (Bazarov at this point ends his quotation from Engels, or rather from Plekhanov, for he deems it unnecessary to deal with Engels himself):

"... And whenever we find ourselves face to face with a failure, then we generally are not long in making out the cause that made us fail; we find that the perception upon which we acted was either incomplete and superficial, or combined with the results of other perceptions in a way not warranted by them" (the Russian translation in *On Historical Materialism* is incorrect). "So long as we take care to train and to use our senses properly, and to keep our action within the limits prescribed by perceptions properly made and properly used, so long we shall find that the result of our action proves the conformity (Uebereinstimmung) of our perceptions with the objective (gegenstandlich) nature of the things perceived. Not in one single instance, so far, have we been led to the conclusion that our sense-perceptions, scientifically controlled, induce in our minds ideas respecting the outer world that are, by their very nature, at variance

with reality, or that there is an inherent incompatibility between the outer world and our sense-perceptions of it.

"But then come the Neo-Kantian agnostics and say...."[54]

We shall leave to another time the examination of the arguments of the Neo-Kantians. Let us remark here that anybody in the least acquainted with the subject, or even the least bit attentive, cannot fail to understand that Engels is here expounding the very same materialism against which the Machians are always and everywhere doing battle. And now just watch the manner in which Bazarov revises Engels:

"Here," writes Bazarov in connection with the fragment of the quotation we have given, "Engels is actually attacking Kantian idealism...."

It is not true. Bazarov is muddling things. In the passage which he quoted, and which is quoted by us more fully, there is not a syllable either about Kantianism or about idealism. Had Bazarov really read the whole of Engels' article, he could not have avoided seeing that Engels speaks of Neo-Kantianism, and of Kant's whole line, only in the next paragraph, just where we broke off our quotation. And had Bazarov attentively read and reflected on the fragment he himself quotes, he could not have avoided seeing that in the arguments of the agnostic which Engels here refutes there is not a trace of either idealism or Kantianism; for idealism begins only when the philosopher says that things are our sensations, while Kantianism begins when the philosopher says that the thing-in-itself exists but is unknowable. Bazarov confuses Kantianism with Humism; and he confuses them because, being himself a semi-Berkeleyan, semi-Humean of the Machian sect, he does not understand (as will be shown in detail below) the distinction between the Humean and the materialist opposition to Kantianism.

page 121

page 120

"... But, alas!" continues Bazarov, "his argument is aimed against Plekhanov's philosophy just as much as it is against Kantian philosophy. In the school of Plekhanov-Orthodox,[55] as Bogdanov has already pointed out, there is a fatal misunderstanding regarding consciousness. To Plekhanov, as to all idealists, it seems that everything perceptually given, i.e., cognised, is 'subjective'; that to proceed only from what is factually given is to be a solipsist; that real being can be found only beyond the boundaries of everything that is immediately given...."

This is entirely in the spirit of Chernov and his assurances that Liebknecht was a true-Russian Narodnik! If Plekhanov is an idealist who has deserted Engels, then why is it that you, who are supposedly an adherent of Engels, are not a materialist? This is nothing but wretched mystification, Comrade Bazarov! By means of the Machian expression "immediately given" you begin to confuse the difference between agnosticism, idealism and materialism. Don't you understand that such expressions as the "immediately given" and the "factually given" are part of the rigmarole of the Machians, the immanentists, and the other reactionaries in philosophy, a masquerade, whereby the agnostic (and sometimes, as in Mach's case, the idealist too) disposes himself in the cloak of the materialist? For the materialist the "factually given" is the outer world, the image of which is our sensations. For the idealist the "factually given" is sensation, and the outer world is declared to be a "complex of sensations." For the agnostic the "immediately given" is also sensation, but the agnostic does not go on either to the materialist recognition of the reality of the outer world, or to the idealist recognition of the world as our sensation. Therefore your statement that "real being [according to

page 122

Plekhanov] can be found only beyond the boundaries of everything that is immedi-

ately given" is sheer nonsense and inevitably follows from your Machian position. But while you have a perfect right to adopt any position you choose, including a Machian one, you have no right to falsify Engels once you have undertaken to speak of him. And from Engels' words it is perfectly clear that for the materialist real being lies beyond the "sense-perceptions," impressions and ideas of man, while for the agnostic it is impossible to go beyond these perceptions. Bazarov believed Mach, Avenarius, and Schuppe when they said that the "immediately" (or factually) given connects the perceiving self with the perceived environment in the famous "indissoluble" co-ordination, and endeavours, unobserved by the reader, to impute this nonsense to the materialist Engels!

"... It is as though the foregoing passage from Engels was deliberately written by him in a very popular and accessible form in order to dissipate this idealist misunderstanding...."

Not for nought was Bazarov a pupil of Avenarius! He continues his mystification: under the pretence of combating idealism (of which Engels is not speaking here), he smuggles in the idealist "co-ordination." Not bad, Comrade Bazarov!

"... The agnostic asks, how do we know that our subjective senses give us a correct presentation of objects?..."

You are muddling things, Comrade Bazarov! Engels himself does not speak of, and does not even ascribe to his foe the agnostic, such nonsense as "subjective" senses. There are no other senses except human, i.e., "subjective" senses, for we are speaking from the standpoint of man and not of a hobgoblin. You are again trying to impute Machism to Engels, to imply that he says: the agnostic regards senses,

page 123

or, to be more precise, sensations, as only subjective (which the agnostic does not do!), while we and Avenarius have "co-ordinated" the object into an indissoluble

connection with the subject. Not bad, Comrade Bazarov!

"... But what do you term 'correct'? -- Engels rejoins. -- That is correct which is confirmed by our practice; and consequently, since our sense-perceptions are confirmed by experience, they are not 'subjective,' that is, they are not arbitrary, or illusory, but correct and real as such...."

You are muddling things, Comrade Bazarov! You have substituted for the question of the existence of things outside our sensations, perceptions, ideas, the question of the criterion of the correctness of our ideas of "these things themselves," or, more precisely, you are hedging the former question with the help of the latter. But Engels says explicitly and clearly that what distinguishes him from the agnostic is not only the agnostic's doubt as to whether our images are "correct," but also the agnostic's doubt as to whether we may speak of the things themselves, as to whether we may have "certain" knowledge of their existence. Why did Bazarov resort to this juggling? In order to obscure and confound what is the basic question for materialism (and for Engels, as a materialist), viz., the question of the existence of things outside our mind, which, by acting on our sense-organs evoke sensations. It is impossible to be a materialist without answering this question in the affirmative; but one can be a materialist and still differ on what constitutes the criterion of the correctness of the images presented by our senses.

And Bazarov muddles matters still more when he attributes to Engels, in the dispute with the agnostic, the absurd and ignorant expression that our sense-perceptions are confirmed by "experience." Engels did not use and could not

page 124

have used this word here, for Engels was well aware that the idealist Berkeley, the agnostic Hume and the materialist Diderot all had recourse to experience.

"... Inside the limits within which we have to do with objects in practice, perceptions of the object and of its properties coincide with the reality existing outside us. 'To coincide' is somewhat different from being a 'hieroglyphic.' 'They coincide' means that, within the given limits, the sense perception is [Bazarov's italics] the reality existing outside us....

The end crowns the work! Engels has been treated à la Mach, fried and served with a Machian sauce. But take care you do not choke, worthy cooks!

"Sense-perception is the reality existing outside us"!! This is just the fundamental absurdity, the fundamental muddle and falsity of Machism, from which flows all the rest of the balderdash of this philosophy and for which Mach and Avenarius have been embraced by those arrant reactionaries and preachers of priestlore, the immanentists. However much V. Bazarov wriggled, however cunning and diplomatic he was in evading ticklish points, in the end he gave himself away and betrayed his true Machian character! To say that "sense-perception is the reality existing outside us" is to return to Humism, or even Berkeleyanism, concealing itself in the fog of "coordination." This is either an idealist lie or the subterfuge of the agnostic, Comrade Bazarov, for sense-perception is not the reality existing outside us, it is only the image of that reality. Are you trying to make capital of the ambiguous Russian word *sovpadat*? Are you trying to lead the unsophisticated reader to believe that *sovpadat* here means "to be identical," and not "to correspond"? That means basing one's falsification of Engels

page 125

à la Mach on a perversion of the meaning of a quotation, and nothing more.

