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STALIN AS A MARXIST PHILOSOPHER

ABSTRACT. This article treats Stalin's contributions to dialectical and historical materialism. It argues that the latter found his theses of the 'enormous' role of ideas, and of the existence of social phenomena that do not belong either to the basis or to the superstructure, in Georgij Plekhanov's 'monism'. Nevertheless, Stalin did add some new points of his own. Furthermore, his adopting Plekhanov's monism also helps us understand the apparent contradiction between Stalin's emphasis on non-economic and non-class factors in human history and his rejection of 'idealist' rudiments in dialectics.

KEY WORDS: dialectical materialism, historical materialism, Plekhanov, Stalin

The question of Joseph Stalin's contribution to Marxist philosophy has not fired the imagination of many researchers. Evert van der Zweerde characterises the years 1935–1938 as those of the domestication of philosophy, which was reduced to a "supervised instrument in the hands of the Party."¹ Philosophy was put in a state of deep-freeze. Moreover, however lenient we are, the writings of Stalin that can count as philosophical at all are few. Before the revolution only the 1906–1907 "Anarchism or socialism?" comes to mind. After 1917 there is the 1938 chapter on dialectical and historical materialism in the so-called *Kratkij kurs*. The 1950 work on linguistics and 'Economic problems of socialism in the USSR' also treat a number of philosophical issues. This is a meagre harvest. Most importantly, the dictator's arguments were ramshackle and schematic.

However, it has been claimed that Stalin did in fact make some contributions to Marxist philosophy. Anton Donoso mentions two, namely his "emphasis on the role of ideas in changing a society" and his "contention that a form of consciousness, language for example, can belong neither to the base nor to the superstructure but to society as a whole."² Both of these points belong to Marxist societal philosophy – 'historical materialism' – rather than to general philosophy



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which is referred to as 'dialectical materialism'. To my knowledge the most extensive study of Stalin as a philosopher is by Gustav Wetter. Like Donoso, Wetter concludes that Stalin contributed nothing to dialectical materialism, but in the historical field he distinguishes three points worthy of mention. The first is the contention that under certain conditions the political superstructure has a dominant influence on the economic basis of society. Secondly, Stalin solved in a characteristic way two problems, namely what are the motive forces of a socialist society and whether such a society is still characterised by sudden "jumps." Finally, he acknowledged the "national factor" in the history of societies.

Upon closer inspection Wetter's three points significantly coincide with the two questions Donoso later distinguished. The motive forces of socialist society mentioned by Stalin consisted of the moral-political unity of that society, its ideological coherence. In other words, this point is part of the first claim, that the superstructure on occasion becomes decisive. Furthermore, Stalin's thesis that some institutions, like language, develop without sudden revolutionary jumps was closely connected to his recognition of the "national factor." Both were part of the notion that some institutions serve society as a whole, rather than specific classes, and remain intact throughout the capitalist and socialist eras.³

Concerning dialectics, according to Leszek Kolakowski, Stalin's 1938 exposition was copied from Nikolaj Bukharin's *Historical Materialism*. But Kolakowski notes that one of the 'laws', the so-called "negation of the negation," was omitted.⁴ Moreover, the acknowledgement of the possibility of qualitative change without sudden jumps, as mentioned by Wetter, comes down to a reformulation of the dialectical 'law' of "the transition of quantitative into qualitative change."⁵ We can conclude, then, that Stalin formulated some elements both of historical and dialectical materialism in ways of his own. The first purpose of the present article is to investigate whether and in what sense these indeed represented original contributions.

The issues mentioned by Wetter and Donoso point in the same direction, namely to a reducing of the economic and class factors in human society. But with his interpretation of dialectics Stalin was reducing the Hegelian rudiment in Soviet philosophy. This

confronts us with a challenging problem. A simultaneous upgrading of ideological and national factors in human history and downgrading of idealist elements in philosophy seems to be incoherent.

The two main leaders of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party engaging in philosophy prior to the revolution were Georgij Plekhanov and Aleksandr Bogdanov. The menshevik Plekhanov died in 1918 and Bogdanov was marginalised even before the revolution. But through the nineteen-twenties Soviet philosophy remained dominated by two schools – ‘dialecticians’ and ‘mechanists’ – whose thinking was indebted to these two men respectively. The ‘dialecticians’, with the former menshevik Abram Deborin as the leader, defended a concept of dialectics with important Hegelian rudiments against the scientific interpretation of the ‘mechanists’. In questions of dialectics Stalin came down on the mechanist side, though without acknowledging it. However, his emphasizing of non-economic factors in human history seemed to be inspired by the opposite spirit. Characteristically, he attacked the school of economic materialism of the historian M.N. Pokrovskij, a one-time follower of Bogdanov.

The second theme treated in the present article is the logic underlying this seemingly incoherent treatment by Stalin of dialectical and historical materialism. My conclusion will be that Plekhanov’s work provides the key to understanding Stalinist philosophy as an integrated whole. Though in his theory of knowledge the Soviet dictator opposed Plekhanov in the name of the orthodoxy formulated by Friedrich Engels, his philosophical position was nevertheless strongly influenced by the former’s ‘monism’. This shaped in particular his version of historical materialism. And, though Stalin drew other conclusions from it than Plekhanov himself, the latter’s ‘monism’ also laid the basis of his interpretation of dialectics.

THE EARLY YEARS

The earliest thoughts of Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili relevant to historical materialism concern his interpretation of the vanguard role of the social-democratic party. In Marx and Engels’ view the emancipation of the working class was to be realised by that class, not by its self-appointed representatives. Throughout their lives they

rejected 'Blanquism' as a sectarian aberration. But their *Communist Manifesto* did ascribe to the communists the theoretical advantage, in comparison to the mass of the proletarians, of an insight into the conditions, the course and the general results of the movement. The communist party was the "most resolute and advanced part" of the class.⁶ The leaders of the Second International adhered to the interpretation of a vanguard party, leading but not ruling the class.

Following Friedrich Engels' death in 1895 Karl Kautsky took over his mantle as the most authoritative leader of the International and the pope of 'orthodox' Marxism. Together with others like the 'father of Russian Marxism', Plekhanov, he took up the struggle for the purity of the Marxist tradition in the International when it came under attack by the 'revisionists' of Eduard Bernstein around the turn of the century. Plekhanov and V.I. Lenin belonged to the so-called *Iskra* group, which defined itself as the 'orthodox Marxists' in the RSDWP. The group was in solidarity with Kautsky and saw their own struggle against the 'economist' wing in their party as the counterpart of his heroic defence of Marxism against the revisionist evil.

Lenin's *What is to be done?* served as an *Iskra* platform in the struggle against the 'economists'. He argued that, though the workers might spontaneously develop a political consciousness through their involvement in the so-called "economic struggle," socialist consciousness could never evolve in that way. Of themselves the workers felt "attracted" to socialism, but nevertheless they would not develop a socialist consciousness unaided. Left on its own, the working class remained confined within a "trade-unionist consciousness," i.e. the realisation that it ought to fight for better wages and social legislation. This defined the social-democratic party's mission to embody socialist consciousness, which it carried into the class "*from outside*." Lenin quoted Kautsky, who was known to insist that "socialist consciousness" did not emerge spontaneously from the class struggles. It had been elaborated by theoreticians like Marx and Engels, and "carried into" the class by the "*bourgeois intelligentsia*."⁷

Neil Harding and Moira Donald argue that Lenin cited Kautsky in good faith. The point of view he laid down in his famous 1902 work contained nothing special. It represented the 'orthodox Marxism'

of the day, not some Blanquist novelty.⁸ However, according to John Kautsky (not to be confused with Karl), Lenin had referred to his grandfather out of context. Whereas Kautsky remained true to Marx's limited elitism, Lenin elaborated a Blanquist concept.⁹ The point made by Donald and Harding about the basic correspondence between Lenin's and Kautsky's approaches is in itself irrefutable. There is no denying that the latter formulated a vanguard theory of the socialist intelligentsia. For him social democracy was "the party of the militant proletariat; it seeks to enlighten it, to educate it, to organize it."¹⁰ The same went for Plekhanov. In his *Socialism and Political Struggle* (1883) he bluntly wrote that "our socialist intelligentsia [. . .] must become the leader of the working class." It ought to "clarify to it its political and economic interests."¹¹ There was nothing new about Lenin's thesis that the party introduced socialist consciousness into the class from outside.

Yet things are not so simple. John Kautsky points to one particular formula in Lenin's work to the effect that, as only *two* ideologies can possibly exist in this world – bourgeois and socialist – and as, moreover, the spontaneous trade-unionism of the workers is not socialist, that trade-unionism is a form of bourgeois ideology, representing the "ideological enslavement of the workers to the bourgeoisie." It is the task of the social-democrats to *combat spontaneity*, to *divert* the workers from their natural course.¹² To say that the 'elementary' consciousness of the workers is *insufficient*, lacking in 'scientific-socialist' depth, is one thing. But to hold that their ideological make-up is hostile to the cause is something else. With this formula Lenin gave a maximalist interpretation of the vanguard thesis.

