

THE DEBATE ON THE UNITY OF THE WORLD

Dühring, Engels, Lenin, Bazarov, Dietzgen, Plekhanov, Yushkevich, Petzoldt

One Divides Into Two

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The debate on the unity of the world raised by Lenin in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism (MEC)* 3.4 involves many thinkers responding to one another over three decades. We get an oblique indication of its extent when Lenin remarks that Yushkevich accepted the “*obvious mistakes of the materialist Dietzgen,*” who is not otherwise mentioned in the section. We have presented the debate in ten parts:

- (1) Dühring’s argument that ‘all-embracing being is one’ from his *Course in Philosophy* (1875).
- (2) Engels’ attack on the Dühring passage in *Anti-Dühring* (1877).
- (3) Lenin’s commentary on the Engels’ passage in *MEC* 2.2.
- (4) The Bazarov passage referenced in Lenin’s commentary in *MEC* 2.2.
- (5) Joseph Dietzgen’s reprise of Dühring in *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy* (1887).
- (6) Plekhanov’s critique of Dietzgen in *Joseph Dietzgen* (1907).
- (7) Yushkevich’s comments on Dühring, Engels, Dietzgen, and Plekhanov in *Materialism and Critical Realism* (1908).
- (8) Lenin’s critique of Yushkevich in *MEC* 3.4.
- (9) Petzoldt’s openly idealist argument in *Introduction to the Philosophy of Pure Experience*, Vol. II (1904).
- (10) Lenin’s commentary on Petzoldt following the quoted portions of (9), in *MEC* 3.4.

In the quoted passages, **bolded phrases** indicate the lines quoted by Lenin in *MEC* 3.4.

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1. Dühring, *Course in Philosophy* [*Philosophy of Reality*], 1875

“*Basic forms of being*

“*First chapter*

Elementary concepts of the worldview

“*All-embracing being is one [einzig]. In its self-sufficiency it has nothing above or beside it. To associate a second being with it would mean making what it is not, namely, a part or constituent part of a larger whole. By stretching out our unified [einheitlichen] thought as a framework, as it were, nothing that has to go into this unity of thought [Gedankeneinheit] can retain a duality in itself. But nothing can escape this unity of thought; for where should an element be transferred that should remain an object of thought in general? But what could never be the object of thought would cease to belong to our concept of being and the world and therefore become completely nothing for us.*

“*However, it is not enough to recognize the oneness [Einzigkeit] of being in the manner indicated from the unity [Einheit] of our own thought. Any other thinking would also bring about the same idea. The essence of all thought consists in the unification of the elements of consciousness into one unity [Einheit]. Therefore, however we may conceive a thought outside of our own, we shall have to equip it in the same way with the power of summation and with the capacity of taking in the world and all the worlds that may exist into its framework. Even if it lacked the external tools to assure itself of all reality in the particular, the starting point would still remain in itself an indivisible unity [Einheit], which would correspond to the oneness [Einzigkeit] of all being and would guarantee the unification of all parts into one total thought. Those many worlds which we have named hypothetically and actually in word only, would transform themselves ahead of any thought into one [einzig].*

“It is also important to make it clear that the degree of universality of thought adds nothing to the unity [Einheit] just explained. Whether a thought stands high or low, whether it spans much or little, depends on its particular equipment. But it is already its very general nature which, without regard to special arrangement and equipment, brings with it the universal unity [Einheit] of the worldview and hence the oneness [Einzigkeit] of the associated world-concept. Also the repetition of thought in manifold carriers of it does not change that fundamental relation; for it is not the oneness [Einzigkeit] of the function of thought, but the unity-point [Einheitspunkt] of summation, whereby the indivisible world-concept arose, and the universe, as already stated by the word, is recognized as something in which everything is unified into one unity [Einheit].

“It would be foolish to want to present this latter unification, by virtue of which all reality is united [einheitlich] and, as it were, made into a single [einzigem] being, as an inner thinking in things. This would indeed mean inventing a consciousness where none exists. But a thinking without consciousness is either a meaningless combination of words or an oblique expression for an act that contains no thinking at all, but only a connecting activity in general. Moreover, the concatenations and unity [Einheit] which are expressed in the real in different schemes and relations are only secondary consequences of oneness [Einzigkeit], so that in the parallel which we have before us between thought and being, only two simple points correspond to each other. The multiple concordances are not even mentioned here, and thus one can neither speak of special functions of thought nor of special chains of being regarding this fundamental question. Thought has its unity [Einheit] before it passes to a special conception and to special activities of unification. Being, however, is one [einziges], quite independently of how and by what forces it is connected within itself.

