

## Johannes Witt-Hansen, 1961

### The »Eastern« or Communist Philosophy (*Den »østlige« eller kommunistiske filosofi*).

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Translated by Philip Højme (Hoejme). Revised and proofed by Ed Graham. 2021. Published with the current copyright holder's permission JP/Politikens Forlag. Revised August 2021 by Philip Højme; expansion of the introduction and minor editing.

#### *Translator's Introduction*

Johannes Witt-Hansen (1908 to 1986) was a Danish philosopher and historian of science worked at the University of Copenhagen as a professor in Philosophy, from 1959 to 1978, after receiving a doctoral degree in 1958 for a dissertation on A. Eddington and the philosophy of physics (Witt-Hansen, 1958).

Examining Witt-Hansen's publications, three themes stand out: Philosophy of Science (particularly materialism), Communist philosophy (Marxism and other Communist ideologies), and Futures studies (from 1972 and onward). While each of these often overlaps in particular publications, dividing Witt-Hansen's work topically allows for a provisional conclusion that Witt-Hansen was first and foremost a philosopher of science, then a historian of Marxisms (there is, albeit, always a strong overlap in between these interests in Witt-Hansen's work) and lastly or later a *futurologist*.

As one of the most prolific authors writing on Marxism, Historical Materialism and Marxist ideologies, and as a translator of Marx, Witt-Hansen was an important figure in Denmark, who played an essential role in introducing not only a specialist audience to Marx's primary texts, but who also sought to educate the general public about Marx's thoughts and their developments in later *Eastern* or Communist ideologies (Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism, and Maoism [in Stybe, 1972]).

The reason for translating Witt-Hansen's first public introduction to the development of Marx's thoughts and the later developments of Communist philosophy, and thus introducing a contemporary international audience to this text, is two-fold. On the one hand, this text is interesting for its early critique of 'Soviet philosophy', which questions the feasibility of guiding scientific development from the single (ideal) perspective of Historical Materialism. Witt-Hansen later published two essays on Marx in *Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities* (Witt-Hansen, 1976; 1977) while also being part of its advisory committee in 1976 and serving as an editor in 1977. The publication of these essays in this journal is fascinating because of the critical perspective on Communist philosophy that Witt-Hansen outlined in this essay from 1961. On the other hand, the translator hopes to awaken scholarly interest in Witt-Hansen's various works, particularly the unfinished (planned) publication *Historical Materialism* volumes 1-3<sup>1</sup>. The examination of Communist philosophy is of particular note and is interesting precisely because of its critique of the chains which both anchored and held back Communist philosophy. Concluding the following text, Witt-Hansen, in reference to the general development of science, proposes that Communist philosophy cannot, in the long run, continue to dictate which scientific theories are acceptable for scientists to engage with.

Witt-Hansen's text, valuable as it is, is at times ambiguous when it comes to clearly distinguishing between Historical and Dialectical Materialism. The reader must therefore bear in mind that Witt-Hansen (in the works referenced below in footnote 1 and 2) uses the term Historical

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1. Witt-Hansen only published the first volume. The first volume does however contain descriptions of the content in the following two volumes.

Materialism to describe the theories and texts of Karl Marx (and Friedrich Engels), whilst the term Dialectical Materialism describes not only Engels (without Marx) but also the later permutations of ‘Eastern or Communist philosophy’.

This division, clearly marked in the titles of the respective sections (on Marx, Engels, and so on), is brushed aside or rendered ambiguous in the body of the text, leaving the reader with the task of having to remember that Engels appears in relation to both Historical and Dialectical Materialism, while direct references to Marx’s theories and texts often indicate that Witt-Hansen is talking about Historical Materialism.

### *Notes on the Translation*

Various key terms have been cross-referenced with Witt-Hansen’s book, *Historical Materialism*<sup>2</sup> and the Danish publication bearing a similar title<sup>3</sup>. Where this has not been possible, I have instead relied on cross-referencing the Danish translation of *Kapitalen*<sup>4</sup> (edited by Witt-Hansen) with the English translation of *Capital*<sup>5</sup>. A few other terms have been cross-referenced with other works<sup>6</sup>.