After the *iskrists* fell apart into bolsheviks and mensheviks in 1903 Plekhanov took a close look at *What is to be done?* and found it wanting. He pointed to Lenin's remark that scientific socialism came about "altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the workers' movement." Where did Lenin get that wild idea? It was indeed bourgeois intellectuals like Marx and Engels who developed the theory, but on the basis of a study of social reality, not independent of it. The course of the spontaneous class struggles partly determined the form the socialist teachings took. To deny this was to deny Marx's materialism, which held that the economic basis of

society determined the ideologies that arose from it.¹³ In *Socialism and Political Struggle* Plekhanov had defined modern, scientific socialism as a “generalisation of precisely those phenomena which we come across in one way or another in our everyday life.”¹⁴

And who told Lenin that, unaided, the workers could only gain a trade-unionist consciousness? Quoting Kautsky, Plekhanov stressed that the workers spontaneously developed a “socialist instinct” and a “longing for socialism.” Only the “theory of *scientific* socialism” was to be introduced from the outside. But even without party enlightenment the workers would in due course establish socialism on their own. It would only take them much longer.¹⁵ Already in 1900 Plekhanov had explained the vanguard theory in a more modest form than Lenin. In his interpretation, the consciousness of the proletariat was determined by its socio-economic position, but it was, as it were, somewhat slow. The task of “*the superstructure – the social-democratic intelligentsia*” was therefore to “speed up” the process of formation of proletarian self-consciousness. The mistake of the “economists” was to deny this need.¹⁶

Plekhanov’s interpretation of the difference between party and proletarian consciousness rested on a general hypothesis of relatively close correspondence between economic basis and superstructure. Consciousness can never be fundamentally opposed to the basis. It reflects it. The point is only that it lags behind. In Plekhanov’s words, “the growth of the consciousness of people of their situation usually more or less lags behind the growth of the new actual relations [. . .] Nevertheless, consciousness follows the real relations.”¹⁷ As an economically exploited class, the proletariat inevitably develops a corresponding consciousness which must be of a rudimentary socialist orientation. In this limited concept of the autonomy of the ideological sphere the mission of the vanguard is also limited – namely to accelerate the development of a spontaneous process. The party is merely ahead of the class. Essentially, it is a case of two varieties of socialist consciousness, the one complete and up to date and the other primitive and slow. However, in Lenin’s scheme proletarian consciousness does not correspond to the exploited situation of the class; it stubbornly remains bourgeois. Consequently, the vanguard must introduce something entirely new

into the class. Here the contrast is a total one, between bourgeois and socialist consciousness.¹⁸

The First Russian Revolution forced Lenin to admit that he had been too strict in his definition of the ‘spontaneous’ consciousness of the working class. He acknowledged that the workers could progress beyond ‘trade-unionist’ demands on their own after all. In many of his writings in 1905 he admitted that in times of revolutionary upheaval the working class *did* develop a revolutionary consciousness spontaneously.¹⁹ Nevertheless this admission did not reduce the need for party leadership very much. As Lenin pointed out, if the RSDWP were unable to press its “proletarian stamp” on the revolution, the bourgeoisie would turn it to its own, exclusive advantage. In that case the working class would end up as the “assistant of the bourgeoisie” rather than as the independent leader of the democratic revolution.²⁰ Thus without the active education by the party the proletariat would perhaps make a revolution *on* its own, but it would not be a revolution *of* its own. The *bourgeois* revolutionary trend would yet gain the upper hand among the working class. In other words, despite appearances to the contrary, Lenin stuck to his idea of spontaneous proletarian consciousness as a bourgeois phenomenon.

After the break between mensheviks and bolsheviks Iosif Dzhughashvili opted for the latter. But despite his convinced bolshevism, his theoretical defence of it contained some odd points. Perhaps the first occasion on which he defended Lenin’s thesis were two letters he wrote in the autumn of 1904 and in which he responded to Plekhanov’s critique of the latter’s interpretation of vanguardism.²¹ Calling Plekhanov “completely mad,” Dzhughashvili insisted that Lenin understood that the socialist idea did not fall out of the blue, but arose under specific, capitalist conditions. “As if Lenin says that Marx’s socialism would be possible in the age of slavery and serfdom.” Lenin stuck “in the most consistent way to K. Marx’s thesis *concerning the origin of consciousness.*” In that sense the leader of bolshevism was as orthodox as anyone. But that was not the point:

We are now interested in how a system of ideas (the theory of socialism) is being produced [*vyrabatyvaetsia*] out of separate ideas, how separate (larger and smaller) ideas are being linked into one harmonious system. [. . .] Do the masses

give the programme and the argument for the programme to their leaders, or the leaders to the masses?

The “theory of socialism” was produced “altogether independently of the growth of the spontaneous movement, even in opposition to this movement, and only then is it *carried from the outside into* this movement, *correcting* it according to its content.” But *how* did the leaders produce this programme “*outside* the spontaneous movement”? Socialist consciousness, the author replied to his own question, arose from “the observation and study of the spontaneous movement by people who are armed with the knowledge of our era.”²² So, it appears that socialist consciousness did in fact *not* arise altogether independently of the spontaneous movement. Rather, the proto-socialist, ‘separate’ ideas of the workers formed its raw material, and the learned people only brought them into shape, by ‘observing’ them, and then ‘linking’, ‘systematising’ and ‘correcting’ them. In his defence of Lenin, Dzhugashvili repeated Plekhanov’s interpretation of the vanguard process almost to the letter.

This set a pattern. In a brochure of May 1905 Dzhugashvili once again defended Lenin against his menshevik critics. He insisted on the “trade-unionist” and “bourgeois” character of the elementary consciousness of the proletariat. But then he continued that this would not have to remain so. Lenin had allegedly not denied that “even those class conflicts that cannot be called social-democratic, carry the proletariat yet inevitably to the social revolution.” Again and again he made remarks to the effect that “after prolonged wanderings and vexations the spontaneous movement will succeed one day to arrive at the gates of the social revolution even without the help of social democracy.” He compared “the workers’ movement *without socialism?*” to a “ship without a compass. Even without it, it will reach the other shore, but with a compass it would reach shore much quicker and meet fewer dangers.” To avoid all misunderstandings, Dzhugashvili noted that, if left on its own, the workers’ movement “will submit to bourgeois ideology, until, of course, prolonged wanderings and vexations force it to break with bourgeois ideology.”²³

In sum, whereas for Lenin the job of the party was to create the socialist process, for Dzhugashvili it was merely one of *accel-*

erating it, precisely as it was for Plekhanov. Although on the face of it he accepted Lenin's characterisation of the spontaneous workers' consciousness as bourgeois, he was in fact denying it. The elementary consciousness of the workers did represent a form of socialism, though only a rudimentary variety, chaotic and incomplete, and overlaid with bourgeois rubble. He was appreciative enough of the instinctive socialist direction of the workers to conclude that in the end they would be able to reach the goal on their own. A few months later Dzhugashvili wrote another article on the matter against the menshevik Noj Zhordanija. Abstract formulas now covered up his own 'deviations' from Lenin. Zhordanija had quoted Kautsky to the effect, that the workers' movement did spontaneously produce a "socialist *tendency*" and "socialist *inclinations*." Dzhugashvili reacted that Kautsky had not spoken of "socialist *consciousness*." And he repeated, that real socialist consciousness could only be produced outside the class:

In accordance with these two classes, consciousness too is produced in a twofold way: bourgeois and socialist. [. . .] But now the question is who produces this socialist consciousness, who has the possibility to produce it (i.e. scientific socialism). Kautsky says, and I repeat his idea, that the mass of the proletarians do not have either time or opportunity to produce socialist consciousness [. . .] 'Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of deep scientific knowledge', says Kautsky. The carriers of science are intellectuals, like for instance Marx, Engels.²⁴

But on this occasion Dzhugashvili left it completely in the dark as to *how* those intellectuals produced the socialist consciousness. In other words, what was their raw material? Did they create it from scratch, or was their productive activity a matter of systematising and purging the workers' natural socialist inclinations, as he had suggested earlier? And the other question – what would happen if the party did *not* assist the class, would socialism then be reached nevertheless? – was also left unanswered.²⁵

Furthermore 'Anarchism or socialism?' confirms that Dzhugashvili also followed Plekhanov's general concept of basis and superstructure. Robert Tucker noted that the work displayed Marxist erudition, but contained "nothing notably original." Its significance lies in proving that the author was attracted to Marxism and philosophically awakened.²⁶ That may be so, but the problem is that there was no such thing as a standard Marxism to be

summarised without originality. Different Russian Marxists gave different interpretations. As a follower, Dzhugashvili had no choice but to decide whom he wanted to copy.