*“Being would retain the same quality that we have discussed even if it were not thought at all. By being capable of this thought, we prove that we are able to refrain from the thought in which the world appears as an object. With this abstraction, however, we are already entering that limit at which thinking expires in non-thinking or, to put it quite clearly, thought expires in thoughtlessness. It might seem as if, with that idea of the unthought oneness and unity [Einzigkeit und Einheit] of being, we put ourselves into the interior of things themselves and grasp an essential trait which before all thought – or, more precisely, at the limit of all thought – expressed something which, independent of subjective consciousness, provided the link for a new kind of logic and consequence. However, this semblance disappears as soon as we consider that each property of the real is always covered by a clear element of thought, and that we must not confuse the knowledge of this property with its existence in itself. Our knowledge is never independent of our thinking, but the reality corresponding to the concept is independent of the act of comprehension. The concept of oneness and unity [Einzigkeit und Einheit] never exists except in some consciousness; but that oneness [Einzigkeit] itself has nothing to do with the existence or absence of this or that or all thinking.” (Dühring, *Course in Philosophy [Philosophy of Reality]*, 1875, 16-18)*

2. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 1877, 1.4. Here Engels provides an extended commentary on this passage from Dühring’s *Course*:

“If we try to state his process of thought in unalloyed form, we get the following: I begin with being. I therefore think what being is. The thought of being is a unified thought. But thinking and being must be in agreement, they are in conformity with each other, they ‘coincide.’ Therefore being is a unity also in reality. Therefore there cannot be anything ‘beyond.’ If Herr Dühring had spoken without disguise in this way, instead of treating us to the above oracular passages, his ideology would have been clearly visible. To attempt to prove the reality of any product of thought by the identity of thinking and being was indeed one of the most absurd delirious fantasies of – a Hegel.

*“Even if his whole method of proof had been correct, **Herr Dühring would still not have won an inch of ground from the spiritualists.** The latter would reply briefly: to us, too, the universe is simple; the division into this world and the world beyond exists only for our specifically earthly, original-sin standpoint; in and for itself, that is, in God, all being is a unity. And they would accompany Herr Dühring to his other beloved celestial bodies and show him one or several*

on which there had been no original sin, where therefore no opposition exists between this world and the beyond, and where the unity of the universe is a dogma of faith.

“The most comical part of the business is that Herr Dühring, in order to prove the non-existence of God from the idea of being, uses the ontological proof for the existence of God. This runs: when we think of God, we conceive him as the sum total of all perfections. But the sum total of all perfections includes above all existence, since a non-existent being is necessarily imperfect. We must therefore include existence among the perfections of God. Hence God must exist. Herr Dühring reasons in exactly the same way: when we think of being, we conceive it as one idea. Whatever is comprised in one idea is a unity. Being would not correspond to the idea of being if it were not a unity. Consequently it must be a unity. Consequently there is no God, and so on.

“When we speak of being, and purely of being, unity can only consist in that all the objects to which we are referring – are, exist. They are comprised in the unity of this being, and in no other unity, and the general dictum that they all are not only cannot give them any additional qualities, whether common or not, but provisionally excludes all such qualities from consideration. For as soon as we depart even a millimeter from the simple basic fact that being is common to all these things, the differences between these things begin to emerge — and whether these differences consist in the circumstance that some are white and others black, that some are animate and others inanimate, that some may be of this world and others of the world beyond, cannot be decided by us from the fact that mere existence is in equal manner ascribed to them all.

“The unity of the world does not consist in its being, although its being is a precondition of its unity, as it must certainly first be before it can be one. Being, indeed, is always an open question beyond the point where our sphere of observation ends. **The real unity of the world consists in its materiality, and this is proved not by a few juggled phrases, but by a long and wearisome development of philosophy and natural science.**” (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 1877, 1.4)

3. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, 1908, 2.2. Lenin discusses the last paragraph from the Engels passage above (Quote 2) in *MEC* 2.2, in relation to Bazarov:

“But first, let us finish with Bazarov’s ‘processing’ [обработки] of Engels: ‘[...] In one place in his *Anti-Dühring*, Engels says that ‘being’ outside the realm of perception is an *offene frage*, i.e., a question, for the answer to which, or even for the asking of which, we have no data.’ Bazarov repeats this argument following the German Machist Friedrich Adler. This last example is almost worse than the ‘sense perception’ which ‘is the reality existing outside us.’ In *Anti-Dühring*, 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 [*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 juggled phrases, but by a long and wearisome development of philosophy and natural science.’ (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 1877)