Both the translator and editor have taken the liberty of making minor editorial changes to the text where this was needed. Changes include: correcting typos, improving readability, adding explanatory footnotes, and applying a more consistent style to the text. In regards to the bibliography and Witt-Hansen’s original citations, these do not conform to modern academic standards.

Furthermore, it has not always been clear which authors various citations refers to. Hence, the citations in this translation are direct translations of the Danish citations in Witt-Hansen’s text. All footnotes were added by the translator.

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2. Witt-Hansen, J. 1960. *Historical Materialism*. Copenhagen: Munksgaard. Published in the United States by Humanities Press.

3. Witt-Hansen, J. 1973. *Historisk Materialisme*. København: Berlingske Forlag.

4. Marx, K. 1970[1867]. *Kapitalen 1. Bog*. trans. K. Ø. Nielsen, ed. J. Witt-Hansen. København: Rhodos. Retrieved from <<http://www.marxister.dk/kapitalen.php>> 27.12.2020.

5. Marx, K. 2015[1867]. *Capital Vol. 1*. S. Moore, E. Aveling, ed. F. Engels. Moscow: Progress Publishers. Retrieved from <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/index.htm?>> 27.12.2020.

6. Marx, K. 1965[1844]. ‘Fremmedgjort arbejde’. In *Tiden – Verden Rundt*, (2), trans. Unk.

pp. 54-63. Retrieved from <<https://www.marxists.org/dansk/marx/44-okfil/1-frmarb.htm>> 28.12.2020. And Marx, K. 2004[1844]. ‘Alienated Labor’. In *Marx’s Concept of Man*, ed. E. Fromm, trans. T. B. Bottomore, London, New York: Continuum. pp. 78–90.

*The »Eastern« or Communist Philosophy*  
By Johannes Witt-Hansen

[228] Although most readers are aware that »Eastern« philosophy does not solely refer to Arabic, Indian or Japanese philosophy, I have nevertheless, instead, decided to apply the term »Communist philosophy« to describe the prevalent philosophy in the Communist countries. To limit this topic even further, I will equate Communist philosophy with Soviet philosophy or the philosophy prevalent in the USSR.

Moreover, the use of the term »Eastern Philosophy« is unfortunate when we remember that today's Communist philosophy emerged in the »West,« particularly in three major West-European countries: Germany, France and England. It was in these three countries that the German theorists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels founded *Historical Materialism*, which forms the core around which Communist philosophy is built. Historical Materialism was founded between 1842 and 1846, and was continuously developed in the following half a century by both Marx and Engels, and their followers in Germany, Austria and Russia (i.e. E. Bernstein, K. Kautsky, R. Hilferding; M. Adler, F. Adler, O. Bauer; G. Plekhanov, V. Lenin, et al.).

*Historical Background*

According to Marx and Engels, the following circumstances were necessary conditions for Historical Materialism to emerge and develop:

1. The economic and political development in Europe since the beginning of the 16th century. First and foremost, the emergence of Capitalism in Great Britain and France, and the bourgeois political revolutions that took place in these countries during the 17th and 18th centuries. These developments brought about two new social classes on the historical scene, namely, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and this occasioned a new kind of class-struggle;
2. The emergence and development of novel economic and political »ideas« and theories which attempted to understand the changes taking place (W. Petty, A. Smith, D. Ricardo, T. Malthus; J. Locke, J. Rousseau, I. Kant, H. Saint-Simon, C. Fourier);
3. The emergence and development of modern scientific methods and the application of these in mechanics, cosmology, physics, chemistry, and biology (N. Copernicus, G. Galilei, J. Kepler, I. Newton, I. Kant; N. Carnot, R. Mayer, H. Helmholtz; A. Lavoisier, J. Dalton, F. Wöhler; J. Lamarck, G. Cuvier, M. Schleiden, T. Schwann, et al.);
4. The emergence and development of French Materialism (P. Holbach, C. Helvetius, J. La Mettrie), Hegel's philosophy and Feuerbach's materialism.

To this *general* background for Historical Materialism's emergence and development a *special* factor must be added, namely the situation in Germany, where the proletariat in the 1840s had started social movements to oppose both the old feudal institutions and the new Capitalist economy. Immediately before the revolution of 1848 there were around 30 such associations which also supported »Bund der Kommunisten«<sup>7</sup>. To be used by this federation, founded in 1847, Marx and Engels wrote the political polemic *The Communist Manifesto* (1848).