Koba, as Dzhugashvili was nicknamed at the time, called Marxist philosophy “dialectical materialism,” a term first used by Plekhanov. His very use of the term shows the latter’s influence. Friedrich Engels used another term to denote his and Marx’s system, namely “historical materialism,” or “new” or “modern materialism.” But Koba followed Engels when he divided Marxist philosophy into two parts – its dialectical method and its materialist *theory*.²⁷ In the chapter on materialism he presented a classical exposé in the style of Engels. Consciousness was a product of matter. The human “I” consisted merely of “images [*predstavleniia*]” aroused by the “external conditions.” The ego reflected an objectively existing material world. Any denial of objective reality would lead to the absurd conclusion that there existed only one “I.” But Dzhugashvili also rejected the “vulgar” thesis that consciousness was itself material. Consciousness was produced by and reflected matter, but they were “not one and the same phenomenon.”²⁸

Parallel to this there is a Marxist account of history to be found in this text. In their struggle with nature people develop particular technologies, giving rise to certain economic relations, which again give rise to social consciousness. The economic side of society makes up its “*content*,” whereas the juridical, political, and other such phenomena constitute only its “*form*.” Dzhugashvili insisted that “material” changes always *preceded* “ideal” ones. There is no such thing as a “parallelism” between the two. Consciousness lags behind. As an example he referred to his own father. When a cobbler goes bankrupt and is forced to take a job in a leather plant, he at first hopes to get his shop back. Only gradually is he reconciled with his new proletarian status. As a consequence of the slowness of the “superstructure,” it never fully conforms to the “material basis” of society: “a new content is ‘forced’ to dress itself up in an old form.” But “*in the final instance*,” i.e. eventually, it will always come to correspond to the new economic relations.²⁹ Thus we have a Plekhanovist argument of basic correspondence of the superstructure to the economic basis, in which its autonomy is reduced to its slowness.

But Koba did not only attack “idealism,” but also “dualism.” Dualists were the sort of heretics who did not understand that “consciousness and being, idea and matter” were only “two different forms of one and the same phenomenon.” What could that common principle be?

A unified and indivisible nature, expressing itself in two different forms – a material and an ideal one; a unified and indivisible social life, expressing itself in two different forms – a material and an ideal one. That is how we must look to the development of nature and social life. [...] monism proceeds from *one principle* – nature or being, having material and ideal forms; whereas dualism proceeds from *two principles* – material and ideal, which according to dualism, deny each other.³⁰

Claiming that the ideal side of society cannot “deny” the material side, this monism repeated the thesis that consciousness must always be in essential correspondence with the economic basis. But the monism was also strangely incoherent with the rest of Dzhugashvili’s argument. He had insisted that matter equalled being, and that it was the fundamental principle determining consciousness. Matter was to consciousness as content to form. But then it appeared that matter was the expression of a third, deeper principle – namely being – having matter and idea as its two forms! In other words, matter was *not* the primary category after all. Correspondingly, on one hand the economic basis of society was the primary factor of societal development, but on the other it was a mere expression of “social life” as such.

Though unacknowledged, this confused monism was inspired by Plekhanov, on whose *On the Question of the Development of the Monist View of History* (1895), in Lenin’s words, “a whole generation of Russian Marxists was educated.”³¹ One just has to read it to see that this is where Koba drew his monism from. Plekhanov pledged adherence to the “camp of the *materialists*,” consisting of all those who considered matter to be the “primary factor.” But he also opposed the “*dualist systems*,” which considered spirit and matter as “separate, independent *substances*.” Instead he adhered to “*monism*, i.e. to the explanation of the phenomena with the help of *some single fundamental principle*.” Mind and matter were of one substance. What was this fundamental principle? According to Plekhanov, man was “that which the environment surrounding

him (i.e., first, *nature*, and second, *society*) makes him.” Nature was the unifying principle of which mind and matter were expressions, and society unified the economic basic and the psychological superstructure.

According to [Marx], *the economy of a society* and its *psychology* form the two sides of one and the same phenomenon, ‘the production of life’ of the people, their struggle for existence, in which they organise themselves in a certain way, thanks to the given state of the productive forces. The struggle for existence creates their economy; and on the basis of that its psychology also grows. The economy itself is something secondary, like the psychology.³²

Here again, two schemes fused into one. Firstly, matter determines the idea. And, secondly, nature determines both matter and the idea. In terms of society, we have an economic system producing an ideological superstructure; and a society, identified mainly with productive technology, producing both the economic system and the ideological superstructure. Dzhugashvili’s model was so similar, that there is little doubt that he copied it from Plekhanov.

Monism had an interesting consequence. Plekhanov attributed all-encompassing importance to the productive forces. Although the economy determined the superstructure, “whether the passions govern the economy or the economy the passions” was irrelevant. The point was that they were both “different *sides* of the social *whole*,” i.e. of the productive process.³³ Thus Plekhanov held, that not only did the productive relations determine the superstructure; it was moreover the case that the productive forces determined both these productive relations and the superstructure.

This is not just another way of expressing Marx’s materialism. With Marx, society’s technology determined its economic system, and the economic system again its politics and culture. But in Plekhanov’s model the superstructure was only in part determined by the economic system. *It was in part directly determined by the technological demands of society*, i.e. without the intervening factor of the economic system. This model had serious consequences for historical analysis. When the Italian Marxist Antonio Labriola claimed that the state was always an organisation of the economically ruling class, Plekhanov denied this. In countries like China and Egypt the state arose due to the need to control the great rivers, i.e. due to the “direct influence of the needs of the social productive

process.”³⁴ In Plekhanov’s monism it was possible for the superstructure of a class society to contain elements without a class nature, arising directly in response to technological needs of society. For the time being, this monist analysis of society remained only an abstract formula in Dzhugashvili’s essay. But later in his career it would be revived and, slightly reformulated, put to use.

Whereas Dzhugashvili’s materialism was copied from Plekhanov’s work, the chapter in “Anarchism or socialism?” on the “dialectical method” was not. Dialectics had mainly something to do with the world being in a “state of permanent movement and development.” Life should not be considered as “something immutable and frozen.” It is in an “eternal process of destruction and creation.” Therefore there will always be “*the new and the old, the growing and the dying.*” Koba added that “movement has two forms: evolutionary and revolutionary.” He identified the former with quantitative changes and the latter with qualitative ones. Minor changes prepare the ground for the decisive ones. It is a law, equally valid in nature and human society, that at some point the first always turns into the second. So, things always change, and eventually they even change into something different. That is what dialectics was about.

This is a rather dramatic view, dominated by a struggle for life between things opposing each other, a grim world of growth and death. Koba was thinking particularly of struggling classes. For example, the proletariat was a small class, but “it grows daily,” so in the end it will be victorious despite its present smallness. “In contrast, that in life which gets old and goes to its grave, will inevitably suffer defeat, even if it represents a *giant* force today.” The example was the bourgeoisie, which “as a class is decomposing, gets weaker and old, and becomes a dead weight to life.” Classes are competing for supremacy and the economic laws of history determine which win out and which die.³⁵ This seemed a kind of biological Marxism, a Marxist ‘Darwinism’, well adapted to an ideology of life-and-death class struggle.

Hegel’s original dialectics had been a form of logic – if one understands logic not in the usual sense of a set of deductive, formal operations, but as a self-induced movement of concepts. The essence of the world is made up of concepts, which are inherently contra-

dictory and ‘solve’ themselves by turning into something else. The consecutive ‘negations’ are the changes the tangible world lives through. According to Engels, whose works popularised Marxist philosophy more than Marx’s own, Hegel was wrong in claiming that concept was the essence of reality. Matter was ultimate reality. He pleaded for a “materialist dialectic” – a “dialectical movement of the real world.” All things are interrelated, mutually dependent, causing each other and turning into each other, and developing from the lower to the higher. Engels believed that the dialectics of nature had been proven by the discoveries of modern natural science, in particular of the living cell, the concept of energy, and Darwin’s discovery of the mechanism of evolution.³⁶

Engels’ ‘dialectics’ represented in many ways no more than a summary of the modern, evolutionary view of the world. But not quite. Hegel also described the world as a living whole or a complex of interacting forces, moving from one stage of complexity to another. But he interpreted this as the expression of the contradictoriness of the concepts underlying the world. Engels followed Hegel, though in a twisted way. In his *Anti-Dühring* he explained that, if one sees things as static and isolated, one will discover no contradictions in them. But if one proceeds from the dynamic view of *movement* one will at once observe contradictions everywhere.³⁷ Thus, whereas Hegel started from the concept and its contradictions and arrived at a dynamic and holistic view of reality, Engels departed from a dynamic and holistic real world and then found contradiction in it. ‘Logical’ contradiction remained an inherent part of his doctrine, but as a derived element.