Take the German original and you will find there the words *stimmen mit*, which means to correspond with, "to voice with" -- the latter translation is literal, for *Stimme* means voice. The words "*stimmen mit*"

cannot mean "to coincide" in the sense of "to be identical." And even for the reader who does not know German but who reads Engels with the least bit of attention, it is perfectly clear, it cannot be otherwise than clear, that Engels throughout his whole argument treats the expression "sense-perception" as the image (Abbild) of the reality existing outside us, and that therefore the word "coincide" can be used in Russian exclusively in the sense of "correspondence," "concurrence," etc. To attribute to Engels the thought that "sense-perception is the reality existing outside us" is such a pearl of Machian distortion, such a flagrant attempt to palm off agnosticism and idealism as materialism, that one must admit that Bazarov has broken all records!

One asks, how can sane people in sound mind and judgment assert that "sense-perception [within what limits is not important] is the reality existing outside us"? The earth is a reality existing outside us. It cannot "coincide" (in the sense of being identical) with our sense-perception, or be in indissoluble co-ordination with it, or be a "complex of elements" in another connection identical with sensation; for the earth existed at a time when there were no men, no sense-organs, no matter organised in that superior form in which its property of sensation is in any way clearly perceptible.

That is just the point, that the tortuous theories of "co-ordination," "introjection," and the newly-discovered world-

page 126

elements which we analysed in Chapter I serve to cover up this idealist absurdity. Bazarov's formulation, so inadvertently and incautiously thrown off by him, is excellent in that it patently reveals that crying absurdity, which otherwise it would have been necessary to excavate from the piles of erudite, pseudoscientific, professorial rigmarole.

All praise to you, Comrade Bazarov! We shall erect a monument to you in your life-

time. On one side we shall engrave your dictum, and on the other: "To the Russian Machian who dug the grave of Machism among the Russian Marxists!"

* * * *

We shall speak separately of the two points touched on by Bazarov in the above-mentioned quotation, viz., the criteria of practice of the agnostics (Machians included) and the materialists, and the difference between the theory of reflection (or images) and the theory of symbols (or hieroglyphs). For the present we shall continue to quote a little more from Bazarov:

"... But what is beyond these boundaries? Of this Engels does not say a word. He nowhere manifests a desire to perform that 'transcendence,' that stepping beyond the boundaries of the perceptually-given world, which lies at the foundation of Plekhanov's 'theory of knowledge'...."

Beyond what "boundaries"? Does he mean the boundaries of the "co-ordination" of Mach and Avenarius, which supposedly indissolubly merges the self with the environment, the subject with the object? The very question put by Bazarov is devoid of meaning. But if he had put the question in an intelligible way, he would have clearly seen that

page 127

the external world lies "beyond the boundaries" of man's sensations, perceptions and ideas. But the word "transcendence" once more betrays Bazarov. It is a specifically Kantian and Humean "fancy" to erect in principle a boundary between the appearance and the thing-in-itself. To pass from the appearance, or, if you will, from our sensation, perception, etc., to the thing existing outside of perception is a transcendence, Kant says; and transcendence is permissible not to knowledge but to faith. Transcendence is not permissible at all, Hume objects. And the Kantians, like the Humeans, call the materialists transcendental realists, "metaphysicians," who ef-

fect an illegitimate passage (in Latin, *transcensus*) from one region to another, fundamentally different, region. In the works of the contemporary professors of philosophy who follow the reactionary line of Kant and Hume, you may encounter (take only the names enumerated by Voroshilov-Chernov) endless repetitions made in a thousand keys of the charge that materialism is "metaphysical" and "transcendent." Bazarov borrowed from the reactionary professors both the word and the line of thought, and flourishes them in the name of "recent positivism"! As a matter of fact the very idea of the "transcendence," i.e., of a boundary in principle between the appearance and the thing-in-itself, is a nonsensical idea of the agnostics (Humeans and Kantians included) and the idealists. We have already explained this in connection with Engels' example of alizarin, and we shall explain it again in the words of Feuerbach and Joseph Dietzgen. But let us first finish with Bazarov's "revision" of Engels:

"... In one place in his *Anti-Duhring*, Engels says that 'being' outside of the realm of perception is an *offene Frage*,

page 128

i.e., a question, for the answer to which, or even for the asking of which we have no data."

Bazarov repeats this argument after the German Machian, Friedrich Adler. This last example is perhaps even worse than the "sense-perception" which "is the reality existing outside us." In his *Anti-Duhring*, p. 31 (5th Germ. ed.), Engels says:

"The unity of the world does not consist in its being, although its being is a pre-condition of its unity, as it must certainly first be, before it can be one. Being, indeed, is always an open question

3. L. FEUERBACH AND J. DIETZGEN ON THE THING-IN-ITSELF

To show how absurd are the assertions of our Machians that the materialists Marx

(*offene Frage*) beyond the point where our sphere of observation (*Gesichtskreis*) ends. The real unity of the world consists in its materiality, and this is proved not by a few juggling phrases, but by a long and wearisome development of philosophy and natural science."^[56]

Behold the new hash our cook has prepared. Engels is speaking of being beyond the point where our sphere of observation ends, for instance, the existence of men on Mars. Obviously, such being is indeed an open question. And Bazarov, as though deliberately refraining from giving the full quotation, paraphrases Engels as saying that "being beyond the realm of perception" is an open question!! This is the sheerest nonsense and Engels is here being saddled with the views of those professors of philosophy whom Bazarov is accustomed to take at their word and whom Dietzgen justly called the graduated funkeys of clericalism or fideism. Indeed, fideism positively asserts that something does exist "beyond the world of perception." The materialists, in agreement with natural science, vigorously deny this. An intermediate position is held by those professors, Kantians, Humeans (including the Machians), etc., "who have found the truth outside materialism and idealism" and who "com-

page 129

promise," saying: it is an open question. Had Engels ever said anything like this, it would be a shame and disgrace to call oneself a Marxist.

But enough! Half a page of quotation from Bazarov presents such a complete tangle that we are obliged to content ourselves with what has already been said and not to continue following all the wavering of Machian thought.

and Engels denied the existence of things-in-themselves (i.e., things outside our sen-

sations, perceptions, and so forth) and the possibility of their cognition, and that they admitted the existence of an absolute boundary between the appearance and the thing-in-itself, we shall give a few more quotations from Feuerbach. The whole trouble with our Machians is that they set about parroting the words of the reactionary professors on dialectical materialism without themselves knowing anything either of dialectics or of materialism.

"Modern philosophical spiritualism," says Feuerbach, "which calls itself idealism, utters the annihilating, in its own opinion, stricture against materialism that it is dogmatism, viz., that it starts from the sensuous (*sinnlichen*) world as though from an undisputed (*ausgemacht*) objective truth, and assumes that it is a world in itself (*an sich*), i.e., as existing without us, while in reality the world is only a product of spirit" (*Samtliche Werke*, X. Band, 1866, S. 185).

page 130

This seems clear enough. The world in itself is a world that exists without us. This materialism of Feuerbach's, like the materialism of the seventeenth century contested by Bishop Berkeley, consisted in the recognition that "objects in themselves" exist outside our mind. The *an sich* (of itself, or "in itself") of Feuerbach is the direct opposite of the *an sich* of Kant. Let us recall the excerpt from Feuerbach already quoted, where he rebukes Kant because for the latter the "thing-in-itself" is an "abstraction without reality." For Feuerbach the "thing-in-itself" is an "abstraction with reality," that is, a world existing outside us, completely knowable and fundamentally not different from "appearance."