In the struggle against the above-mentioned institutions in Germany, Marx, who in 1842 was still a so-called Left Hegelian, adopted arguments from Hegel's philosophy of right. But he soon realized that this philosophy, whose stinger aimed at the political institutions rather than at their economic base, was insufficient, even futile, for achieving those political goals that Marx had begun to formulate in 1843 and 1844 – goals which aimed at an in-depth change of the economic structures of contemporary society. [230]

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7. *The Communist League.*

As Marx began to critique Hegel's Philosophy of Right, he also laid the foundations for the *method* that he would later (from 1849 to 1883) use to examine the »modern« or Capitalist society: the *method of Historical Materialism*. In these efforts he found support in a philosophy, which aimed at critiquing the *foundation* of Hegelian philosophy, created by the Left Hegelian thinker Ludwig Feuerbach. This philosophy is commonly referred to as Feuerbach's materialism.

### *Hegelian Philosophy and Feuerbach's Materialism*

The Hegelian *system*, which is based on the assumption that the primordial reason for existence is of a mental or spiritual nature, presumes a kind of philosophical deity, who not only has existed from the beginning of time, but who moreover is the living spirit of the existing world: »the Absolute Idea«. This living spirit undergoes a *development proper*, which concludes by »finding itself« when it becomes conscious of itself in the human spirit.

In the first phase of this development, the Absolute Idea forms its opposite or appears »disguised« as *nature* or a *natural necessity*. We here have a kind of speculative theory about the creation of the world. In the second phase, nature or the material world, together with the Absolute Idea, forms a »higher unity«, whereby nature, or matter, are mentalized or spiritualized<sup>8</sup>. This process, which already began in the animal kingdom, culminates in human beings. The human spirit objectifies itself in society and in *history*. The driving force behind this development proper is the activity or the labour of the human spirit. In this phase of the development proper, the Absolute Idea frees itself more and more from the chains of natural necessity and thus reaches greater and greater *freedom*. The historical progress is therefore for Hegel a progression toward greater consciousness of freedom.

The Absolute Idea as »Absolute Spirit« becomes consci- [231: full-page image of Hegel. 232] ous of itself: in *art*, it *perceives* itself; in *religion*, it *imagines* itself; and in *philosophy*, it *comprehends* itself, as it *understands* both its own Being as spirit and its place in the universe.

Insofar as the Absolute Idea in religion imagines itself, it imagines itself in the form of Gods or a God. These Gods or God are beings who *become* during the development proper of the human spirit. Feuerbach concluded from this that it was human beings who had created God, rather than vice versa. The characteristics (reason, love, willpower), which human beings ordinarily attribute to God, are therefore really characteristics of the Being of humans themselves. This is the basic idea of Feuerbach's *anthropology*.

If God is not infinite, but rather *becomes*, then it is, according to Feuerbach, a contradiction inherent in the Hegelian system to make God an *eternal* principle (the Absolute Idea) that comes *before* nature and human beings. Because the Hegelian hypothesis of the Absolute Idea not only leads to logical difficulties, but also because it cannot either be confirmed nor denied, Feuerbach abandons it as a mystification and instead places nature or matter as the founding principle of existence. This is the basic idea of Feuerbach's *materialism*.

### *Marx and the Method of Historical Materialism*

Even though Feuerbach freed Marx and Engels from their earlier acceptance of those Hegelian philosophical principles, the anthropology or theory of the human being proposed by Feuerbach still offered no basis for a theory of the social phenomenon of Capitalist society, which Marx wished to describe and whose general laws he sought to discover, namely, Capitalist society. However, Marx did find such a basis, inspired by Engels' economic writings from 1844, in the English economists Petty, Smith and Ricardo, all of whom perceived *labour* or the labour-process as an essential characteristic of human beings. The theory [233] of the human being understood as a

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<sup>8</sup>. Orig. Dan. "spiritualiseres eller åndeliggøres" (Witt-Hansen, 1961, 230), lit. trans. 'Spiritualized or made-into-Spirit'. The difference between these terms, possess some difficulties translating into English. I have chosen to translate the former (*spiritualiseres*) as "mentalized" because Witt-Hansen earlier writes 'mental or spiritual nature' (orig. Dan. "mental eller åndelig natur" [230]) in relation to Hegel's philosophy.