As to what contradiction was, Engels remained vague. Most characteristically he defined it as a specific form of interaction between two poles, interpenetrating and conflicting with each other. The magnet was a case in point, and so was the relation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, hostile classes yet mutually presupposing each other. This interpretation of contradiction preserved a flavour of logical paradox. Engels further explained that Hegel discovered two specific laws of dialectical movement. One held that slow, “quantitative” change eventually results in a quick and immediate kind of transformation, a “qualitative” leap. An example was that water, while being heated, remains fluid all the time, until at

100° it suddenly turns into a gas. The other law was the so-called “negation of the negation.” Things develop, as it were, spirally, by turning into their opposite repeatedly and at a progressively higher level. For instance, one grain “negates” itself into a plant, which again “negates” itself into a large number of new grains.³⁸ In sum, Engels’ thought was a curious compromise between Hegel and scientism, between dialectics as a peculiar form of ‘contradictory logic’ and dialectics as a system of evolution and interaction of forces.

This mixture was the starting point for other Marxist philosophers. Plekhanov’s model of dialectics remained a close copy of Engels’.³⁹ But Kautsky developed a new interpretation, often described as a “Darwinist version of Marxism.” According to him, the notions of matter being riddled with logical contradiction and of its development through self-negation were metaphysical artefacts in Marxism. Dialectics merely meant *interaction* between conflicting forces.⁴⁰ Among Russian social-democrats Bogdanov was the main representative of scientific Marxism. He held that everything that existed was energy in diverse forms. Laws described the principles of transformation from one form of energy into another. And these were purely positive laws of change and interaction. There was no room for logical contradictions, negations, and qualitative jumps.

Against this background we must return to Dzhughashvili’s dialectics. In his model there existed *only* the ever developing, growing and dying world. Interestingly, he omitted to mention the mutual dependence of things, i.e. the holistic aspect. The focus was completely on the dynamic, developmental character of nature and society. Of the Hegelian element only the concept of ‘qualitative jumps’ was preserved. Engels’ other dialectical principle of the ‘negation of the negation’ was omitted. What is more, any reference to logical contradictions or interpenetrating opposites was absent and replaced by a struggle between growing and dying things. Engels was quoted to the effect that a thing could be itself and its own opposite, but this was reformulated in such a way that any rudiment of paradox was gone: the latter had only intended to say that something could be positive now and negative tomorrow, or positive in one respect, but not in another.⁴¹

Dzhugashvili's interpretation of dialectics ran counter to Plekhanov's. He obviously followed the scientific-biological tendency.⁴² But we can understand how a man who adopted monism arrived, in contrast to Plekhanov, at a complete rejection of the Hegelian element. According to the monist scheme, matter and idea were two sides of one closely integrated 'being'. Now a fusion of matter and idea naturally tends to produce either a submersion of matter under a conceptual 'logic', producing some kind of neo-Hegelian system; or it will, alternatively, result in rejecting separate dialectical laws – such as the 'negation of the negation' – as abstract principles with no relation to the material world. Though the monist Plekhanov did not draw the latter conclusion, it was apparently drawn by his follower Dzhugashvili.

Meanwhile, not only Bogdanov's dialectics, but his materialism too deviated sharply from Engels' orthodox position. Influenced as he was by Ernst Mach's and Richard Avenarius' 'empiriocriticism', he insisted that introspection and observation were fundamentally of one kind. To speak of "mind" and "matter" as fundamentally different things, meant "substituting" metaphysical concepts for pure "experience." The idea of "reality" itself was a metaphysical construct, and whatever it 'was', it was in any case one unbroken flow of experiences. The only thing Bogdanov allowed was "universal substitution." Concepts could be used, provided they carried no claim of expressing reality, and were essentially the same for all branches of science. This point of view, dubbed "empiriomonism," also allowed Bogdanov to interpret the observed laws of nature as our own constructs. Not only does the world provide us with sensory input, we, in turn, as it were construct the world by observing it. He called this his "labour world view."⁴³

Plekhanov was no completely orthodox follower of Engels' theory of knowledge. In contrast to Bogdanov, he agreed on the objective reality of the material world, but held that it was not fully knowable. Our concepts were not potentially perfect reflections, as Engels believed, but rather something like "hieroglyphs." Our image of reality *corresponded* to it rather than reflecting it.⁴⁴ Nevertheless this remained much closer to Engels than Bogdanov's agnosticism. And the menshevik Plekhanov did not hesitate to attack the bolshevik Bogdanov for his heresy.

In 1908 the Transcaucasian bolsheviks became divided among themselves in this philosophical conflict. Some of Koba's close acquaintances chose Bogdanov's side.⁴⁵ The main source of information on his own position are two letters. He wrote the first one from prison to the Bogdanovite Misha Tskhakaja in July 1908. The second was written in January 1910 to a comrade in Switzerland. Quoting the then available fragments of the letters, Robert Williams concluded that "Stalin was well informed about emigré philosophical disputes, but by no means a supporter of Lenin [who later joined in the attack on Bogdanov, E.v.R.]."⁴⁶ This conclusion is only partly supported by the full text of the letters. In the first one Dzhugashvili characterised the various positions as follows:

About which differences are we speaking here? Between the Plekhanovists and the Bogdanovists (*empiriomonists*)? But apart from them there are still other tendencies: *empiriocriticists* (Lunacharskij, Valentinov), *empiriosymbolists* (P. Jushkevich) and the Marxists.

Koba appears to have been well informed, at least in general terms. His characterisations of Lunacharskij and Valentinov as *empiriocriticists*, and of Jushkevich as an *empiriosymbolist* were apt. Most interestingly, he denied in effect that either Plekhanov or any of the the 'empirio'-theorists were really Marxists. Thereby he placed himself in a camp of those who held on to the original Marxist position taken by Engels. He explained this as follows:

Of course, one has to reject Plekhanov's 'thing in itself', his curious understanding of materialism, his disparaging attitude towards Dietzgen, Mach-Avenarius etc. [...] But one has to reject Bogdanov's 'panpsychism', his spiritualistic 'universal substitution' etc. just as well. Despite its good sides, *empiriocriticism* is also, as a whole, unacceptable due to its parallelism which confuses matters. One has to stick to dialectical materialism (not Plekhanov's, but that of Marx and Engels), developing it and making it more concrete in the spirit of J. Dietzgen, while assimilating the good sides of 'Machism' in the process.⁴⁷

This sounds obscure, but Koba's position was coherent enough. In "Anarchism or socialism?" he had defended Engels' orthodox position of the objective character of external reality and its knowability. Now he confirmed that only this epistemology was the real thing. Plekhanov's claim that the *Ding an sich* could not be fully known was unacceptable, and Bogdanov's agnosticism the more so. But all the same, Dzhugashvili was subjected to the temptations

of monism. Matter and consciousness should somehow be brought together in one scheme. That is why he could not bring himself to reject Mach and Avenarius (as well as the monist-materialist Dietzgen) out of hand.

As Engels' faithful follower, Lenin had all the time been disgusted by Bogdanov's philosophy. As long as they co-operated closely in the Bolshevik Centre their marriage of convenience held. However when in 1908 they ran into conflict over political tactics, Lenin joined Plekhanov in the attack. In May 1909 he published *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, dedicated to the destruction of Bogdanov's system. The book was an elaborate, up-to-date version of Engels' theory of knowledge. Against Bogdanov's refusal to admit that our mental concepts were potentially accurate reflections of an objective material reality, Lenin argued that external reality simply had to exist. If it did not, the only existing reality would be the mind of the one individual observer – a "solipsist" absurdity.⁴⁸ After Dzhugashvili's first letter we would expect him to react positively, but with reservations, to Lenin's book. And precisely this showed through in his letter of January 1910:

How did you like Bogdanov's new book?," Koba wrote, "I think it pins down very strikingly and correctly some *particular* blunders of Il'ich's. It is also correct in pointing to the fact that Il'ich's mater-ism differs in many respects from Plekhanov's, something which Il'ich (for diplomatic reasons?) tries to cover up [. . .] In general I still hold that Il'ich's book is a compendium of the theses of the philosophy (gnoseology) of mater-ism, unique in its kind."⁴⁹

Koba was critical of Lenin, reproaching him with some unspecified blunders and with opportunistically covering up his differences with Plekhanov's hieroglyphics. But fundamentally he stood on Lenin's side against Bogdanov. And it could hardly have been otherwise, because both men followed Engels, though Lenin committedly and Koba with monist reservations.

In summing up, Dzhugashvili's prerevolutionary philosophy combined two sources of inspiration. Firstly, he adopted Engels' epistemology of the objectively existing and knowable world, with the human mind as the product of matter. Secondly, he embraced Plekhanov's monism. The concept of close correspondence between matter and idea in a single integrated whole made him conclude that the ideological superstructure could never be in conflict with

the economic basis but only lag behind. Consequently the task of the vanguard was merely to accelerate the rudimentary socialism of proletarian consciousness. Furthermore, Plekhanov's monist concept of society as a single whole, of which the economic basis was only a segment, allowed for the existence of non-class elements in the ideological superstructure.