Feuerbach very ingeniously and clearly explains how ridiculous it is to postulate a "transcendence" from the world of phenomena to the world in itself, a sort of impassable gulf created by the priests and taken over from them by the professors of philosophy. Here is one of his explanations:

"Of course, the products of fantasy are also products of nature, for the force of fantasy, like all other human forces, is in the last analysis (zuletzt) both in its basis and in its origin a force of nature; nevertheless, a human being is a being distinguished from the sun, moon and stars, from stones, animals and plants, in a word, from those beings (*Wesen*) which he designates by the general name, 'nature'; and consequently, man's presentations (*Bilder*) of the sun, moon and stars and the other beings of nature (*Naturwesen*), although these presentations are products of nature, are yet products distinct from their objects in nature" (*Werke*, Band VII, Stuttgart, 1903, S. 516).

The objects of our ideas are distinct from our ideas, the thing-in-itself is distinct from the thing-for-us, for the latter is only a part, or only one aspect, of the former, just as

page 131

man himself is only a fragment of the nature reflected in his ideas.

"... The taste-nerve is just as much a product of nature as salt is, but it does not follow from this that the taste of salt is directly as such an objective property of salt, that what salt is merely as an object of sensation it also is in itself (*an und fur sich*), hence that the sensation of salt on the tongue is a property of salt thought of without sensation (des ohne Empfindung gedachten Salzes)...." And several pages earlier: "Saltiness, as a taste, is the subjective expression of an objective property of salt" (*ibid*, p. 514).

Sensation is the result of the action of a thing-in-itself, existing objectively outside us, upon our sense-organs -- such is Feuerbach's theory. Sensation is a subjective image of the objective world, of the world *an und fur sich*.

"... So is man also a being of nature (*Naturwesen*), like sun, star, plant, animal, and stone, nevertheless, he is distinct from nature, and, consequently, nature in the

head and heart of man is distinct from nature outside the human head and heart."

"... However, this object, viz., man, is the only object in which, according to the statement of the idealists themselves, the requirement of the 'identity of object and subject' is realised; for man is an object whose equality and unity with my being are beyond all possible doubt.... And is not one man for another, even the most intimate, an object of fantasy, of the imagination? Does not each man comprehend another in his own way, after his own mind (in und nach seinem Sinne)? ... And if even between man and man, between mind and mind, there is a very considerable difference which it is impossible to ignore, how much greater must be the difference between an unthinking, non-human,

page 132

dissimilar (to us) being in itself (Wesen an sich) and the same being as we think of it, perceive it and apprehend it?" (ibid., p. 518).

All the mysterious, sage and subtle distinctions between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself are sheer philosophical balderdash. In practice each one of us has observed times without number the simple and palpable transformation of the "thing-in-itself" into phenomenon, into the "thing-for-us." It is precisely this transformation that is cognition. The "doctrine" of Machism that since we know only sensations, we cannot know of the existence of anything beyond the bounds of sensation, is an old sophistry of idealist and agnostic philosophy served up with a new sauce.

Joseph Dietzgen is a dialectical materialist. We shall show below that his mode of expression is often inexact, that he is often not free from confusion, a fact which has been seized upon by various foolish people (Eugen Dietzgen among them) and of course by our Machians. But they did not take the trouble or were unable to analyse the dominant line of his philosophy and to

disengage his materialism from alien elements.

"Let us take the world as the 'thing-in-itself,'" says Dietzgen in his *The Nature of the Workings of the Human Mind*. "We shall easily see that the 'world in itself' and the world as it appears to us, the phenomena of the world, differ from each other only as the whole differs from its parts" (Germ. ed., 1903, p. 65). "A phenomenon differs no more and no less from the thing which produces it than the ten-mile stretch of a road differs from the road itself" (pp. 71-72). There is not, nor can there be, any essential difference here, any "transcendence," or "innate disagreement." But a difference there is, to be sure, viz., the passage beyond the

page 133

bounds of sense-perceptions to the existence of things outside us.

"We learn by experience (wir erfahren)," says Dietzgen in his *Excursions of a Socialist into the Domain of the Theory of Knowledge*, "that each experience is only a part of that which, in the words of Kant, passes beyond the bounds of all experience.... For a consciousness that has become conscious of its own nature, each particle, be it of dust, or of stone, or of wood, is something unknowable in its full extent (*Unauskenntliches*), i.e., each particle is inexhaustible material for the human faculty of cognition and, consequently, something which passes beyond experience" (*Kleinere philosophische Schriften* [Smaller Philosophical Essays], 1903, S. 199).

You see: in the words of Kant, i.e., adopting -- exclusively for purposes of popularisation, for purposes of contrast -- Kant's erroneous, confusing terminology, Dietzgen recognises the passage "beyond experience." This is a good example of what the Machians are grasping at when they pass from materialism to agnosticism: you see, they say, we do not wish to go "beyond experience", for us "sense-

perception is the reality existing outside us."

"Unhealthy mysticism [Dietzgen says, objecting precisely to such a philosophy] unscientifically separates the absolute truth from the relative truth. It makes of the thing as it appears and the 'thing-in-itself,' that is, of the appearance and the verity, two categories which differ *toto coelo* [completely, fundamentally] from each other and are not contained in any common category" (S. 200).

We can now judge the knowledge and ingenuity of Bogdanov, the Russian Machian, who does not wish to acknowl-

page 134
edge himself a Machian and wishes to be regarded as a Marxist in philosophy.

"A golden mean [between "panpsychism and panmaterialism"] has been adopted by materialists of a more critical shade who have rejected the absolute unknowability of the 'thing-in-itself,' but at the same time regard it as being fundamentally [Bogdanov's *italics*] different from the 'phenomenon' and, therefore, always only 'dimly discernible' in it, outside of experience as far as its content is concerned [that is, presumably, as far as the "elements" are concerned, which are not the same as elements of experience], but yet lying within the bounds of what is called the forms of experience, i.e., time, space and causality. Such is approximately the standpoint of the French materialists of the eighteenth century and among the modern philosophers -- Engels and his Russian follower, Beltov" [57] (*Em-*

pirio-Monism, Bk. II, 2nd ed., 1907, pp. 40-41).

This is a complete muddle. 1) The materialists of the seventeenth century, against whom Berkeley argues, hold that "objects in themselves" are absolutely knowable, for our presentations, ideas, are only copies or reflections of those objects, which exist "outside the mind" (see Introduction). 2) Feuerbach, and J. Dietzgen after him, vigorously dispute any "fundamental" difference between the *thing-in-itself* and the phenomenon, and Engels disposes of this view by his brief example of the transformation of the "*thing-in-itself*" into the "*thing-for-us*." 3) Finally, to maintain that the materialists regard things-in-themselves as "always only dimly discernible in the phenomenon" is sheer nonsense, as we have seen from Engels' refutation of the agnostic. The reason for Bogdanov's distortion of materialism lies in his failure to understand the relation of absolute truth to relative truth

page 135
(of which we shall speak later). As regards the "outside-of-experience" *thing-in-itself* and the "elements of experience," these are already the beginnings of the Machian muddle of which we have already said enough.

Parroting the incredible nonsense uttered by the reactionary professors about the materialists, disavowing Engels in 1907, and attempting to "revise" Engels into agnosticism in 1908 -- such is the philosophy of the "recent positivism" of the Russian Machians!

4. DOES OBJECTIVE TRUTH EXIST?

Bogdanov declares: "As I understand it, Marxism contains a denial of the unconditional objectivity of any truth whatsoever, the denial of all eternal truths" (*Empirio-Monism*, Bk. III, pp. iv-v). What is meant by "unconditional objectivity"? "Truth for all eternity" is "an objective truth in the abso-

lute meaning of the word," says Bogdanov in the same passage, and agrees to recognise "objective truth only within the limits of a given epoch."