»tool producing animal« became the basic idea in Marx's *anthropology*, which in-turn provided the basis for Historical Materialism.

Hegel understood »spiritual labour« as the driving force of human history, whereas Marx thought it was rather »material labour«, the activity through which human beings produce their »material« necessities. Marx thus adopted the Hegelian thesis but went further by establishing the connection between the labour-process and the historical development proper. The Hegelian thesis together with the changes introduced by Marx hereafter became a founding component of Historical Materialism.

Following Feuerbach and the French materialists, Marx assumed, as stated earlier, the axiom that nature, the physical or the material, is a necessary condition for historical or mental concepts (philosophical materialism). And following from Hegel, he assumed the theory of the *development proper* of history and mental life (dialectics), which he connected to the theories about material production suggested by the aforementioned English economists.

Based on philosophical materialism, Marx's own anthropology, Hegel's theory of the development proper of history, as well as on historical studies, Marx developed, in close collaboration with Engels between 1844 and 1864, a method suitable for examining humanity's social formations, including Capitalism and simple commodity-producing in pre-capitalist societies.

While developing this method – Historical Materialism – Marx not only aimed at describing the general laws which govern specific social formations (to the extent that each formation has a particular form in a given historical epoch, e.g. Capitalist society's laws of »motion«), but also those laws which govern the transition from one social formation to another (e.g. the transition from simple commodity production in pre-capitalist societies to Capitalism). General laws of the latter kind are according to Historical Materialism the actual *laws of historical development proper*.

[234] In their description of Historical Materialism Marx pointed out that, in opposition to physics, it is impossible to utilize any particular observational instruments or to use particular experimental arrangements. Hence, Marx emphasised the importance of other procedures<sup>9</sup> instead, such as: historical-critical analysis, abstraction, the formation of hypotheses, conceptual analysis, and deduction.

These procedures, and specifically the analysis of the labour-process or the »material« production process, helped Marx to find the basic concepts or categories of Historical Materialism, which include the following: mode of production, forces of production, *material* social relations, *ideological* social relations, relations of production, *economic structure* or basis of society, *superstructure* of society (including its ideological social relations), *total structure* of society, social formation, classes, class struggle, and so on.

Marx included these concepts in the *hypotheses* about human society proposed between 1845 and 1849, and used them as a *guiding thread*<sup>10</sup> when aiming to find the general laws which govern a specific social formation or the transition from one formation to another. While attempting this Marx relied heavily on the criteria of recurrence, which states that a law is necessarily that which repeats or recurs.

These hypotheses were formulated in Marx's well-known *Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), and are derived from the aforementioned philosophical materialism and the Hegelian viewpoint of the development proper. They assume the following to be true:

*that* the material side of social and historical existence is a necessary condition for the existence of their mental side,

*that* the mode of production, as well as the forces and relations of production, causes social, political, and mental life, which constitutes the *total structure* of society,

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9. "Neither microscope nor chemical reagent are of use ... in the analysis of economical forms ... The force of abstraction must replace both (Marx, Capital, 12)" (Witt-Hansen, 1960, 85).

10. Orig. Dan. "ledetråd" (Witt-Hansen, 1961, 234), translated from Ger. *Leitfaden* in *Historical Materialism* (Witt-Hansen, 1960, 28).

*that* each specific *economic structure* is defined by the totality of the relations of production in a given society, which corresponds to a definite *superstructure*, encompassing religious, philosophical and political ideologies, ideological social relations and their corresponding institutions,

*that* the material forces of production, which include both the instruments of production and those human beings who use them in a particular stage of the development of society, come into conflict with the pre-existing relations of production (predominantly appearing as relations of ownership of the means of production [or the tools of production and the subjects of labour]),

*that* based on the above there necessarily follows an epoch of social revolution, which is characterised by the transition from one social formation into a »new« social formation,

*that* the »old« economic structure of society subsequently disappears and gives way to a »new« structure,

*that* the superstructure of society changes in accordance with the »real basis« or the economic structures of society – at a faster or slower pace, and finally,

*that* the history of all class-societies is at the same time the history of class-struggle.