Finally, unlike Plekhanov, Dzhugashvili interpreted philosophical monism as irreconcilable with quasi-logical dialectical laws. He even omitted the holistic aspect of dialectics which could easily have been accommodated in his system based on evolution and interaction instead of on 'logic'. But this latter omission (which might be explained by Dzhugashvili's extreme focus on the irreconcilability of classes) proved no permanent feature of Stalinist dialectics. As we will see, after the revolution Stalin included holism in his definition.

ESTABLISHING ORTHODOXY

During the nineteen-twenties the Soviet philosophical world was torn apart by the struggle between the 'mechanists' and the 'dialecticians'. Among prominent party leaders only Bukharin regularly engaged in philosophy. Until he was overthrown in 1929, his 1921 *Historical Materialism* was regarded as a classic. By this time Russian Marxists began to make the terminological distinction between "dialectical materialism" as the philosophy of Marxism and "historical materialism" as its application to society.⁵⁰ This distinction was turned into a dogma by Stalin in 1938.⁵¹

Though not participating in the great debate of the twenties, Bukharin was a mechanist. He believed in absolute determinism. There were no accidental, causeless phenomena. Seemingly accidental occurrences were cases of the intersecting of two causal chains, of which only one was known. There were two possible ways of regarding nature and society. The static way was to see everything as constantly at rest. The "dynamic point of view" held that nothing was unchanging. This correct dialectical position implied that everything was a "process," to be studied in an evolution of origination, motion and destruction. According to Bukharin, permanent change was caused by the fact that everything was

interconnected. As everything was constantly subjected to outside influences, nothing could remain as it was.

Bukharin further explained permanent change in terms of “constant internal contradictions” *in* all things. Things moved from a state of original equilibrium through disturbance of that equilibrium to the reestablishment of equilibrium on a new basis. But a state of balance of “opposing and colliding forces” was exceptional. This scheme seemed to affirm change as an inherent characteristic of the phenomena rather than caused by external factors. But that was only apparent. For once an equilibrium between the internal forces of a system was established, it could only be disturbed from the outside. Next to interconnectedness, dynamism and internal struggle, the fourth and last principle of dialectics was the “theory of sudden changes,” of development through “sudden leaps.”⁵² This last principle, corresponding to Hegel’s transition from quantity to quality, was a dialectical rudiment in an otherwise completely mechanist system.

In 1925 Engels’ manuscript *Dialektik der Natur* was published for the first time. It listed three “general laws” of dialectics, namely “the transition from quantity to quality and conversely,” “the interpenetration of opposites” and “the negation of the negation.”⁵³ The publication of the manuscript was an unpleasant surprise for the mechanists. Most of them denied the very existence of the first and the last ‘laws’, and their colliding physical forces did not correspond to Engels’ “interpenetration of opposites,” which preserved a logical-Hegelian flavour. The next blow fell in 1929, when Lenin’s *Filosofskie tetrady* were published, betraying his admiration of Hegel’s *Wissenschaft der Logik*. All this supported Deborin and the conception of dialectics as Plekhanov had defended it, and which had not allowed Hegel to be drowned in the waters of modern science and positivism. Deborin scored his great triumph in April 1929, when mechanicism was officially condemned as a deviation from Marxism-Leninism.

Stalin did not participate in the philosophical debate of the nineteen-twenties.⁵⁴ His library, which he began to collect after the revolution, testifies to a limited interest in dialectical materialism.⁵⁵ The same goes for historical materialism. We do know that he attached importance to using the proper Marxist terminology.⁵⁶ But

in his library we find only a few indications of theoretical interest in historical materialism.⁵⁷ In a speech of April 1929 he quoted Lenin to the effect that Bukharin never completely understood dialectics, the “soul of Marxism.”⁵⁸ However, it would have been a problem for him to pursue this matter, for his own interpretation of dialectics was close to Bukharin’s. In December 1929 he attacked the latter’s theory of equilibrium, but characteristically only in its economical and not in its philosophical aspect.⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, it did not take long for him to turn against the triumphant Deborin.

In 1930 the young philosophers Mark Mitin and Pavel Judin opened the attack on Deborin. They accused him of overestimating the significance of Plekhanov’s dialectics to the detriment of Lenin’s, and of a lack of interest in practical political questions. These mistakes were connected with a formalistic and schematic interpretation of dialectics as a conglomerate of self-developing abstract concepts.⁶⁰ In other words, Deborin was accused of staying too close to Hegel. Stalin intervened on the side of Mitin and Judin. In December 1930 he attended a meeting of the Bureau of the party cell of the department of philosophy and natural sciences of the Institute of Red Professors. He explained that “all deviations from Marxism, even in the most abstract questions of theory, acquire political significance in a situation of sharpening class struggle.” Therefore philosophy should be taken seriously. And Stalin was in an uncompromising mood.

You have to *turn over* and dig up all the dung that accumulated in philosophy [...]. You should turn over everything written by the Deborin group. Everything which is mistaken should be destroyed. [...] You have to unmask Plekhanov, his philosophical theses. He always behaved arrogantly towards Lenin; and also Jushkevich, Valentinov, Bazarov and others. Now you have to uproot all their works, how they criticised Lenin, how they behaved towards him, towards ‘Materialism and Empirio-criticism’.

Stalin noted that, in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, Lenin had developed materialism to a new stage, beyond its “atomistic” level, by integrating electron theory into it. Asked whether the theory should not be developed even further, the leader was not enthusiastic. The main problem now was to “beat in all directions.” First of all one should beat the Deborinists, who were “Plekhanovists in the field of gnoseology” and for whom Hegel was an “icon.”

Using dialectics in a formalistic way – as a collection of ready-made abstract formulas, they were guilty of a “contemplative materialism” and of a “menshevizing idealism.” “What kind of Marxism is that,” Stalin asked, “which separates philosophy from politics, theory from practice?” Nevertheless the main danger did not come from Deborin but from the mechanists, who had more serious roots in real life.⁶¹ In January 1931 the Central Committee adopted a resolution confirming Stalin’s findings and bringing the Deborin group to an end.

Stalin’s intervention shows that he had not moved from his pre-revolutionary positions. He defended the orthodox Engels-Lenin theory of knowledge against Plekhanov’s indiscretions and against the various empirio-theoreticians with their denial of objective reality. Furthermore, he attacked Plekhanov and Deborin for preserving abstract Hegelian elements in their idea of dialectics. The only important new theme was the practical orientation of philosophy, a point which he also accused the Deborinists of neglecting. Stalin had put this question on the agenda in December 1929, when he complained that theoretical work in economics lagged behind the demands of the kolkhoz movement. He observed a “rift between practical successes and the development of theoretical thought.” To be valid, theory should give “the *praktiki* the strength of an orientation, a clarity of perspective, assurance in work, faith in the victory of our socialist construction.”⁶²

In itself, practice as the criterion of theory is not spectacular. To be meaningful, scientific hypotheses must be testable. However, for science the concept of practice should strictly mean *scientific practice*, i.e. the controlled experiment and other forms of systematic observation. But that was not how Stalin saw it. His condition that theory must give an orientation to *praktiki* cut off a substantial part of the body of science as irrelevant. Furthermore, in his 1938 *On dialectical and historical materialism* he quoted Engels to the effect that practice as the criterion of truth referred in particular to the “experiment” and “industry.”⁶³ To mention industry as a separate criterion of truth – next to the scientific experiment – opened the way for accepting as true theories which seemed to work in production but had not been subjected to scientific testing. We expect Stalin’s utilitarian interpretation of practice to lead to unjustified

acceptance of practical wisdom as scientifically valid. In a speech in November 1935 the Soviet leader called on scientists to follow the example of the Stakhanovites. Science was only worthy of its name, if it “sharply listens to the voice of experience, of practice.” He explained:

People [...] say that the data of science, the data of the technical handbooks and instructions, contradict the demands of the Stakhanovites concerning new, higher technical norms. But about which science do we speak here? The data of science have always been tested in practice, by experience. A science which has lost the link with practice, with experience – what kind of science is that?⁶⁴

Apparently, the results of scientific experiments, as laid down in handbooks, should be overturned not by new experiments and analysis but *directly* by the productive experience of the toilers, without separate scientific verification.⁶⁵ In a speech in May 1938 Stalin noted that new roads in science were sometimes opened by people “completely unknown in the scientific world, simple people, *praktiki*, innovators of the deed.” Stakhanov and the arctic traveller Papanin were such “innovators in science, people of our advanced science.”⁶⁶ Discussing the development and study of Marxism in a speech of 1 October 1938, the leader noted: “After all, how did theory develop? On the basis of a generalisation of experience. How does experience originate? Either in practice in a laboratory or in practice among the masses. People are also a laboratory.” Marxism, alleged to be a science, developed in the course of class struggle.⁶⁷ Thus Stalin’s concept of scientific practice included political as well as productive work. There is, furthermore, an obvious parallel between his earlier view of the vanguard party as merely systematising spontaneous proletarian consciousness and this later view of science as systematising the experience of the proletariat.