“Look at this new paté from our cook. Engels talks about being beyond the border where our field of vision ends, i.e., for example, about the existence of people on Mars, etc. Clearly, such a being is indeed an open question. But Bazarov, as if deliberately not giving a full quotation, retells Engels as if the question of ‘‘being’ outside the realm of perception’ is an open one! This is the height of nonsense, and Engels is credited with the views of those professors of philosophy whom Bazarov is accustomed to take at their word and whom Dietzgen rightly called the certified lackeys of popovschina or fideism.” (Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, 1908, 2.2)

4. Bazarov, “Mysticism and the Realism of Our Time,” in *Studies ‘in’ the Philosophy of Marxism*, 1908, 64-66. This is the passage discussed by Lenin in *MEC* 2.2 (Quote 3, above) regarding Bazarov’s argument that Engels is a positivist, based on his mistranslation into Russian of the German “stimmen mit” (literally, “voice with”) meaning “to conform to” as “to coincide with.” Lenin quotes this passage at the end of the section.

“*The Materialism of Marx and Engels*

“*In this chapter, I do not set out to give any coherent outline of the ‘worldview’ of Marx and Engels; I will not, for example, touch on such a cardinal question as the question of dialectics – my article has already grown too long. However, it is absolutely necessary to point out, at least in the most general outline, the fundamental divergence with Marx and Engels of those points of the Plekhanov system discussed in the First Chapter. This is necessary because, as is well known, ‘a precedent has been established in the practice of the Kashin District Court’¹: anyone who disagrees in any matter with G. V. Plekhanov should be charged under Article 126² for overthrowing the foundations of Marxism. To confirm his understanding of the ‘thing-in-itself’ in contrast to Kant’s, G. V. Plekhanov quotes the following passage from Engels’ Preface to the English edition of his work From Utopia to Science³:*

“‘Again, our agnostic admits that all our knowledge is based upon the information imparted to us by our senses. But, he adds, how do we know that our senses give us correct representations of the objects we perceive through them? And he proceeds to inform us that, whenever we speak of objects, or their qualities, of which he cannot know anything for certain, but merely the impressions which they have produced on his senses. 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.*⁴ 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-perception. 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 proof positive that our perceptions of it and of its qualities, so far, agree with reality outside ourselves.’”

“*Here Engels is actually attacking Kantian idealism; but, alas! his argument is aimed against Plekhanov’s philosophy just as much as it is against Kantian philosophy. In the school of Plekhanov-Orthodox, 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., cognized, 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. 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. The agnostic asks, how do we know that our subjective senses give us a correct presentation of objects? But what do you term ‘correct’? – Engels rejoins. – That is correct which is*

¹ [This is a famous line from the social satirist (often quoted by Lenin, cf. *WITBD* 3F) Mikail Saltykov-Schedrin’s *Modern Idyll* (1883): “*Members of the court followed the prosecutors. They climbed the stairs solidly and had a solid conversation, which invariably began with the words: ‘A precedent has been established in the practice of the Kashin District Court ...’ First one will say these words, then another will repeat, then a third, and the doorman looks at them and is not overjoyed. In general, these people, apparently, perfectly understood that on the twentieth day of each month, nothing would prevent them from taking advantage of the content appropriated from the treasury. The Kashinka [river] can overflow its banks and drown the treasury, and fire can destroy it, But their money will not burn in fire, nor drown in water.*”]

² [Article 126 of the Criminal Code was used to charge political crimes against the autocracy.]

³ [The original title of *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* was *The Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science* (1880). The familiar title was adopted for the first English edition of the work in 1892, for which the Preface discussed here by Bazarov was appended]

⁴ [“In the beginning was the deed.” A quote from Goethe’s *Faust*.]

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. 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, sense perception is [Bazarov's italics] the reality existing outside us.

"But what is beyond these boundaries? Of this Engels does not say a word. He nowhere manifests a desire to perform that 'transcensus,' that stepping beyond the boundaries of the perceptually-given world, which lies at the foundation of Plekhanov's 'theory of knowledge.' In one place in his Anti-Dühring, Engels says that 'being' outside of the realm of perception is an offene Frage, i.e., a question, for the answer to which, or even for the asking of which we have no data. On page 23 of the same Anti-Dühring (quoted from the 3rd German ed.):

"If we deduce world schematism not from our minds, but only through our minds from the real world, if we deduce principles of being from what is, we need no philosophy for this purpose, but positive knowledge of the world and of what happens in it; and what this yields is also not philosophy, but positive science."