It must be made explicit that Marx, guided by these hypotheses, only examined *a single social formation* in detail, namely, capitalism, and furthermore that he only examined *a single instance* of the transition from one social formation to another, namely, the transition from simple commodity producing in pre-capitalist societies to Capitalism. However, a *scientifically* founded theory of the transition from Capitalism to a novel social formation (socialism) does not exist in Marx.

While the above enumerated sentences were understood by Marx as *hypotheses*, which had to be examined in the course of the historical-critical analyses of specific social formations, Communist philosophy perceived these hypotheses as »general laws, valid for *all* stages of social development and for *all* social formations« (*Historical Materialism*, 23, 1954 [rus.]). [236, 2/3 page picture of Karl Marx]

Communist philosophy is therefore a generalized system and a world-view<sup>11</sup> which takes as its starting points the hypotheses of Historical Materialism and the Hegelian view of the development proper. The propensity to understand these general laws as axioms, whose validity is [237] proven, is already conspicuous in Engels, and becomes even-more so in the writings of the Russian philosophers of the 1920s and 1930s.

An important occasion to generalize these viewpoints, which are expressed in the hypotheses of Historical Materialism, was already present in Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Marx read this book in 1860, and wrote to Engels saying that it »contains the foundation in natural history for our point of view« (letter to Engels, 19.12.1860). There is an obvious analogy between the hypothesis about the development of class-societies through »class-struggle« and the evolution of species through »the struggle for existence«. It is therefore not surprising that Engels, in their speech at Marx's grave on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1883, gave into temptation and said that »just as Darwin discovered the *laws of the evolution of organic nature*, so Marx discovered the material *laws of the development of human history*«, even though both Darwin and Marx began from viewpoints that have characteristics similar to those of hypotheses.

While Marx – excluding political activity – spent most of their time developing and grounding a single theory of Capitalist society and its »*laws of motion*«, Engels was far more interested in expanding the *philosophical* viewpoints which provided the basis for the method as it was applied by Marx. This was done not only by studying Darwin's theories about the evolution of the species and the lineage of human beings, important for developing a detailed grounding of Marxist anthropology (see p. 233) as this was, but also by studying contemporary sciences such as mechanics, cosmology, physics, chemistry and general biology together with a renewed study of Hegel's philosophy.

#### *Engels and Dialectical Materialism*

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11. Orig. Dan. "verdensanskuelse" (Witt-Hansen, 1961, 236); En. *world-view* (or ideology); Ger. *Weltanschauung*.

By 1858 Marx and Engels had both renewed their studies of Hegelian philosophy, even though Marx had earlier, in their 1847 critique of the French-Hegelian social philosopher Proudhon's *The Philosophy of Poverty*, distanced themselves strongly from Hegel's »dialectical« schema concerned with development proper or [238] triad (thesis-antithesis-synthesis)<sup>12</sup>. Notably, while Marx, in their seminal work *Capital*, only makes brief references to the Hegelian *mode of expression*, Engels' works sought to find the confirmation of the Hegelian generalizations of the development proper in the natural sciences, which were expressed in Engels' »laws of dialectics«.

While Hegel had considered nature to be an ossified realm of concepts, which – in opposition to human history and its spirit – does not undergo an independent development, Engels, on the other hand, set themselves the task of expanding or generalizing the Hegelian »laws of dialectics« so as also to include *nature*.

Hand-in-hand with these efforts, Engels attempted to expand the viewpoints of development contained within Historical Materialism and Darwin's evolutionary theory to also include the theory of planetary systems. Engels sought support in the hypothesis that had been put forward by the German philosopher Kant (1755) regarding the creation, evolution and destruction of planetary systems. Engels found in Kant's theory of the two driving forces behind this development, attraction and repulsion, an analogy to the »struggle of opposites«, which Engels, in agreement with Hegel, considered to be the impulse behind the development proper of both organic nature and human history. »Kant's discovery« says Engels, »provided the springboard for all further progress«.

The viewpoints developed by Engels were laid down in the philosophical-polemic work, *Anti-Dühring*, published in 1878, and in the incomplete work, *Dialectics of Nature* (written between 1873 and 1885 and subsequently published by the Marx-Engels Institute in 1925).