For the time being it remained unclear as to what kind of dialectics Stalin hoped to put in place of Deborinism. Mitin accused Deborin of treating “matter” as an abstract concept in a way very similar to Hegel’s “idea.” Dialectical laws were not to be treated as empty concepts moving in a “purely logical” way. But when it came to his own understanding of these laws, Mitin could only return to Engels’ “unity and struggle of opposites,” the qualitative “jump” and the “negation of the negation.”⁶⁸ There was in fact no fundamental difference between Mitin and Deborin. It was only that the former

adhered more closely to Engels' three laws, whereas the latter did more justice to the grandness of Hegel's system. Not surprisingly, after the mid-nineteen thirties Mitin too was accused of "abstract and scholastic" work.⁶⁹

Stalin defined his dialectical materialism in the philosophical chapter of the 1938 *Kratkii kurs*. He repeated Engels and Lenin's familiar thesis that the world was material. Matter moved by itself, not driven by a spiritual principle. "Matter, nature, being" constituted an objectively existing reality. Consciousness reflected matter. The objective world was completely knowable. Bogdanov was again castigated for denying objective truth. But the leader's sympathies for the scientific camp were clear enough. Like Bukharin, he insisted that the connectedness and mutual causation of the phenomena was no matter of coincidence, but of laws of development. The history of society was no "accumulation of 'coincidences'" but governed by laws. Furthermore, the dialectical method looked to development "as the result of the development of contradictions in nature, as the result of the interaction of opposing forces in nature." This identification of contradiction with interacting forces put Stalin firmly in the mechanist camp.

Dialectics had four distinguishing marks. Firstly, the world was no coincidental accumulation of objects, isolated from each other, but a coherent, united whole, in which the phenomena were "organically linked to each other, depending on each other and causing each other." A thing was caused by "the phenomena that surround it." Secondly, nature was in a state of permanent movement and change, of permanent renewal and development. Thirdly, development was not a simple process of growth, but a matter of small, quantitative changes turning at some point suddenly into a qualitative, jump-like transition. And, finally:

dialectics proceed from the fact that [. . .] the phenomena of nature know internal contradictions, for they all have their negative and positive sides, their past and future, their obsolete and developing sides. The struggle between these opposites, the struggle between the old and the new, between what dies and what is being born [. . .] forms the internal content of the process of development, the internal content of the transition from quantitative into qualitative changes.⁷⁰

Thus we find again the elimination of all traces of Hegelian contradiction. No "interpenetration of opposites" and no "nega-

tion of the negation.” Yet it is not quite accurate to hold, as Kolakowski does, that Stalin’s position was almost a restatement of Bukharin’s.⁷¹ To begin, his own 1906–1907 work already mentioned the last three aspects of dialectics. Only the first point of mutual causation was new, but that could have simply been derived from Engels. The only two Bukharinist elements were the denial of coincidence and the idea of summarising dialectics in four points. More importantly, in Bukharin’s theory of equilibrium a thing left alone in due course comes to rest. With Stalin that was not the case. His first principle of external causation did suggest it, but the exposition of contradiction shows internally driven self-movement. Stalin remained faithful to his view of unending struggle between vital forces of growth and obsolete forces of decay. His model was more biological than Bukharin’s. Typically, he expected social science to become “just as exact a science as, let’s say, biology.”⁷²

The 1938 text further contained an exposé of historical materialism. It was in part developed as a reaction to the ‘Pokrovskij school’ of history. From 1934 onwards the deceased historian was accused of having exaggerated the economic factor in the historical process and of unduly reducing the role of individual personalities and the state. Stalin had always been suspicious of too strict an interpretation of economic materialism.⁷³ In December 1931 he indicated to Emil Ludwig that only “vulgarisers of Marxism” denied the “role of eminent personalities.”

But, of course, people do not make history the way their imagination inspires them to [. . .] Every new generation finds certain conditions [. . .] And great people are worth anything only as far as they are able to understand these conditions correctly, to understand how to change them. [. . .] Marxism never denied the role of heroes. On the contrary, it recognises this role as considerable, but with those reservations about which I just spoke.⁷⁴

Stalin again followed Plekhanov. In his debate with the populists the latter had acknowledged that historical heroes did exist, but not as self-sufficient actors. A “great man” was one who understood the scientific laws of social life and, acting in accordance with the direction these laws predicted society was taking, accelerated the inevitable process.⁷⁵ A few years later the leader elaborated on this point in a critique of the alleged tendency in Pokrovskij’s work to discuss history exclusively in terms of economic and sociological

categories. In March 1934 he said at a meeting at the Communist Academy, in A.I. Stetskij's paraphrase:

sociology is substituted for history [...] What generally results is some kind of odd scenario for Marxists – a sort of bashful relationship – [in which] they attempt not to mention tsars and attempt not to mention prominent representatives of the bourgeoisie [...] We cannot write history in this way! Peter was Peter, Catherine was Catherine. They relied on specific classes and represented their mood and interests, but all the same they took action – these were historical individuals.

In the same month the Politbureau took up the issue and Stalin spoke again. According to the diary of one historian present, he said:

What the heck is 'the feudal epoch', 'the epoch of industrial capitalism', 'the epoch of formations' – it's all epochs and no facts, no events, no people, no concrete information, not a name, not a title, and not even any content itself. [...] History must be history.⁷⁶

Stalin wanted to be an orthodox historical materialist.⁷⁷ But he also hoped to preserve room for the role of individuals in history. In the philosophical chapter of the *Kratkij kurs* he explained that the mode of production of material goods determined "in the last resort the physiognomy of society, its ideas, views, political institutions etc." Productive technology changed first, to be followed by the productive system, to be followed by ideas. The latter could merely speed up or slow down the former. "Just as the productive forces are – so too must be the productive relations." The crisis of capitalism would, for example, lead to the establishment of the new system of socialism with a "complete correspondence of the productive relations with the character of the productive forces." But Stalin also insisted on the "enormous role of new social ideas, new political institutions, a new political power, which are called to abolish by force the old productive relations."

It does not follow from Marx's words that social ideas [...] do not produce a reverse influence on social being [...]. We have been speaking so far about the *source* of social ideas [...], about their *origin*, about the fact that the spiritual life of society constitutes a reflection of the conditions of its material life. As regards the *significance* of social ideas [...], as regards their *role* in history, historical materialism not only does not deny but, on the contrary, emphasizes their serious role.

The point was that, whereas old ideas "slow down" the development of society, new ideas "facilitate" that development. They are

instrumental in the breakthrough to a new order.⁷⁸ In his October 1938 speech the dictator complained that the role of theory had been put under a cloud, and “by simplifying this matter people slipped into a line of economic materialism or vulgar materialism.” Lenin had been the first Marxist to “work out the question of the role of the advanced idea.” A new idea arises only “on the basis of an economic tendency [*napravlenie*],” but it is nevertheless of crucial significance. It “organises people, mobilises them and leads to the transformation of an old society into a new one.”⁷⁹ In other words, economic materialism explains the *origin* of new ideas, but once they exist they may become decisive. The role of the idea however remained restricted, because the *direction* of the development of the economic system was fixed. Ideas could only accelerate inevitable transformation processes.

According to Wetter, though he was as it were continuing Lenin’s struggle against the economists, Stalin made an original contribution to historical materialism with the above thesis. His distinction between the origin and the significance of ideas was new.⁸⁰ At first sight this conclusion is hard to sustain. To begin with, Marx and Engels recognised that economics had their way only “in the last resort.” If the superstructure turned into an obstacle hampering the rise of a new economic system, political revolution became decisive.⁸¹ More importantly, Stalin’s words were foreshadowed in Plekhanov’s work. The latter argued in his 1908 *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* that the political factor “plays a significant role in the development of society,” but that, incontestably, non-economic factors “must *be created* by the economic development *before they can act on them.*” He made a distinction between “the origin and the influence” of the non-economic factor.⁸² Once again Stalin followed in Plekhanov to the letter. Yet, Wetter’s point cannot be completely dismissed. Stalin did add a new dimension to the question.