Two questions are obviously confused here: 1) Is there such a thing as objective truth, that is, can human ideas have a con-

tent that does not depend on a subject, that does not depend either on a human being, or on humanity? 2) If so, can human ideas, which give expression to objective truth, express it all at one time, as a whole, unconditionally, absolutely, or only approximately, relatively? This second question is a question of the relation of absolute truth to relative truth.

Bogdanov replies to the second question clearly, explicitly and definitely by rejecting even the slightest admission

page 136

of absolute truth and by accusing Engels of eclecticism for making such an admission. Of this discovery of eclecticism in Engels by A. Bogdanov we shall speak separately later on. For the present we shall confine ourselves to the first question, which Bogdanov, without saying so explicitly, likewise answers in the negative -- for although it is possible to deny the element of relativity in one or another human idea without denying the existence of objective truth, it is impossible to deny absolute truth without denying the existence of objective truth.

"... The criterion of objective truth," writes Bogdanov a little further on (p. ix), "in Beltov's sense, does not exist truth is an ideological form, an organising form of human experience...."

Neither "Beltov's sense" -- for it is a question of one of the fundamental philosophical problems and not of Beltov -- nor the criterion of truth -- which must be treated separately, without confounding it with the question of whether objective truth exists -- has anything to do with the case here. Bogdanov's negative answer to the latter question is clear: if truth is only an ideological form, then there can be no truth independent of the subject, of humanity, for neither Bogdanov nor we know any other ideology but human ideology. And Bogdanov's negative answer emerges still more clearly from the second half of his statement: if truth is a form of human experience, then there can be no truth independ-

ent of humanity; there can be no objective truth.

Bogdanov's denial of objective truth is agnosticism and subjectivism. The absurdity of this denial is evident even from the single example of a scientific truth quoted above. Natural science leaves no room for doubt that its assertion that the earth existed prior to man is a truth. This is entirely

page 137

compatible with the materialist theory of knowledge: the existence of the thing reflected independent of the reflector (the independence of the external world from the mind) is a fundamental tenet of materialism. The assertion made by science that the earth existed prior to man is an objective truth. This proposition of natural science is incompatible with the philosophy of the Machians and with their doctrine of truth: if truth is an organising form of human experience, then the assertion that the earth exists outside human experience cannot be true.

But that is not all. If truth is only an organising form of human experience, then the teachings, say, of Catholicism are also true. For there is not the slightest doubt that Catholicism is an "organising form of human experience." Bogdanov himself senses the crying falsity of his theory and it is extremely interesting to watch how he attempts to extricate himself from the swamp into which he has fallen.

"The basis of objectivity," we read in Book I of *Empirio-Monism*, "must lie in the sphere of collective experience. We term those data of experience objective which have the same vital meaning for us and for other people, those data upon which not only we construct our activities without contradiction, but upon which, we are convinced, other people must also base themselves in order to avoid contradiction. The objective character of the physical world consists in the fact that it exists not for me personally, but for everybody [that is not true! It exists independently of "every-

body"!], and has a definite meaning for everybody, the same, I am convinced, as for me. The objectivity of the physical series is its *universal significance*" (p. 25, Bogdanov's italics). "The objectivity of the physical bodies we encounter in our experience is in the last analysis established by the mutual verification and co-

page 138

ordination of the utterances of various people. In general, the physical world is socially-co-ordinated, socially-harmonised, in a word, *socially-organised experience*" (p. 36, Bogdanov's italics).

We shall not repeat that this is a fundamentally untrue, idealist definition, that the physical world exists independently of humanity and of human experience, that the physical world existed at a time when no "sociality" and no "organisation" of human experience was possible, and so forth. We shall now stop to expose the Machian philosophy from another aspect, namely, that objectivity is so defined that religious doctrines, which undoubtedly possess a "universal significance," and so forth, come under the definition. But listen to Bogdanov again: "We remind the reader once more that 'objective' experience is by no means the same as 'social' experience.... Social experience is far from being altogether socially organised and always contains various contradictions, so that certain of its parts do not agree with others. Sprites and hobgoblins may exist in the sphere of social experience of a given people or of a given group of people -- for example, the peasantry; but they need not therefore be included under socially-organised or objective experience, for they do not harmonise with the rest of collective experience and do not fit in with its organising forms, for example, with the chain of causality" (p. 45)

Of course it is very gratifying that Bogdanov himself "does not include" the social experience in respect to sprites and hobgoblins under objective experience. But

this well-meant amendment in the spirit of anti-fideism by no means corrects the fundamental error of Bogdanov's whole position. Bogdanov's definition of objectivity and of the physical world completely falls to the ground, since the religious

page 139

doctrine has "universal significance" to a greater degree than the scientific doctrine; the greater part of mankind cling to the former doctrine to this day. Catholicism has been "socially organised, harmonised and co-ordinated" by centuries of development; it "fits in" with the "chain of causality" in the most indisputable manner; for religions did not originate without cause, it is not by accident that they retain their hold over the masses under modern conditions, and it is quite "in the order of things" that professors of philosophy should adapt themselves to them. If this undoubtedly universally significant and undoubtedly highly-organised religious social experience does "not harmonise" with the "experience" of science, it is because there is a radical and fundamental difference between the two, which Bogdanov obliterated when he rejected objective truth. And however much Bogdanov tries to "correct" himself by saying that fideism, or clericalism, does not harmonise with science, the undeniable fact remains that Bogdanov's denial of objective truth completely "harmonises" with fideism. Contemporary fideism does not at all reject science; all it rejects is the "exaggerated claims" of science, to wit, its claim to objective truth. If objective truth exists (as the materialists think), if natural science, reflecting the outer world in human "experience," is alone capable of giving us objective truth, then all fideism is absolutely refuted. But if there is no objective truth, if truth (including scientific truth) is only an organising form of human experience, then this in itself is an admission of the fundamental premise of clericalism, the door is thrown open for it, and a place is cleared

for the "organising forms" of religious experience.

The question arises, does this denial of objective truth belong personally to Bogdanov, who refuses to own himself

page 140

a Machian, or does it follow from the fundamental teachings of Mach and Avenarius? The latter is the only possible answer to the question. If only sensation exists in the world (Avenarius in 1876), if bodies are complexes of sensations (Mach, in the *Analysis of Sensations*), then we are obviously confronted with a philosophical subjectivism which inevitably leads to the denial of objective truth. And if sensations are called "elements" which in one connection give rise to the physical and in another to the psychical, this, as we have seen, only confuses but does not reject the fundamental point of departure of empiriocriticism. Avenarius and Mach recognise sensations as the source of our knowledge. Consequently, they adopt the standpoint of empiricism (all knowledge derives from experience) or sensationalism (all knowledge derives from sensations). But this standpoint gives rise to the difference between the fundamental philosophical trends, idealism and materialism and does not eliminate that difference, no matter in what "new" verbal garb ("elements") you clothe it. Both the solipsist, that is, the subjective idealist, and the materialist may regard sensations as the source of our knowledge. Both Berkeley and Diderot started from Locke. The first premise of the theory of knowledge undoubtedly is that the sole source of our knowledge is sensation. Having recognised the first premise, Mach confuses the second important premise, i.e., regarding the objective reality that is given to man in his sensations, or that forms the source of man's sensations. Starting from sensations, one may follow the line of subjectivism, which leads to solipsism ("bodies are complexes or combinations of sensations"), or the line of objectiv-

ism, which leads to materialism (sensations are images of objects, of the external world). For the first point of view, i.e., agnosticism, or, pushed a little further, subjec-

page 141

tive idealism, there can be no objective truth. For the second point of view, i.e., materialism, the recognition of objective truth is essential. This old philosophical question of the two trends, or rather, of the two possible deductions from the premises of empiricism and sensationalism, is not solved by Mach, it is not eliminated or overcome by him, but is muddled by verbal trickery with the word "element," and the like. Bogdanov's denial of objective truth is an inevitable consequence of Machism as a whole, and not a deviation from it.