In these works, which together with Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* (1908<sup>13</sup>) and *Philosophical Notebooks* (written between 1914 and 1916 and subsequently published between 1929 and 1930) form the cornerstone of Communist philosophy, Engels speaks of dialectics as a *science of the general laws of the development proper of nature, society and thought*. Engels also speaks of dialectics as a *science of the connection* between the different disciplines. This science includes according- [239, 1/2 page of Engels] ly: »the laws of the evolution of planetary systems« (Kant); »the laws of the evolution of organic nature« (Darwin); »the laws of the development of human history« (Marx); and »the laws of the connection between the different disciplines« (mechanics, physics, chemistry, biology) – all of which are special instances of the »laws of dialectics«.

Since Engels' dialectics disregards the Hegelian theory of »the Absolute Idea« or the World-Spirit, and because nature or matter is a necessary precondition for history and the human spirit, Engels' theory becomes primarily a theory of the development of the material processes and only secondarily a theory of the development proper of these processes as they are mirrored by thought. To this extent, Engels' theory is a *materialist* dialectics, distinct from Hegel's dialectics where *all* processes of development proper are of a mental or spiritual nature.

Engelsian *dialectical materialism* has, as already mentioned, become the core of Communist philosophy. As such, Communist philosophy frequently talks of *science, theories and general laws*, rather than of *world-views, presumptions, viewpoints or hypotheses*. This follows from the above hypotheses about Historical Materialism, as well as Darwin's laws of evolution.

Even though, in regards to dialectical materialism, Engels repeatedly talks of »science«, »theory«, »general laws«, and indubitably supports this with reference to the various scientific disciplines, it is still hardly possible to describe dialectical materialism as a science. In particular, it seems difficult, even with the help of scientifically applied logical and empirical tests, to denote, with any reasonable warranty, the validity of dialectical materialism's far-reaching generalizations.

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12. Witt-Hansen is here referring to the development proper of Hegelian thought which leads to idealism or the Absolute Spirit or Idea. This reference is however also quite ambiguous in the original text.

13. *Sic*. Written in 1908, but not published until 1909.

It is interesting in this context that Albert Einstein, when asked for a comment on (a part of??) the manuscript for *Dialectics of Nature* in 1924 noted that its »content is not particularly interesting, neither from the position of modern physics nor for the history of physics«. This harsh verdict should be understood in light of the fact that Engels' classification of and theory of the connection between the different natural sciences (mechanics, physics, chemistry, biology) turned out to be incompatible with facts discovered in connection with Planck's quantum theory (1900), Einstein's theory of special relativity (1905), Bohr's atomic theory (1913), and Einstein's theory of general relativity (1916).

Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* nevertheless came, after its initial publication in 1925, to play an extraordinarily large role in the construction of Communist philosophy in the USSR. This will be described succinctly in the following.[241<sup>14</sup>]

### *Lenin and Communist Philosophy*

In *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* Lenin made themselves, with reference to Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, the spokesman for dialectical materialism understood as »the essential theoretical foundation of Marxism«. In an article from 1922 published in the Russian journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*, Lenin addressed its editors and workers with a call to form »a kind of »association of materially minded friends of Hegelian dialectics« «.

Though it can hardly be said that Lenin's call was heard, it was still undoubtedly the case that the more Hegelian faction under the leadership of A. Deborin in the 1920s gained the upper hand during the early years of the development of Communist philosophy. Meanwhile, the radical anti-philosophy faction, which during this period demanded that philosophy should be thrown out together with religion, lost its foothold.

In the struggle against the anti-philosophy faction, Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* turned out to be a more useful ally than Lenin's study of Hegelian philosophy, the latter of which was almost completed at this time. In addition to this study, a collection of Lenin's philosophical contemplations, written in Switzerland between 1914 and 1916, was published later, between 1929 and 1930, as the *Philosophical Notebooks*. It was in these writings that Lenin wrote the seldom quoted words that »clever idealism (Hegelianism) stands closer to clever materialism than stupid materialism«.

At the same time, Deborin was increasingly confronted by a group of younger philosophers under the leadership of M. Mitin. These younger philosophers argued that Deborin's group had separated philosophy and politics, theory and praxis, and charged them with focusing too much on Hegelian logic and the history of philosophy, at the expense of actual philosophical-political problems.