In 1927 the Soviet leader had argued that the working class was now the full master of the country, and under these fortunate conditions “consciousness is a huge driving-force in the cause of developing and perfecting our industry.”⁸³ In his speech to the 1939 party congress the triumphant dictator explained that, because of the establishment of a harmonious system of socialism, more favourable

conditions had arisen for the deployment of the force of ideas in society. There were now “such driving-forces as the moral-political unity of Soviet society, the friendship of the peoples of the USSR, Soviet patriotism.”⁸⁴ To hold that during the period of transition from capitalism to socialism, when the system still ‘lagged behind’ the demands of the productive forces, the state became decisive – as the accelerating factor – was in line with Plekhanov. In his day, Lenin too had insisted that “politics is the concentrated expression of economics [. . .] Politics must have the primacy over economics.”⁸⁵ This referred to the economic liberation of the working class being critically dependent on the establishment and preservation of the proletarian dictatorship.

But Stalin made a further step when he argued that, once the productive relations had been brought to correspond with the demands of the productive forces, politics *remained* the primary factor – for precisely the opposite reason: not because of remaining imperfections to be removed but because of the very perfectness of the new system. Even under a system no longer ‘lagging behind’ the demands of the productive forces, under socialism, the accelerating superstructure remained the primary driving force. This could never be unconditionally the case. As always, the direction of developments was determined by the productive forces. Nevertheless politics remained the driving force of the system.⁸⁶ Here, then, lay Stalin’s originality – in applying Plekhanov’s thesis of the significance of the ideological factor under conditions of a retrograde socio-economic system to the opposite conditions of an advanced socialist system.

In conclusion, in the first two decades after the October Revolution Stalin basically accomplished two things in philosophy. Firstly, he rejected Deborin’s model of dialectics which – in the spirit of Engels, Plekhanov and Lenin – had preserved some Hegelian elements. Without acknowledging it, he joined the mechanist camp. Compared to his writings of 1906–1907, he embraced the scientific approach more fully now, accepting as he did the holist notion of external, mutual causation with its complete determinism. But his dialectics did not become a copy of Bogdanov’s and Bukharin’s more strict mechanicism. Stalin’s ‘biological’ model lacked the element of equilibrium, resting instead on a metaphor of permanent

struggle between vital and decaying forces. In that sense his interpretation of dialectics remained distinctively his own. Secondly, in his struggle against the Pokrovskij school he emphasized the significance of the superstructure and of individual historical actors, but as before they could only accelerate spontaneous processes.

MATURE STALINIST PHILOSOPHY

In 1945–1946 there appeared G.F. Aleksandrov's *History of Western-European Philosophy*. Stalin agreed to award the author with a Stalin Reward. But soon he decided to subject the book to discussion for serious mistakes. Reportedly the leader laid out the basis for the discussion in a telephone conversation with the chief editor of *Pravda*, P.N. Pospelov. He was dissatisfied with the tone of the book. "It doesn't have that militant party spirit, of which Lenin's works on philosophy are a model." And he quoted his own "Anarchism or socialism?" to the effect that Marx and Engels had not been the founders of some philosophical school, but "living leaders of a living proletarian movement." Furthermore, the break between Hegel and Marx had not been appreciated to a sufficient degree. The former's system had not only been conservative, as Aleksandrov characterised it, but "reactionary, called forth by fear of the French revolution and directed against the French materialists." Marxism represented a true "revolution in philosophy."⁸⁷

As in the times of the critique of Deborin, Stalin sharply distinguished between Marxism and Hegelianism. In his last years he further reduced the remaining non-mechanist elements in his dialectics. The 1938 exposé contained several such rudiments, among which was the transition from quantitative to qualitative change. Subsequently the Soviet dictator partly dismantled this 'law'. In his report to the 1939 party congress he noted that capitalist society has "irreconcilable contradictions" and "antagonistic, hostile classes." The USSR no longer has such contradictions.⁸⁸ The concept of non-antagonistic contradictions became the point of departure to reformulate dialectics.⁸⁹ In June 1947 party secretary Andrej Zhdanov held an important speech on philosophy containing the following passage:

In our Soviet society, where the antagonistic classes have been liquidated, the struggle between the old and the new, and, consequently, the development from the lower to the higher does not proceed in the form of a struggle between antagonistic classes and of cataclysms, as it takes place under capitalism, but in the form of criticism and self-criticism, which is the real driving-force of our development [. . .]. This is undoubtedly a new kind of movement, a new type of development, a new dialectical law.⁹⁰

The speech was read and corrected by Stalin in advance.⁹¹ The passage in question claims that, in the absence of ‘antagonistic’ contradictions, developments from the ‘lower to the higher’ take non-cataclysmic forms. In his 1950 articles on linguistics Stalin elaborated on this point. He explained that the transition from one language to another did not take place through an “explosion [vzryv],” but through a “gradual and lengthy accumulation of the elements of the new quality” and a “gradual dying of the elements of the old.” What is more,

the law of the transition of an old to a new quality through an explosion is not only inapplicable to the history of development of language [. . .]. It is obligatory for a society divided into hostile classes. But it is not at all obligatory for a society that does not have hostile classes.

Another example of a gradual transition from one quality to another had been the collectivisation of Soviet agriculture. As it had taken the form of a revolution from above supported by the peasantry, this too had been a gradual process.⁹² This reformulation of the ‘law’ of qualitative change in the mechanist direction was never complete. The full mechanist (and on this point even Bukharin had not been one) denies the very idea of qualitative change. Stalin needed to prove that dialectics did not predict violent transition from socialism to communism. But to deny qualitative change as such would have made nonsense of the whole idea of transition from one type of society to another.⁹³

The second point on which Stalin moved further in the direction of mechanismism concerned the question of external causation. In the 1938 list of four defining elements of dialectics, the first concerned complete causation of objects by the surrounding world, excluding coincidence and which consequently made behaviour fully predictable. At the same time, though, Stalin had in contrast to Bukharin insisted on never-ending internal struggles within objects. In his last

years he distanced himself from this latter non-mechanist element in his doctrine.

We should first consider Stalin's views of biology and physiology. The dictator sympathised with Lamarck's idea of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Before the revolution he expressed the expectation that "neo-Darwinism" was about to be replaced by "neo-Lamarckism," because the latter better explained qualitative change in nature.⁹⁴ In his discussion of December 1930 he admitted that, from his youth, he had been "captivated by neo-Lamarckism. Weismann [a German neo-Darwinist biologist, died 1914, E.v.R.] contains a lot of mysticism."⁹⁵ On 31 October 1947 Stalin informed the main Soviet Lamarckist Trofim Lysenko that, in his opinion, "Michurinism" was the "only scientific thesis": those "who deny the inheritance of acquired characteristics are not worth devoting much attention to."⁹⁶ In a discussion with Iurij Zhdanov of the party secretariat's Science Department Stalin rejected the assumption of an "immutable substance of heredity, which is not subject to the influence of external nature." Most of the new plant species allegedly developed by Lysenko perished, but that was only "what the books teach."⁹⁷

In April 1948 the young Zhdanov bravely criticised the Lysenko school.⁹⁸ At a meeting of the Politbureau in June the leader harshly attacked him. Notes made by Andrej Zhdanov suggest that he divided biology into two schools, the one "based on mysticism – a mystery on a mystery. The other materialist."⁹⁹ Stalin further edited Lysenko's speech for the conference of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences in August.¹⁰⁰ What struck Lysenko-Stalin as harmful in "Mendelism-Morganism" was the "undefined character of variability." Changes in the heredity of organisms were "*fundamentally unpredictable*." This "concept of unknowability" disarmed creative agrobiologists.¹⁰¹ A *Bol'shevik* editorial commented that Soviet science "chases coincidence from biology," thereby allowing the "planned capture of living nature from the viewpoint of practice."¹⁰²

The same spirit pervaded physiology. In September 1949 *Bol'shevik* published a celebratory article on the occasion of the centenary of Ivan Pavlov's birthday. Pavlov had developed a "materialist teaching of the dependence of the behaviour of organ-

isms on external stimuli, on the conditions of their existence.”¹⁰³ On Stalin’s initiative the Academies of Sciences and of Medical Sciences organised a conference in June–July 1950 with the purpose of rooting out everything diverging from Pavlov’s teachings – that is, as interpreted by Stalin.

The main address delivered by Konstantin Bykov, published in *Pravda* on 29 and 30 June, was again read and edited by Stalin in advance.¹⁰⁴ It praised Pavlov’s “synthetic view of living nature,” according to which the organism was conceived in unity with the nature surrounding it. According to Bykov-Stalin, capitalist physiologists operated with a concept of “the conservativeness of the forces of nature, thereby putting the brakes on the development of the all-penetrating force of the human mind.” With the theory of conditioned reflexes, provoked by external conditions, “all reactions of animals and man” might be explained. The idea that living beings were “predetermined once and for all” was rejected. The “inner world” of animals existed, but external environment had a dominant influence on it.

In other words, according to Stalin, the hereditary material of plants and the behavioural patterns of animals were completely determined by their environment, which made them fully predictable and malleable through manipulation of this environment. Plants and animals did no longer have an internal reality of their own; they, as it were, lacked a stable, independent essence. In effect Stalin now denied the relevance of the internal contradictions in objects. This brought him close to Bukharin’s thesis of equilibrium in the absence of external stimuli.