"Engels proceeds from empirical facts developed by 'positive science' as from true, real being (aus dem was ist ["from what is"]); his thinking does not need any a priori 'philosophical' premise of transcendental being. And Plekhanov asserts that the philosophical 'life-giving leap' (salto vitale) into the transcendental realm of things-in-themselves is 'a necessary precondition for critical thinking in the best sense of the word.' Not badly, G.V. Plekhanov expounds and explains Engels' world outlook.

"On page 41 of Anti-Dühring we read: 'space and time are the basic forms of all being,' and on page 49: 'movement is the mode of existence of matter.' Engels' matter moves in our space and time, while Plekhanov's matter does something that corresponds to movement in something corresponding to [space and time]. In Chapter VI, Engels speaks of the 'primordial nebula' as the first form of matter known to us, but with no sound does he hint that this primordial nebula is not matter 'in itself,' but only 'our' hieroglyph of matter.

As you can see, Engels everywhere proceeds from the reality of the directly-perceived sensual world, and consequently, from Plekhanov's point of view, he is absolutely in the same 'solipsism' as is Avenarius or Mach. It is true that Engels speaks sometimes (e.g., on page 49 of Anti-Dühring) of the 'atoms' of the world as of something real. But of course, there is not a slightest hint of a 'thing-in-itself' here either. For Engels, the heuristic primordial theory of the structure of matter could not be as clear as it is for us. Along with very many scientists of that time, he considered atoms to be a scientific thesis, i.e., an assumption that can be tested in one or another form, but not by experience. It was not metaphysics, not the 'philosophy' of matter, but a positivist scientific representation of that time.

*"Many of Engels' particular views, as for example, his conception of 'pure' space and time, are now obsolete. But the starting-point of his world outlook, his 'realism,' remains to this day the inviolable property of the truly scientific mind. And G. V. Plekhanov quite unnecessarily believed Konrad Schmidt and other neo-Kantians that 'critical' philosophy had undermined this realism. If he had not succumbed to this incomprehensible credulity, Marxism would have had a double win: on the one hand, he would have been able to develop Engels' worldview further, but on the other hand, he would not have been able to reconcile Engels with Kant with the help of a compromise, the barely [чуть-чуть] knowable thing-in-itself." (Bazarov, "Mysticism and the Realism of Our Time," in *Studies 'in' the Philosophy of Marxism*, 1908, 64-66)*

5. Dietzgen, *Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, 1887. Lenin comments on the "obvious mistakes of the materialist Dietzgen" refer to this passage. Here Dietzgen comments on the unity of the world in terms strikingly similar to those of Dühring's *Course* (Dühring: "All-embracing being is one"; Dietzgen: "being is everything"):

“In the historical course of philosophy, there has been much discussion as to where our knowledge comes from, whether any of it, or how much of it, is innate, and how much acquired by experience. Without any innate faculties no knowledge could have been gathered with any amount of experience, and without any experience even the best faculties would remain barren. The results of science in all departments are due to the interaction of subject and object.

“There could be no subjective faculty of vision unless there were something objective to be seen. The possession of a faculty of vision carries with it the practical performance of seeing. One cannot have the faculty of vision without seeing things. Of course, the two may be separated, but only in theory, not in practice, and this theoretical separation must be accompanied by the recollection that the separated faculty is only a conception derived from the practical function. Faculty and function are combined and belong together.

“Man does not acquire consciousness, the faculty of understanding, until he knows something, and his power grows with the performance of this function.

“The reader will remember that we have mentioned as an achievement of philosophy the understanding of the fact that we must not make any exaggerated distinctions. Hence we must not make any such distinction between the innate faculty of understanding and the acquired knowledge.

“It is an established universal rule that the human intellect knows of no absolute separation of any two things, although it is free to separate the universe into its parts for the purpose of understanding.

“Now, if I claim that the conception of the universe is innate in us, the reader must not conclude that I believe in the old prejudice of the human intellect being like a receptacle filled with ideas of the true, the beautiful, the good, and so forth. No, the intellect can create its ideas and concepts only by self-production and the world around it must furnish the materials for this purpose. But such a production presupposes an innate faculty. Consciousness, the knowledge of being, must be present, before any special knowledge can be acquired. Consciousness signifies the knowledge of being. It means having at least a faint inkling of the fact that being is The universal idea. Being is everything; it is the essence of everything. Without it there cannot be anything, because it is the universe, the infinite.