With Stalin's support, philosophy was, so to speak, drawn in- [242] to the political struggle. This was expressed in the slogan about the »two-front war« in philosophy which was similar to the situation in the political sphere.

In 1929, while Deborin was still the director of *The Communist Academy's Institute for Philosophy*, this attitude had a strong influence on the organization of philosophical studies in the USSR.

### *Dialectical Materialism as »the sole scientific world-view«*

In 1931 the leadership of Russian philosophy was placed completely in the hands of the younger philosophers led by Mitin. A clear expression of this group's position within Communist philosophy can be found in the dissertation *Dialectical Materialism* in *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (vol. 22, 45-235, 1935). Here it is clearly stated that dialectical materialism is the world-view of the Communist party and an important weapon in the political and ideological

14. This page contains an unspecified reference to p. 16 in *Vor Tids Filosofi* (1961) where the editor, in their *Historical Introduction*, outlines the revolutions and critiques of religion starting from "Luther, Melanchton, Calvin et al." to Locke and general "[t]houghts about tolerance and spiritual freedom" (*Vor Tids Filosofi*, 1961, 16, my translation).

struggle. At the same time, in accordance with Engels, dialectical materialism is understood as a *science* of the general laws of the development proper of nature, science and thought. As a science dialectical materialism is not only a *theory* of the most common features of nature, society and thought, but it is also a *method* for exploring these disciplines. Dialectical materialism therefore appears explicitly as »the only scientific world-view or ideology«. Here I am referring back to my previous remarks (on p. 240).

Through the narrow connection between theory and praxis, philosophy and politics, heralded under Mitin's leadership, Communist philosophy became neither more elastic nor less dogmatic than it had been under Deborin. Presumably, the dissertation cited above, from *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, is the first expression of a coherent presentation of dialectical materialism as a »scientific« system including the »laws« of dialectics. And even if this [243<sup>14</sup> 1/2 page picture of Lenin] presentation does not have the same Hegelian imprint, which is undeniably encountered in Deborin, then it has, because of its dogmatic use of Engels' *Anti-Dühring* and *Dialectics of Nature*, together with Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* and *Philosophical Notebooks*, an imprint of absoluteness stronger than any previous systematic presentation of Communist philosophy.

This systematic presentation of the »laws« of dialectical materialism begins from Hegel's and later Engels' well-known »law of the unity of opposites«, in addition to all of the other »dialectical laws«. Indeed, the laws of the development proper and the laws of connection are described as special or more concrete instances of the former »constitutive law« of the unity of opposites. Other aspects presented here include Hegel's and Engel's well-known »law of quantity's transition to quality and vice versa« and »the law of the negation of negation«.

It would be too extensive to describe these [244] »laws«, whose meaning it can be hard to comprehend, and whose area of application it can equally be difficult to limit, in more detail. Here it will only be observed that »the law of the unity of opposites« states that all change and all development in both nature and history occurs as a consequence of an impulse, inherent in them, and not by virtue of a divine principle of motion that somehow, »externally«, brings about the change or development. One can think of Aristotle's »unmoved mover«, Newton's »God«, Hegel's »World-Spirit«, or Ranke's »leading ideas«, as examples of such divine principles.

The inner impulse, which, so to speak, keeps the natural- and historical-processes moving, originates from certain »oppositions« which form a kind of insoluble unity (in the things, in nature and history). »The struggle of opposites« is accordingly the source of all change and development proper. Examples of such changes or developments are made in reference to the evolution of the solar system through the basic forces of attraction and repulsion (Kant), the evolution of the species through the individual's struggle for survival (Darwin), and the development of class-societies as the result of antagonistic class-struggle (Marx).

In the preceding I have referred to far-reaching processes of generalization and dogmatization, which subsequently led to the assumptions, viewpoints, intuitions and hypotheses stipulated by Historical Materialism, and which in turn came to be perceived as theories or laws such as those we know from the mathematical sciences, e.g. classical mechanics, the theories of relativity, and quantum mechanics.