Engels in his *Ludwig Feuerbach* calls Hume and Kant philosophers "who question the possibility of any cognition, or at least of an exhaustive cognition, of the world." Engels, therefore, lays stress on what is common both to Hume and Kant, and not on what divides them. Engels states further that "what is decisive in the refutation of this [Humean and Kantian] view has already been said by Hegel" (4th Germ. ed., pp. 15-16). [58] In this connection it seems to me not uninteresting to note that Hegel, declaring materialism to be "a consistent system of empiricism," wrote: "For empiricism the external (das Ausserliche) in general is the truth, and if then a supersensible too be admitted, nevertheless knowledge of it cannot occur (soll doch eine Erkenntnis desselben [d. h. des Uebersinnlichen] nicht stattfinden können) and one must keep exclusively to what belongs to perception (das der Wahrnehmung Angehörige). However, this principle in its realisation (Durchführung) produced what was subsequently termed materialism. This materialism regards matter, as

such, as the truly objective (das wahrhaft Objektive).⁵

page 142

All knowledge comes from experience, from sensation, from perception. That is true. But the question arises, does objective reality "belong to perception," i.e., is it the source of perception? If you answer yes, you are a materialist. If you answer no, you are inconsistent and will inevitably arrive at subjectivism, or agnosticism, irrespective of whether you deny the knowability of the thing-in-itself, or the objectivity of time, space and causality (with Kant), or whether you do not even permit the thought of a thing-in-itself (with Hume). The inconsistency of your empiricism, of your philosophy of experience, will in that case lie in the fact that you deny the objective content of experience, the objective truth of experimental knowledge.

Those who hold to the line of Kant or Hume (Mach and Avenarius are among the latter, in so far as they are not pure Berkeleians) call us, the materialists, "metaphysicians" because we recognise objective reality which is given us in experience, because we recognise an objective source of our sensations independent of man. We materialists follow Engels in calling the Kantians and Humeans agnostics, because they deny objective reality as the source of our sensations. Agnostic is a Greek word: *a* in Greek means "no," *gnosis* "knowledge." The agnostic says: I do not know if there is an objective reality which is reflected, imaged by our sensations; I declare there is no way of knowing this (see the words of Engels above quoted setting forth the position of the agnostic). Hence the denial of objective truth by the agnostic, and the tolerance -- the philistine, cowardly tolerance -- of the dogmas regarding

sprites, hobgoblins, Catholic saints, and the like. Mach and Avenarius, pretentiously resorting to a "new" terminology, a supposedly "new"

page 143

point of view, repeat, in fact, although in a confused and muddled way, the reply of the agnostic: on the one hand, bodies are complexes of sensations (pure subjectivism, pure Berkeleianism); on the other hand, if we rechristen our sensations "elements," we may think of them as existing independently of our sense-organs!

The Machians love to declaim that they are philosophers who completely trust the evidence of our sense-organs, who regard the world as actually being what it seems to us to be, full of sounds, colours, etc., whereas to the materialists, they say, the world is dead, devoid of sound and colour, and in its reality different from what it seems to be, and so forth. Such declamations, for example, are indulged in by J. Petzoldt, both in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of Pure Experience* and in his *World Problem from the Positivist Standpoint* (1906). Petzoldt is parroted by Mr. Victor Chernov, who waxes enthusiastic over the "new" idea. But, in fact, the Machians are subjectivists and agnostics, for they do not sufficiently trust the evidence of our sense-organs and are inconsistent in their sensationalism. They do not recognise objective reality, independent of man, as the source of our sensations. They do not regard sensations as a true copy of this objective reality, thereby directly conflicting with natural science and throwing the door open for fideism. On the contrary, for the materialist the world is richer, livelier, more varied than it actually seems, for with each step in the development of science new aspects are discovered. For the materialist, sensations are images of the sole and ultimate objective reality, ultimate not in the sense that it has already been explored to the end, but in the sense that there is not

⁵ Hegel, *Encyklopédie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* [Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline], Werke, VI. Band (1843), S. 83. Cf. S. 122.

and cannot be any other. This view irreversibly closes the

page 144

door not only to every species of fideism, but also to that professorial scholasticism which, while not recognising an objective reality as the source of our sensations, "deduces" the concept of the objective by means of such artificial verbal constructions as universal significance, socially-organised, and so on and so forth, and which is unable, and frequently unwilling, to separate objective truth from belief in sprites and hobgoblins.

The Machians contemptuously shrug their shoulders at the "antiquated" views of the "dogmatists," the materialists, who still cling to the concept matter, which supposedly has been refuted by "recent science" and "recent positivism." We shall speak separately of the new theories of physics on the structure of matter. But it is absolutely unpardonable to confound, as the Machians do, any particular theory of the structure of matter with the epistemological category, to confound the problem of the new properties of new aspects of matter (electrons, for example) with the old problem of the theory of knowledge, with the problem of the sources of our knowledge, the existence of objective truth, etc. We are told that Mach "discovered the world-elements": red, green, hard, soft, loud, long, etc. We ask, is a man given objective reality when he sees something red or feels something hard, etc., or not? This hoary philosophical query is confused by Mach. If you hold that it is not given, you, together with Mach, inevitably sink to subjectivism and agnosticism and deservedly fall into the embrace of the immanentists, i.e., the philosophical Mensheviks. If you hold that it is given, a philosophical concept is needed for this objective reality, and this concept has been worked out long, long ago. This concept is matter. Matter is a philosophical

page 145

category denoting the objective reality which is given to man by his sensations, and which is copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them. Therefore, to say that such a concept can become "antiquated" is childish talk, a senseless repetition of the arguments of fashionable reactionary philosophy. Could the struggle between materialism and idealism, the struggle between the tendencies or lines of Plato and Democritus in philosophy, the struggle between religion and science, the denial of objective truth and its assertion, the struggle between the adherents of supersensible knowledge and its adversaries have become antiquated during the two thousand years of the development of philosophy?

Acceptance or rejection of the concept matter is a question of the confidence man places in the evidence of his sense-organs, a question of the source of our knowledge, a question which has been asked and debated from the very inception of philosophy, which may be disguised in a thousand different garbs by professorial clowns, but which can no more become antiquated than the question whether the source of human knowledge is sight and touch, hearing and smell. To regard our sensations as images of the external world, to recognise objective truth, to hold the materialist theory of knowledge -- these are all one and the same thing. To illustrate this, I shall only quote from Feuerbach and from two textbooks of philosophy, in order that the reader may judge how elementary this question is.

"How banal," wrote Feuerbach, "to deny that sensation is the evangel, the gospel (*Verkundung*) of an objective saviour."⁶ A strange, a preposterous terminology, as you see,

⁶ Feuerbach, *Samtliche Werke*, X. Band, 1866, S. 194-95.

page 146

but a perfectly clear philosophical line: sensation reveals objective truth to man. "My sensation is subjective, but its foundation [or ground -- Grund] is objective" (S. 195). Compare this with the quotation given above where Feuerbach says that materialism starts from the perceptual world as an ultimate (*ausgemachte*) objective truth.

Sensationalism, we read in Franck's dictionary of philosophy,⁷ is a doctrine which deduces all our ideas "from the experience of sense-organs, reducing all knowledge to sensations." There is subjective sensationalism (scepticism and Berkeleyanism), moral sensationalism (Epicureanism), and objective sensationalism. "Objective sensationalism is nothing but materialism, for matter or bodies are, in the opinion of the materialists, the only objects that can affect our senses (*atteindre nos sens*)."