“Consciousness is in itself the consciousness of the infinite. The innate consciousness of man is the knowledge of infinite existence. When I know that I exist, then I know myself as a part of existence. That this existence, this world, of which I am but a particle with all others, must be an infinite world, does indeed not dawn on me until I begin to analyze the conception of being with an experienced instrument of thought. The reader, in undertaking this work with such an instrument, will at once discover that the conception of the infinite is innate to his consciousness,[8] and that no faculty of conception is possible without this conception. The faculty of conception, understanding, thought, means above all the faculty of grasping the universal concept. The intellect cannot have any conception which is not more or less clearly or faintly based on the concept of the universe. Cogito, ergo sum. I think, therefore, I am. Whatever I imagine is there, at least in imagination. Of course, the imagined and the real thing are different, yet this difference does not exceed the limits of the universal existence. Creatures of fiction and real creatures are not so radically different that they would not all of them fit into the general gender of being. The manner, the form of being, are different. Goblins exist in fiction and Polish Jews exist in a tangible form, but they both exist. The general existence comprises the body and the soul, fiction and truth, goblins and Polish Jews.

“It is no more inconceivable that the faculty of universal understanding should be innate in us than that circles come into this world round, two mountains have a valley between them, water is liquid and fire burns. All things have a certain composition in themselves, they are born with it. Does that require any explanation? The flowers which gradually grow on plants, the powers and wisdom that grow in men in the course of years, are no more easily explained than such innate faculties, and the latter are no more wonderful than those acquired later. The best explanation cannot deprive the wonders of nature of their natural marvelousness. It is a mistake to assume that the faculty of explanation which is located in the human brain, is a destroyer of the belief in natural marvels. Philosophy which makes this faculty of explanation and the nature of its explanations the object of its special study gives us a new

and much better understanding of this old miracle maker. It destroys the belief in metaphysical miracles by showing that physical nature is so universal that it absolutely excludes every other form of existence than the natural one from this world of wonders.

“I and many of my readers find in our brains the actual consciousness that this general nature of which the intellect is a part is an infinite nature. I call this consciousness innate, although it is acquired. The point that I wish to impress on the reader is that the difference generally made between innate and acquired qualities is not so extraordinary that the innate need not to be acquired and the acquired does not presuppose something innate. The one contradicts the other only in those brains who do not understand the positive outcome of philosophy. Such thinkers do not know how to make reasonable distinctions and exaggerate in consequence. They have not grasped the conciliation of all differences and contradictions in universal nature by which all contradictions are solved.

“Philosophy has endeavored to understand the intellect. In demonstrating the positive outcome of philosophy, we must explain that philosophical understanding as well as any other does not rise out of the isolated faculty of understanding, but out of the universal nature. The womb of our knowledge and understanding must not be sought in the human brain, but in all nature which is not only called the universe, but is actually universal. In order to prove this latter assertion, I refer to the fact that this conception, this consciousness of the infinite in the developed intellect, is in a manner innate. If the reader wishes to object to my indiscriminately mixing the innate faculty with the acquired understanding, I beg him to consider that I am endeavoring to prove that any and all distinction made by the intellect refers in reality to the inseparable parts of the one undivided universe. From this it follows that the admired and mysterious intellect is not a miracle, or at least no greater marvel than any other part of the general marvel which is identical with the infinitely wonderful general nature.

“Some people love to represent consciousness as something supernatural, to draw an unduly sharp line of separation between thinking and being, thought and reality. But philosophy, which occupies itself particularly with consciousness, has ascertained that such a sharp contrast is unwarranted, not in harmony with the reality, and not a faithful likeness of reality and truth.

“In order to understand what philosophy has accomplished in the way of insight into the function of the discriminating intellect, we must never lose sight of the fact that there is only a moderate distinction of degree between purely imaginary things and so-called real things.

“Neither the natural condition of our faculty of thought, nor the universality of general nature, permit of an exaggerated distinction between the reality of creations of imagination and of really tangible things. At the same time the exigencies of science demand clear illustrations and so we must distinguish between these two kinds of reality. It is true that in common usage the mere thought and the purely imaginary things are set apart from nature and reality as something different and antagonistic. Yet the rules of language heretofore in vogue cannot prevent the spread of the additional knowledge that the universe, or general nature, is so unlimited that it can establish a conciliation between these limited antagonisms. The cat and the dog, for instance, are pronounced enemies, but nevertheless zoology recognizes them as being legitimate domestic companions.