### *Dialectical Materialism as a Scientific Method*

I conclude with some remarks about dialectical materialism as a *method* in the sciences (cf. p. 242). It was mentioned earlier (on p. 241) that certain radicals had, in the USSR of the early 1920s, demanded that philosophy be disregarded completely [245]. This demand was, as mentioned, rejected by Lenin, Deborin and others. Philosophical discussion, they thought, was of such importance to the scientific life that philosophy must take up an equally important seat in the pantheon of sciences.

This opinion was made explicitly with the creation of the *Institute for Philosophy*, first (in 1926) in connection with the *Communist Academy*, and later (in 1937) in connection with the *USSR Academy of Sciences* (AN SSSR) located in Moscow.

In 1929 substantial changes were made to the structure of this academy; not only were a large number of new members elected into the academy, but these were now also expected to make their knowledge and talents available for the construction of socialism. Because the new organizational structure of the academy emphasized close collaboration between theory and practice, it introduced »and proclaimed that the philosophy of dialectical materialism was the basis of scientific labour« (*The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 1, 576, 1949 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed.]).

Henceforth, dialectical materialism became the official State philosophy in the USSR, and any further discussion of scientific methodology which took into account philosophical viewpoints was hereafter solely discussed in relation to the theses of dialectical materialism. To the extent that philosophical considerations played a role in their labour, these theses should, it was stated, serve to guide the scientists.

Discussions and considerations of this kind not only played a significant role in the social sciences, but also to a large degree in logic, linguistics, theoretical physics, biology, and psychology. However, in contrast to this the mathematical sciences seemed to stand on their own, unaffected by dialectical materialism.

The *Institute for Philosophy* certainly took on a central position during these discussions, and functioned as the intermediary organ between political and scientific interests within dialectical materialism. This became strikingly clear in a series of discussions, beginning in 1947 with A. Zhdanov's debilitating critique of G. Alexandrov's book *The History of Western European Philosophy*, published in 1946 by [246] the *Institute for Philosophy*. In 1947 and 1948 this led to an extremely hefty discussion about philosophical issues in relation to quantum mechanics, which began with an article published by the Russian physicist M. Markov in the journal *Problems of Philosophy* (no. 2, 1947). When in 1948 the biologist T. Lysenko gave their now famous speech regarding *The Situation in Biological Science*, this became the beginning of a long-lasting discussion about I. Mičurin's »foundation of the science of biology« (Lysenko). Meanwhile Stalin, in 1950, published their book *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics*, which deeply criticized the Russian linguist N. Marr's theory of language, making public the shortcomings of Marr's works and viewpoints by proving their discrepancy in relation to the basic theses of dialectical materialism.

The above discussions occurred in, among other places, the journal published by the *Institute for Philosophy*, *Problems of Philosophy* (1947), and in various other publications by the institute. Here it should be noted that the earlier mentioned (see p. 235) work on Historical Materialism (*Historical Materialism*, 1954) was also published by the *Institute for Philosophy*, together with an extensive textbook on dialectical materialism (*Dialectical Materialism*, 1953 and later editions).

The difficulty associated with using dialectical materialism as a method in or guide for the sciences lies not only within this doctrine itself, but also in the fact that dialectical materialism is the world-view or »ideology« of a powerful statist society. It therefore seems obvious to assume that the interest in this society's stability is also closely connected to the demand for a fairly unchanging world-view.

On the other hand, this society's stability, its well-being and further existence is also significantly conditioned by making scientific labour in all disciplines, not least in the social sciences, as effective as possible. This interest is however closely connected with the demand that scientists are free in the face of new viewpoints, theories, issues and facts, and that their research is not conditioned by their adherence to any predetermined principles.

In the long run it will hardly be dialectical materialism that will shape the scientific research conducted in the USSR; it will rather be that dialectical materialism, as a result of the development of the sciences, gradually changes its character. The question is then what will be left of those theses which are today considered the constitutive laws of dialectical materialism.

No matter where scientific research is conducted, it always has the distinctive character of exposing scientists to the unexpected and the surprising. The history of both philosophy and the sciences have taught us that new and richer experiences, in connection with a renewed logical analysis, have, again and again, forced scientists to realize the invalidity or the limited validity of

their theoretical presentations. Similarly, it was the experiences and the logical analyses which, around the turn of the 20th century, *forced* the previously mentioned physicists to realize that not even classical mechanics had universal validity.

### [253] **Bibliography**

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