"If sensationalism," says Schwegler in his history of philosophy,⁸ "asserted that truth or being can be apprehended exclusively by means of the senses, one had only [Schwegler is speaking of philosophy at the end of the eighteenth century in France] to formulate this proposition objectively and one had the thesis of materialism: only the perceptual exists; there is no other being save material being."

These elementary truths, which have managed to find their way even into the textbooks, have been forgotten by our Machians.

page

147

⁷ *Dictionnaire des sciences philosophiques* [Dictionary of the Philosophical Sciences], Paris, 1875.

⁸ Dr. Albert Schwegler, *Geschichte der Philosophie im Umriss* [Outline History of Philosophy], 15-te Aufl., S. 194.

5. ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE TRUTH, OR THE ECLECTICISM OF ENGELS AS DISCOVERED BY A BOGDANOV

Bogdanov made his discovery in 1906, in the preface to Book III of his *Empirio-Monism*. "Engels in *Anti-Duhring*," writes Bogdanov, "expresses himself almost in the same sense in which I have just described the relativity of truth" (p. v) -- that is, in the sense of denying all eternal truth, "denying the unconditional objectivity of all truth whatsoever." "Engels is wrong in his indecision, in the fact that in spite of his irony he recognises certain 'eternal truths,' wretched though they may be..." (p. viii). "Only inconsistency can here permit such eclectic reservations as those of Engels..." (p. ix). Let us cite one instance of Bogdanov's refutation of Engels' eclecticism. "Napoleon died on May 5, 1821," says Engels in *Anti-Duhring*, in the chapter "Eternal Truths," where he reminds Duhring of the "platitudes" (*Plattheiten*) to which he who claims to discover eternal truths in the historical sciences has to confine himself. Bogdanov thus answers Engels: "What sort of 'truth' is that? And what is there 'eternal' about it? The recording of a single correlation, which perhaps even has no longer any real significance for our generation, cannot serve as a basis for any activity, and leads nowhere" (p. ix). And on page viii: "Can *Plattheiten* be called *Wahrheiten*? Are 'platitudes' truths? Truth is a vital organising form of experience; it leads us somewhere in our activity and provides a point of support in the struggle of life."

It is quite clear from these two quotations that Bogdanov, instead of refuting Engels, makes a mere declamation. If you cannot assert that the proposition "Napoleon died on

page 148

May 5, 1821," is false or inexact, you acknowledge that it is true. If you do not assert that it may be refuted in the future, you

acknowledge this truth to be eternal. But to call phrases such as truth is a "vital organising form of experience" an answer, is to palm off a mere jumble of words as philosophy. Did the earth have the history which is expounded in geology, or was the earth created in seven days? Is one to be allowed to dodge this question by talking about "vital" (what does that mean?) truth which "leads" some where, and the like? Can it be that knowledge of the history of the earth and of the history of humanity "has no real significance"? This is just turgid nonsense, used by Bogdanov to cover his retreat. For it is a retreat, when, having taken it upon himself to prove that the admission of eternal truths by Engels is eclecticism, he dodges the issue by a noise and clash of words and leaves unrefuted the fact that Napoleon did die on May 5, 1821, and that to regard this truth as refutable in the future is absurd.

The example given by Engels is elementary, and anybody without the slightest difficulty can think of scores of similar truths that are eternal and absolute and that only insane people can doubt (as Engels says, citing another example: "Paris is in France"). Why does Engels speak here of "platitudes"? Because he refutes and ridicules the dogmatic, metaphysical materialist Duhring, who was incapable of applying dialectics to the relation between absolute and relative truth. To be a materialist is to acknowledge objective truth which is revealed to us by our sense-organs. To acknowledge objective truth, i.e., truth not dependent upon man and mankind, is, in one way or another, to recognise absolute truth. And it is this "one way or another" which distinguishes the metaphysical materialist Duhring from the dia-

page 149

lectical materialist Engels. On the most complex questions of science in general, and of historical science in particular, Duhring scattered words right and left: ultimate, final and eternal truth. Engels jeered at him. Of course there are eternal truths, Engels said, but it is unwise to use high-sounding words (*gewaltige Worte*) in connection with simple things. If we want to advance materialism, we must drop this trite play with the words "eternal truth"; we must learn to put, and answer, the question of the relation between absolute and relative truth dialectically. It was on this issue that the fight between Duhring and Engels was waged thirty years ago. And Bogdanov, who managed "not to notice" Engels' explanation of the problem of absolute and relative truth given in this very same chapter, and who managed to accuse Engels of "eclecticism" for his admission of a proposition which is a truism for all forms of materialism, only once again betrays his utter ignorance of both materialism and dialectics.

"Now we come to the question," Engels writes in *Anti-Duhring*, in the beginning of the chapter mentioned (Part I, Chap. IX), "whether any, and if so which, products of human knowledge ever can have sovereign validity and an unconditional claim (Anspruch) to truth" (5th German ed., p. 79). And Engels answers the question thus:

"The sovereignty of thought is realised in a number of extremely unsovereign-thinking human beings; the knowledge which has an unconditional claim to truth is realised in a number of relative errors; neither the one nor the other [i.e., neither absolutely true knowledge, nor sovereign thought] can be fully realised except through an endless eternity of human existence.

page 150

"Here once again we find the same contradiction as we found above, between the character of human thought, necessarily

conceived as absolute, and its reality in individual human beings with their extremely limited thought. This is a contradiction which can only be solved in the infinite progression, or what is for us, at least from a practical standpoint, the endless succession, of generations of mankind. In this sense human thought is just as much sovereign as not sovereign, and its capacity for knowledge just as much unlimited as limited. It is sovereign and unlimited in its disposition (*Anlage*), its vocation, its possibilities and its historical ultimate goal; it is not sovereign and it is limited in its individual expression and in its realisation at each particular moment" (p. 81).⁹

"It is just the same," Engels continues, "with eternal truths." [59]

This argument is extremely important for the question of relativism, i.e., the principle of the relativity of our knowledge, which is stressed by all Machians. The Machians one and all insist that they are relativists, but the Russian Machians, while repeating the words of the Germans, are afraid, or unable to propound the question of the relation of relativism to dialectics clearly and straightforwardly. For Bogdanov (as for all the Machians) recognition of the relativity of our knowledge excludes even the least admission of absolute truth. For Engels absolute truth is compounded

page 151

from relative truths. Bogdanov is a relativist; Engels is a dialectician. Here is another, no less important, argument of Engels from the chapter of *Anti-Duhring* already quoted:

"Truth and error, like all thought-concepts which move in polar opposites,

⁹ Cf. V. Chernov, loc. cit., p. 64, et seq. Chernov, the Machian, fully shares the position of Bogdanov who does not wish to own himself a Machian. The difference is that Bogdanov tries to cover up his disagreement with Engels, to present it as a casual matter, etc., while Chernov feels that it is a question of a struggle against both materialism and dialectics.

have absolute validity only in an extremely limited field, as we have just seen, and as even Herr Duhring would realise if he had any acquaintance with the first elements of dialectics, which deal precisely with the inadequacy of all polar opposites. As soon as we apply the antithesis between truth and error outside of that narrow field which has been referred to above it becomes relative and therefore unserviceable for exact scientific modes of expression; and if we attempt to apply it as absolutely valid outside that field we really find ourselves altogether beaten: both poles of the antithesis become transformed into their opposites, truth becomes error and error truth" (p. 86). [60] Here follows the example of Boyle's law (the volume of a gas is inversely proportional to its pressure). The "grain of truth" contained in this law is only absolute truth within certain limits. The law, it appears, is a truth "only approximately."