“Human consciousness is, in the first place, individual. Every human individual has its own. But the peculiarity of my consciousness, of yours, and that of others, is that of being not alone the consciousness of the individual in question, but also the general consciousness of the universe, at least that is its possibility and mission. Not every individual is conscious of the universality of general nature, otherwise there would be none of that distracting dualism. Nor would there be any necessity for volumes and volumes of philosophy to teach us that a limit, a thing, or a world outside of the universal, is a nonsensical idea, an idea which is contrary to sense and reason. We may well say, for this reason, that our consciousness, our intellect, is only in a manner of speaking our own, while it is in fact a consciousness, an intellect belonging to universal nature.

“It can no more be denied that our consciousness is an attribute of the infinite universe than it can be denied that the sun, the moon and the stars are. Since this intellectual faculty belongs to the infinite and is its child, we must not wonder that this universal faculty of thought is born with the capability of grasping the conception of a universe. And whoever does no longer wonder at this, must find it explicable, must realize that the fact of universal consciousness is thus explained.” (Dietzgen, *Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, 1887)

6. Plekhanov, *Joseph Dietzgen*, 1907. In this passage, Plekhanov links Dietzgen’s ‘muddle’ to the passage from Dühring attacked by Engels:

“Space does not permit us to follow up all the regrettable logical consequences of the muddle that has crept into Joseph Dietzgen’s understanding of the ‘first paragraph’ of materialist dialectics; his completely erroneous views of the criterion of truth, and so on. We shall restrict ourselves, therefore, to the remark that, in spite of his son’s opinion, Joseph Dietzgen was unable to solve the problem of the relation of the subject to the object, and that it was this that brought about his logical downfall. We shall add that Joseph Dietzgen’s error arose, apparently, from a highly praiseworthy endeavor to pull the theoretical ground from under the feet of speculative philosophy, which placed spirit – in one or other of its conceptions – outside and above the world. In opposition to this philosophy, Joseph Dietzgen put forward the proposition that ‘being is everything; it is the essential content of everything, outside it there is nothing and can be nothing, because it is the cosmos, that is, the infinite’ (p 26). It goes without saying that as an argument against speculative philosophy, this has absolutely no value, since to repudiate the existence of extra-universal spirit by a simple recital of the proposition that the world contains in itself all being, is to base oneself on a tautology, fully identical with that which Eugene Dühring once placed as the cornerstone of his philosophy and which Engels ridiculed so scathingly in the first part of Anti-Dühring: ‘All-embracing being is one.’ But Joseph Dietzgen thought this tautological expression was almost the most important ‘outcome’ of philosophy. With its aid, he attempted to solve all contradictions.” (Plekhanov, *Joseph Dietzgen*, 1907)

7. Pavel Yushkevich, *Materialism and Critical Realism*, 1908. In 1908, the ‘empirio-symbolist’ Yushkevich comments on Plekhanov’s commentary on Dühring, Dietzgen, and Engels, arguing that (1) Plekhanov was correct to link Dietzgen and Dühring, both of whom “rely on the Eleatic doctrine of the One and the Many”⁵; (2) but if Engels were to criticize Dietzgen, “then Engels would be wrong, not Dietzgen.” He then defends the idealist Dühring-Dietzgen “postulate” of the *a priori* unity of the world:

“In citing this quotation, Plekhanov observes that it contains in itself a tautology, identical with the one from which E. Dühring proceeded in his philosophy and which Engels ridiculed so scathingly in Anti-Dühring. The similarity with Dühring regarding this point is indicated correctly, and it could be traced even a little further. However, there is nothing surprising here, since both Dietzgen and Dühring rely on the Eleatic doctrine of the One and the Many. It is possible that Engels, to whom Plekhanov is appealing, would have laughed at Dietzgen’s ‘tautology’ as he did at that

⁵ [The **Eleatics** were a pre-Socratic school of Greek philosophy that flourished under the leadership of Parmenides in the 400s BC in what today is Campania, Italy. Other Eleatics included Xenophanes and Zeno. The problem of **the One and the Many**, which preoccupied this school of philosophy, involved explaining how one thing can be the source of a diversity of things. **Parmenides** argued that our spontaneous perceptions are misleading, and that if we make “reason the standard,” and refuse to be governed by “an aimless eye, an echoic ear,” we will discover that being is univocal, unified, undifferentiated, and unchanging. The **enemies of the Eleatics** were the various pre-Socratic materialists, including Democritus – of whom Marx wrote his dissertation – Empedocles, and Heraclitus. **Democritus** argued that the many, and not the one, is fundamental, i.e., reality is a chance combination of multiple elements (atoms), which are the primary matter of reality. **Empedocles** argued that reality is a series of permutations of the four ‘roots’ (earth, water, air, and fire) and changes are chance combinations of these elements brought about by their attraction and repulsion to each other. **Heraclitus** argued for the universality of contradiction and flux, in contrast to the Parmenidean argument that reality is motionless and unchanging.]