Human thought then by its nature is capable of giving, and does give, absolute truth, which is compounded of a sum-total of relative truths. Each step in the development of science adds new grains to the sum of absolute truth, but the limits of the truth of each scientific proposition are relative, now expanding, now shrinking with the growth of knowledge. "Absolute truth," says J. Dietzgen in his Excursions, [61] "can be seen, heard, smelt, touched and, of course, also be known, but it is not entirely absorbed (geht nicht auf) into knowledge" (p. 195). "It goes without saying that a picture does not exhaust its object and the artist

page 152

remains behind his model.... How can a picture 'coincide' with its model? Approximately it can" (p. 197). "Hence, we can know nature and her parts only relatively; since even a part, though only a relation of nature, possesses nevertheless the nature of the absolute, the nature of nature as a whole (des Naturganzen an sich) which cannot be exhausted by knowledge....

How, then, do we know that behind the phenomena of nature, behind the relative truths, there is a universal, unlimited, absolute nature which does not reveal itself to man completely? ... Whence this knowledge? It is innate; it is given us with consciousness" (p. 198). This last statement is one of the inexactitudes of Dietzgen's which led Marx, in one of his letters to Kugelmann, to speak of the confusion in Dietzgen's views. [62] Only by seizing upon such incorrect passages can one speak of a specific philosophy of Dietzgen differing from dialectical materialism. But Dietzgen corrects himself on the same page : "When I say that the consciousness of eternal, absolute truth is innate in us, that it is the one and only a priori knowledge, experience also confirms this innate consciousness" (p. 198).

From all these statements by Engels and Dietzgen it is obvious that for dialectical materialism there is no impassable boundary between relative and absolute truth. Bogdanov entirely failed to grasp this if he could write: "It [the world outlook of the old materialism] sets itself up as the absolute objective knowledge of the essence of things [Bogdanov's italics] and is incompatible with the historically conditional nature of all ideologies" (*Empirio-Monism*, Bk. III, p. iv). From the standpoint of modern materialism i.e., Marxism, the limits of approximation of our knowledge to objective, absolute truth are historically conditional, but the existence of such truth is unconditional, and the fact

page 153

that we are approaching nearer to it is also unconditional. The contours of the picture are historically conditional, but the fact that this picture depicts an objectively existing model is unconditional. When and under what circumstances we reached, in our knowledge of the essential nature of things, the discovery of alizarin in coal tar or the discovery of electrons in the atom is historically conditional; but that every such

discovery is an advance of "absolutely objective knowledge" is unconditional. In a word, every ideology is historically conditional, but it is unconditionally true that to every scientific ideology (as distinct, for instance, from religious ideology), there corresponds an objective truth, absolute nature. You will say that this distinction between relative and absolute truth is indefinite. And I shall reply: yes, it is sufficiently "indefinite" to prevent science from becoming a dogma in the bad sense of the term, from becoming something dead, frozen, ossified; but it is at the same time sufficiently "definite" to enable us to dissociate ourselves in the most emphatic and irrevocable manner from fideism and agnosticism, from philosophical idealism and the sophistry of the followers of Hume and Kant. Here is a boundary which you have not noticed, and not having noticed it, you have fallen into the swamp of reactionary philosophy. It is the boundary between dialectical materialism and relativism.

We are relativists, proclaim Mach, Avenarius, Petzoldt. We are relativists, echo Mr. Chernov and certain Russian Machians, would-be Marxists. Yes, Mr. Chernov and Comrades Machians -- and therein lies your error. For to make relativism the basis of the theory of knowledge is inevitably to condemn oneself either to absolute scepticism, agnosticism and sophistry, or to subjectivism. Relativism as

page 154

a basis of the theory of knowledge is not only the recognition of the relativity of our knowledge, but also a denial of any objective measure or model existing independently of humanity to which our relative knowledge approximates. From the standpoint of naked relativism one can justify any sophistry; one may regard it as "conditional" whether Napoleon died on May 5,

6. THE CRITERION OF PRACTICE IN THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

We have seen that Marx in 1845 and Engels in 1888 and 1892 placed the crite-

1821, or not; one may declare the admission, alongside of scientific ideology ("convenient" in one respect), of religious ideology (very "convenient" in another respect) a mere "convenience" for man or humanity, and so forth.

Dialectics -- as Hegel in his time explained -- contains the element of relativism, of negation, of scepticism, but is not reducible to relativism. The materialist dialectics of Marx and Engels certainly does contain relativism, but is not reducible to relativism, that is, it recognises the relativity of all our knowledge, not in the sense of denying objective truth, but in the sense that the limits of approximation of our knowledge to this truth are historically conditional.

Bogdanov writes in italics: "Consistent Marxism does not admit such dogmatism and such static concepts " as eternal truths. (*Empirio-Monism*, Bk. III, p. ix.) This is a muddle. If the world is eternally moving and developing matter (as the Marxists think), reflected by the developing human consciousness, what is there "static" here? The point at issue is not the immutable essence of things, or an immutable consciousness, but the correspondence between the consciousness which reflects nature and the nature which is reflected by consciousness. In connection with this question, and this question alone, the term "dogmatism" has a specific, characteristic philosophical flavour: it is a favourite word used by the idealists and the agnostics against the materialists,

page 155

as we have already seen in the case of the fairly "old" materialist, Feuerbach. The objections brought against materialism from the standpoint of the celebrated "recent positivism" are just ancient trash.

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

criterion of practice at the basis of the materialist theory of knowledge. [63] "The dispute

over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question," says Marx in his second Thesis on Feuerbach. The best refutation of Kantian and Humean agnosticism as well as of other philosophical crotchetts (Schrullen) is practice, repeats Engels. "The result of our action proves the conformity (Uebereinstimmung) of our perceptions with the objective nature of the things perceived," he says in reply to the agnostics. [64]

Compare this with Mach's argument about the criterion of practice: "In the common way of thinking and speaking appearance, illusion, is usually contrasted with reality. A pencil held in front of us in the air is seen as straight; when we dip it slantwise into water we see it as crooked. In the latter case we say that the pencil appears crooked but in reality it is straight. But what entitles us to declare one fact to be the reality, and to degrade the other to an appearance?... Our expectation is deceived when we fall into the natural error of expecting what we are accustomed to although the case is unusual. The facts are not to blame for that. In these cases, to speak of appearance may have a practical

page 156

significance, but not a scientific significance. Similarly, the question which is often asked, whether the world is real or whether we merely dream it, is devoid of all scientific significance. Even the wildest dream is a fact as much as any other" (*Analysis of Sensations*, pp. 18-19).

It is true that not only is the wildest dream a fact, but also the wildest philosophy. No doubt of this is possible after an acquaintance with the philosophy of Ernst Mach. Egregious sophist that he is, he confounds the scientific-historical and psychological investigation of human errors, of every "wild dream" of humanity, such as belief in sprites, hobgoblins, and so forth, with the epistemological distinction between truth and "wildness." It is as if an

economist were to say that both Senior's theory [65] that the whole profit of the capitalist is obtained from the "last hour" of the worker's labour and Marx's theory are both facts, and that from the standpoint of science there is no point in asking which theory expresses objective truth and which -- the prejudice of the bourgeoisie and the venality of its professors. The tanner Joseph Dietzgen regarded the scientific, i.e., the materialist, theory of knowledge as a "universal weapon against religious belief" (*Kleinere philosophische Schriften* [Smaller Philosophical Essays], S. 55), but for the professor-in-ordinary Ernst Mach the distinction between the materialist and the subjective-idealistic theories of knowledge "is devoid of all scientific significance"! That science is non partisan in the struggle of materialism against idealism and religion is a favourite idea not only of Mach but of all modern bourgeois professors, who are, as Dietzgen justly expresses it, "graduated flunkies who stupefy the people by their twisted idealism" (*op. cit.*, p. 53).

page 157

And a twisted professorial idealism it is, indeed, when the criterion of practice, which for every one of us distinguishes illusion from reality, is removed by Mach from the realm of science, from the realm of the theory of knowledge. Human practice proves the correctness of the materialist theory of knowledge, said Marx and Engels, who dubbed all attempts to solve the fundamental question of epistemology without the aid of practice "scholastic" and "philosophical crotchetts." But for Mach practice is one thing and the theory of knowledge another. They can be placed side by side without making the latter conditional on the former. In his last work, *Knowledge and Error*, Mach says: "Knowledge is a biologically useful (forderndes) mental experience" (2nd Germ. ed., p. 115). "Only success can separate knowledge from error" (p. 116). "The concept is a physical working hypothesis" (p. 143). In

their astonishing naiveté our Russian Machian would-be Marxists regard such phrases of Mach's as proof that he comes close to Marxism. But Mach here comes just as close to Marxism as Bismarck to the labour movement, or Bishop Eulogius to democracy. With Mach such propositions stand side by side with his idealist theory of knowledge and do not determine the choice of one or another definite line of epistemology. Knowledge can be useful biologically, useful in human practice, useful for the preservation of life, for the preservation of the species, only when it reflects objective truth, truth which is independent of man. For the materialist the "success" of human practice proves the correspondence between our ideas and the objective nature of the things we perceive. For the solipsist "success" is everything needed by me in practice, which can be regarded separately from the theory of knowledge. If we include the criterion of practice in the

page 158

foundation of the theory of knowledge we inevitably arrive at materialism, says the Marxist. Let practice be materialist, says Mach, but theory is another matter. "In practice," Mach writes in the *Analysis of Sensations*, "we can as little do without the idea of the self when we perform any act, as we can do without the idea of a body when we grasp at a thing. Physiologically we remain egoists and materialists with the same constancy as we forever see the sun rising again. But theoretically this view cannot be adhered to" (pp. 284-85).

Egoism is beside the point here, for egoism is not an epistemological category. The question of the apparent movement of the sun around the earth is also beside the point, for in practice, which serves us as a criterion in the theory of knowledge, we must include also the practice of astronomical observations, discoveries, etc. There remains only Mach's valuable admission that in their practical life men are

entirely and exclusively guided by the materialist theory of knowledge; the attempt to obviate it "theoretically" is characteristic of Mach's gelehrte scholastic and twisted idealistic endeavours.

To what extent these efforts to eliminate practice -- as something unsusceptible to epistemological treatment -- in order to make room for agnosticism and idealism are not new is shown by the following example from the history of German classical philosophy. Between Kant and Fichte stands G. E. Schulze (known in the history of philosophy as Schulze-Aenesidemus). He openly advocates the sceptical trend in philosophy and calls himself a follower of Hume (and of the ancients Pyrrho and Sextus). He emphatically rejects every thing-in-itself and the possibility of objective knowledge, and emphatically insists that we should not go

page 159

beyond "experience," beyond sensations, in which connection he anticipates the following objection from the other camp: "Since the sceptic when he takes part in the affairs of life assumes as indubitable the reality of objective things, behaves accordingly, and thus admits a criterion of truth, his own behaviour is the best and clearest refutation of his scepticism."¹⁰ "Such proofs," Schulze indignantly retorts, "are only valid for the mob (Poebel)." For "my scepticism does not concern the requirements of practical life, but remains within the bounds of philosophy" (pp. 254, 255).

In similar manner, the subjective idealist Fichte also hopes to find room within the bounds of idealistic philosophy for that "realism which is inevitable (sich aufdringt) for

¹⁰ G. E. Schulze, *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von dem Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementarphilosophie* [Aenesidemus, or the Fundamentals of the Elementary Philosophy Propounded by Professor Reinhold in Jena], 1792, S. 253.

all of us, and even for the most determined idealist, when it comes to action, i.e., the assumption that objects exist quite independently of us and outside us" (*Werke*, I, 455).

Mach's recent positivism has not travelled far from Schulze and Fichte! Let us note as a curiosity that on this question too for Bazarov there is no one but Plekhanov -- there is no beast stronger than the cat. Bazarov ridicules the "salto vitale philosophy of Plekhanov" (*Studies*, [66] etc., p. 69), who indeed made the absurd remark that "belief" in the existence of the outer world "is an inevitable *salto vitale*" (vital leap) of philosophy (Notes on Ludwig Feuerbach, p. III). The word "belief" (taken from Hume), although put in quotation marks, discloses a confusion of terms on Plekhanov's part. There can be no question about that. But

page 160

what has Plekhanov got to do with it? Why did not Bazarov take some other materialist, Feuerbach, for instance? Is it only because he does not know him? But ignorance is no argument. Feuerbach also, like Marx and Engels, makes an impermissible -- from the point of view of Schulze, Fichte and Mach -- "leap" to practice in the fundamental problems of epistemology. Criticising idealism, Feuerbach explains its essential nature by the following striking quotation from Fichte, which superbly demolishes Machism: " 'You assume,' writes Fichte, 'that things are real, that they exist outside of you, only because you see them, hear them and touch them. But vision, touch and hearing are only sensations.... You perceive, not the objects, but only your sensations'" (Feuerbach, *Werke*, X. Band, S. 185). To which Feuerbach replies that a human being is not an abstract ego, but either a man or woman, and the question whether the world is sensation can be compared to the question: is the man or woman my sensation, or do our relations in practical life prove the contrary?

"This is the, fundamental defect of idealism: it asks and answers the question of objectivity and subjectivity, of the reality or unreality of the world, only from the standpoint of theory" (*ibid.*, p. 189). Feuerbach makes the sum-total of human practice the basis of the theory of knowledge. He says that idealists of course also recognise the reality of the I and the Thou in practical life. For the idealists "this point of view is valid only for practical life and not for speculation. But a speculation which contradicts life, which makes the standpoint of death, of a soul separated from the body, the standpoint of truth, is a dead and false speculation" (p. 192). Before we perceive, we breathe; we cannot exist without air, food and drink.

page 161

"Does this mean that we must deal with questions of food and drink when examining the problem of the ideality or reality of the world? -- exclaims the indignant idealist. How vile! What an offence against good manners soundly to berate materialism in the scientific sense from the chair of philosophy and the pulpit of theology, only to practise materialism with all one's heart and soul in the crudest form at the table d'hôte" (p. 195). And Feuerbach exclaims that to identify subjective sensation with the objective world "is to identify pollution with procreation" (p. 198).

A comment not of the politest order, but it hits the vital spot of those philosophers who teach that sense-perception is the reality existing outside us.

The standpoint of life, of practice, should be first and fundamental in the theory of knowledge. And it inevitably leads to materialism, brushing aside the endless fabrications of professorial scholasticism. Of course, we must not forget that the criterion of practice can never, in the nature of things, either confirm or refute any human idea completely. This criterion also is sufficiently "indefinite" not to allow human knowledge to become "absolute," but at

the same time it is sufficiently definite to wage a ruthless fight on all varieties of idealism and agnosticism. If what our practice confirms is the sole, ultimate and objective truth, then from this must follow the recognition that the only path to this truth is the path of science, which holds the materialist point of view. For instance, Bogdanov is prepared to recognise Marx's theory of the circulation of money as an objective truth only for "our time," and calls it "dogmatism" to at tribute to this theory a "superhistorically objective" truth (*Empirio-Monism*, Bk. III, p. vii). This is again a muddle. The correspondence of this theory to practice cannot be

page 162
altered by any future circumstances, for the same simple reason that makes it an eter-

nal truth that Napoleon died on May 5, 1821. But inasmuch as the criterion of practice, i.e., the course of development of all capitalist countries in the last few decades, proves only the objective truth of Marx's whole social and economic theory in general, and not merely of one or other of its parts, formulations, etc., it is clear that to talk of the "dogmatism" of the Marxists is to make an unpardonable concession to bourgeois economics. The sole conclusion to be drawn from the opinion of the Marxists that Marx's theory is an objective truth is that by following the path of Marxist theory we shall draw closer and closer to objective truth (without ever exhausting it); but by following any other path we shall arrive at nothing but confusion and lies.