of Dühring. But then Engels would be wrong, not Dietzgen, because Dietzgen's thought, tautological in form, conceals **the cardinal postulate of the fundamental homogeneity and connection of being**. But Dietzgen – following one of the contradictory turns of his undisciplined thought – gave the form of an a priori principle to this basic postulate of our knowledge of nature, which contains in a clear and strict form the results of our instinctive attitude to the world, accumulated for centuries. In our knowledge there are many such axiomatic and, apparently, a priori **propositions**, which, in fact, only express the results of our total, undifferentiated, and instinctive experience. **It would not be exact to say that they have been deduced from experience, since scientific experience is possible only because they are made the basis of the investigation.** They are postulates – heuristic principles thanks to which it is possible to orient oneself in the boundless sea of experience. Their value and significance are distinguished by their theoretical and practical results for human beings.

“One of these postulates is the doctrine of the unity and oneness of being. In spite of all the dualistic excrescences of human thought, it is undoubtedly present, dimly, in the instinctive experience of everyone. Dietzgen speaks of it in this sense as a ‘dormant, dark knowledge’ (see above), preceding any other special knowledge, and which therefore sounds almost a priori: ‘people know a priori: the whole of the world is the whole. Common life is conceivable only as homogeneous’ (Letters, p. 171). This is a postulate; as I thought, it is necessary to interpret Dietzgen's ‘tautology’ of the identity and unity of being, and I prefer to reason. Engels, polemicizing with Dühring on this issue, says: **‘The real unity of the world consists in its materiality, and this is proved not by a few juggled phrases, but by a long and wearisome development of philosophy and natural science.’**”

“**First of all, it is not clear what is meant here by the assertion that ‘the unity of the world consists in its materiality.’** As for the evidence gleaned from the development of philosophy and natural science, this can only mean that the postulate of the unity of the world turned out to be suitable for the development of science – that it was justified by this development.” (Yushkevich, *Materialism and Critical Realism*, 1908)

8. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, 1908, 3.4. In MEC 3.4, Lenin seizes upon Yushkevich's rehash of Dühring and Dietzgen to attack him for upholding propositions derived outside of experience in an idealist manner:

“Isn't this kind of cute? This subject [Yushkevich] has taken it upon himself to talk publicly about the philosophy of Marxism in order to declare that the most elementary propositions of materialism are ‘not clear’ to him! Engels showed, using the example of Dühring, that any consistent philosophy can deduce the unity of the world either from thinking – and then it is helpless against spiritualism and fideism, and the arguments of such a philosophy inevitably reduce to fraudulent phrases – or from that objective reality that exists outside of us, long ago called matter in epistemology and studied by natural science. It is useless to talk seriously with a subject to whom such a thing is ‘not clear,’ because he speaks of it being ‘not clear’ here in order to fraudulently evade the answer in essence to Engels' perfectly clear materialist position, while repeating the purely Dühringian nonsense about ‘the cardinal postulate of the fundamental homogeneity and connection of being’ – concerning postulates as ‘propositions’ about which ‘it would not be exact to say that they have been deduced from experience, since scientific experience is possible only because they are made the basis of the investigation.’ This is all nonsense, for if this subject had any respect for the printed word, he would see the idealist character in general and the Kantian character in particular of the idea that there can be propositions that are not taken from experience, and without which experience is impossible. A set of words picked up from various books and linked with the obvious mistakes of the materialist Dietzgen – this is what the ‘philosophy’ of the Yushkeviches is.” (Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, 1908, 3.4)

9. Petzoldt, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Pure Experience*, Vol. II, 1904. In contrast with Yushkevich's confusion, Lenin introduces several quotations from a passage by the consistent idealist Petzoldt. Lenin introduces the quotes with the following: “Let's look at the arguments about the unity of the world of one serious empirio-critic, Joseph Petzoldt. Paragraph 29 of the 2nd volume of his Introduction is titled: ‘The Tendency to a Uniform [einheitlich] Conception of the Realm of Knowledge. The Postulate of the Unique Determination of All that Happens.’ Here are samples of his

reasoning: [...]” (Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, 1908, 3.4). In the passage from which Lenin draws his quotes, Petzoldt brings his ‘law of unique determination’ to bear against the biologist Ernst Haeckel:

*“Finally, let us explain our principle using a group of examples from the realm of knowledge. Here it asserts itself in the most remarkable way whenever a uniform view [Auffassung] of a field is pursued by a concept, a law, a principle. As long as thought cannot yet confront a series of facts, whose relatedness nevertheless imposes itself on it, with a concept and a law, as long as it still divides the description or explanation of the field into two or more principles, or, between two concepts, applies one just as easily as the other to a group – to this extent, it will have no quiescence [Ruhe = rest]. Again and again, efforts will be taken up which strive beyond pluralism and dualism to monism. **Only in unity can one find that natural end beyond which no thought can go and in which, consequently, thought – if it takes into consideration all the facts of the given sphere – can reach quiescence.***

“Thought could not be satisfied with the earlier assumption of numerous individual acts of creation. It urged the unity of the concept of development. And just as there is little agreement today about how this development may have proceeded in particular, there is almost no longer any doubt that it really took place and is still taking place. With this, a great movement of thought has fundamentally come to an end. Beyond this uniform conception of the origin of the manifold forms of life, a progress in principles is inconceivable: here a stable mental state has been reached, even if much time may pass before there will be as little to ask about the how of that origin as there is already today about the what.

“One stage along the way was, e.g., the discovery of the intermaxillary in humans. It can only be understood from the urge for a unified conception of the vertebrate type instead of the pluralistic one and can therefore be regarded as an expression of the tendency towards stability.

“In the field of chemistry, Mendeleev’s system of elements and efforts to reduce the latter to a single basic substance show us the same indomitable impulse.

“There is, of course, no logical reason why nature should conform to the demand for a unified view [einheitlicher Auffassung]. Just as thinking must always become quiescent [beruhigen] with ultimate facts [bei letzten Tatsachen] and also, only once it has convinced itself that they are ultimate, in fact becomes quiescent [tatsächlich beruhigt], so it would find a pluralist reality just as little contradictory as it does a monist one. More important to it than unity is the stability, the firmness, and the imperturbability of its propositions, and this is present when the certainty is obtained that a majority of facts cannot be further reduced to a smaller number. The urge for a uniform understanding of the real is not to be understood logically, but only biologically – namely, as dependent on changes in the brain – and changes in the brain are subject to the general striving of organic systems for stable states.

*“An earlier psychology, which understood the striving for unity of thought as the highest psychological function and accordingly designated it as reason, ran the risk of creating an unbridgeable gap between reason and nature. **It is beyond doubt that nature does not always respond to the demand for unity, but it is equally beyond doubt that in many cases it already satisfies the demand for quiescence and it must be held, in accordance with all our previous investigations, that nature in all probability will satisfy this demand in the future in all cases. Hence, it would be more correct to describe the actual soul [seelische = mental, psychic] behavior as a striving for states of stability rather than as a striving for unity.** The concept of the latter must often fail where the tendency towards stability still applies. **The principle of the states of stability goes farther and deeper.***

*“An example of the uncertainty, the wavering, and the instability into which thinking is placed when a group of facts can be brought under one as well as under the other of two concepts of the same order is given to us by the classification of the lowest living beings, which only became known long after the emergence of the terms plant and animal, and which is equally close to both. **Haeckel’s proposal to put the kingdom of the protista alongside the plant and animal kingdom is an untenable solution, for it creates two new difficulties in place of the former one difficulty: while formerly the boundary between the plants and animals was doubtful, now it becomes impossible to demarcate***

the protista from both plants and animals. One expression of the continuing difficulty is that certain groups of living things, such as the myxomycetes, are dealt with in the textbooks of both fields, zoology and botany. Obviously, such a state is not final [endgültig]. Such ambiguity of concepts must in one way or another be eliminated, if only, should there be no other means, by an agreement between the specialists, or by a majority vote.” (Joseph Petzoldt, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Pure Experience*, Vol. II, 1904)

10. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, 1908, 3.4. Lenin then comments on the passage from Petzoldt, offering him relative praise for his “scientific integrity”:

“Seems to be enough? It is clear that the empiricist Petzoldt is in no way better than Dühring. But you must also be fair to your opponent. Petzoldt has at least enough scientific integrity to reject materialism as a philosophical trend in each essay with determination and irrevocably. He does not stoop, at least, to imitate materialism and declare ‘not clear’ the most elementary difference between the main philosophical trends.” (Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, 1908, 3.4)