In the very last period of his life Stalin furthermore took a final step in the direction of Bogdanov’s agnostic theory of knowledge. This development was an obvious outflow of his phantasy of complete control over the objective world. In his 1952 *Economic problems of socialism in the USSR* the dictator insisted that scientific laws reflect objective processes, taking place independently of our will. One cannot change, abolish or create such laws. This standard materialist thesis of objective reality was given a strange turn, however. Stalin noted that, if the objectivity of laws were denied, one would land up in the “kingdom of chaos and coincidences” and fall into “slavish dependence on these coincidences.” But, then

again, “fetishisation of laws” would also lead to becoming a slaver to them. By learning the laws of nature and applying them, one can “limit their sphere of action, redirect the destructive forces of nature.” For example, a river can be tamed to produce energy. Though again, this does not mean that the existing laws of nature were abolished.

On the contrary, this whole procedure is realised precisely on the basis of the laws of nature, of the laws of science. For any violation of the laws of nature, the most minor violation, would only lead to the collapse of the purpose [*rasstrojstvo dela*], to the failure of the procedure.¹⁰⁵

Tucker points out that this argument is contradictory. On one hand Stalin insisted that laws of nature cannot be changed. But on the other he did believe that their sphere of action can be limited, which does represent a definite change. More importantly, people can even violate these laws.¹⁰⁶ In Stalin’s logic, to make an airplane fly means to limit the sphere of action of the law of gravity. And the crashing of a plane indicates that that law has been violated. The objectivity of laws consists, then, not in the fact that they cannot be violated, but that one can only violate them to one’s own detriment.

This muddled argument becomes understandable once we assume that, by ‘laws’, Stalin in fact was referring to something like *rules of engineering*. Such ‘laws’ can indeed be violated. If one does, the plane crashes and the dam breaks. What is more, nothing in Stalin’s argument suggests that there are any laws which simply *cannot* be violated, i.e. which are objective in a full sense. This semi-objectivity provides almost limitless scope for transforming the world. The limitations man faces in his projects concern only the procedural rules to be followed, not the goals. There is no inherent reason why any goal could not be achieved, provided the rules are not violated. With this flexible interpretation of objectivity Stalin at last moved away from the rigid Engels-Lenin view of objective reality. He did not embrace Bogdanov’s notion that so-called objective laws are in fact of our own making. After all, rules of construction cannot be changed, and are indeed objectively given. But he did move a substantial way in the direction of hollowing out the fixed, given character of objective reality.

Thus in his last years Stalin again came closer to a completely mechanist-scientistic interpretation of dialectical materialism. To

begin with, the idea of qualitative change was for a part undermined. Furthermore, the factor of internal contradiction lost much of its significance when compared to external causation. No longer did objects have a ‘mystical’ inner being; they were, on the contrary, completely determined by their environment. And, finally, the very concept of an objectively existing reality was diluted. The laws governing the world were objective only in a limited sense; for their sphere of action could be restricted and they could even be violated. The last two changes complemented each other. They expressed extraordinary belief in the powers of man to mould the world at will, an ideology Tucker aptly dubbed “transformism.”¹⁰⁷

Historical materialism too was further adapted in Stalin’s last years. During 1947 and 1948 the ‘patriotic’ temperature rose steeply. During the June 1947 debate the philosopher Bonifatij Kedrov criticised Aleksandrov’s book for exaggerating the role of Russian philosophy and underrating the international aspect of science. In 1948 Kedrov came under fire in *Voprosy filosofii*. The attack was accompanied by a general statement concerning the correct way to analyse the development of sciences, culture and ideology. It was a case of “vulgar sociologism” to represent the whole history of old Russia in terms of the activity of exploiting classes. History was not only a matter of class. One should not forget about the “national particularities of the development of specific peoples.” Marxism insisted on representing the “socio-historical roots of ideology” *in full*:

Scholars [. . .] do not live and act in a vacuum, in a sphere of pure, abstract thought, but in a completely real historical situation; scholars belong to a specific class [. . .] of a specific nation [. . .] Marxism-Leninism destroys completely the cosmopolitan fabrications of a supra-class, supra-national, ‘all-human’ science.¹⁰⁸

In November 1948 *Bol’shevik* wrote that, the “fundamental thesis of historical materialism” – being determines consciousness – implied that the “social conditions” in a given country determined the development of ideology and science.

Therefore one cannot understand the course of scientific development without attentive consideration of the historical development of each nation, of the social system of a given country. To ignore the national aspect in considering the development of science means to separate science from the social soil nurturing it.¹⁰⁹

This amounted to a reformulation of historical materialism. The old attack on the 'vulgar' approach was repeated to make a more sweeping point. In the nineteen-thirties it had been argued that ideas play an important role in history. Society cannot be reduced to its economic basis. Now the national factor was added, suggesting that it was part of the very basis of society, which apparently no longer comprised only the economic system.

The new historical materialism was not elaborated theoretically. But Stalin treated the matter in his 1950 work on linguistics. This collection of articles criticised the linguist Nikolaj Marr, who held that languages changed fundamentally under the influence of revolutions in the socio-economic system. Stalin easily proved this not necessarily to be the case. The Russian language had not changed much since 1917. This is hardly spectacular, but the leader's theoretical remarks deserve some attention. He noted that, as language was not fundamentally influenced by changes in the socio-economic system, it was apparently not part of the superstructure. Stalin used the concept of "society" as the point of departure of a new model. All societies need language as a general instrument of communication, without which the productive process disintegrates. Language, the "form of national culture," shows a "kind of indifference to classes."

Language, though fundamentally differing from the superstructure, does not however differ from the instruments of production, let's say machines, which can also serve the capitalist and socialist system equally. [...] Language is one of a number of social phenomena that are active during the whole period of existence of a society. It is born and develops with the birth and development of society. It dies together with the death of society.

Stalin repeated the standard thesis that society's economic system serves as the basis upon which rests the superstructure of the "political, juridical, religious, artistic, philosophical views of society," as well as the corresponding institutions. He further repeated his old thesis of the active role of the superstructure. A basis "lives and acts" and a superstructure, reflecting that basis, does not have an "indifferent attitude towards the fate of its basis." On the contrary, once it comes into being, it "contributes actively to the formation and strengthening of its basis, takes all measures in order to help the new system to ruin and liquidate the old basis and the old classes."

A superstructure might “reject this serving role,” but it will then stop being a superstructure. Stalin synthesised the two parts of his model (language as a product of society as a whole; and the superstructure as a product of the economic basis) into one formula:

The superstructure is not linked directly with production [. . .]. It is linked with production only indirectly, through the economy, through the basis. Therefore the superstructure reflects the changes in the level of development of the productive forces not immediately and directly, but after changes in the basis [. . .]. But, in contrast, language is directly linked with the productive activity of man.¹¹⁰

To sum up, for Stalin “society” as a whole became the primary category. He visualised it as an organism engaged in a struggle for survival. Society develops various instruments – such as productive technology, a class system of property, and language – attuned to the need of increasing its own viability. Thus class was reduced from primary category to an element derived from the social whole. In the classical terms of historical materialism this gives us a model in which the productive forces are still the primary factor, creating a corresponding economic system (the basis, the relations of production) which is generally of a class nature. And this system again produces a corresponding ideological and political superstructure. But there is also a group of phenomena, like language, which are *direct* creations of the productive forces and not of the productive relations, and which therefore do not bear the stamp of class.¹¹¹

Though Marr was his target, Stalin was in fact again criticising Pokrovskij. He called Marr a “vulgariser of Marxism, in the style of the ‘Proletkultists’.”¹¹² The term “vulgar Marxism” was standardly used to decry Pokrovskij. And he apparently associated Marr’s idea that revolutions produced new languages with the Proletkult efforts to create a new proletarian art. This contained another reference to Pokrovskij, for Proletkult had been the brainchild of Bogdanov, of whom Pokrovskij had once been a follower. There is also strong evidence that Stalin’s thesis was meant as a critique of Bukharin. In *Historical Materialism* the latter insisted that language was part of the “ideological superstructure,” and that it was “erected on the economic basis.” He explained:

the connection of language with the process of production is more and more indirect; the dependence of language on the technique of production is now an indirect dependence; the causal chain now runs *through* the dependence of the

various superstructural forms on the process of production, and even the latter dependence may no longer be a direct one.¹¹³

Stalin's thesis of language being directly determined by the productive forces reads like a comment on Bukharin. Turning to the question of the dictator's sources of inspiration for his new model, we must first observe that the well-known formula of culture being "socialist in content and national in form," which he elaborated in the nineteen-twenties, already foreshadowed his later conclusions. More importantly, we see a resurfacing of his Plekhanovist monism of 1906–1907. It is only that those parts of the superstructure that were directly determined by the productive forces were now redefined as no longer belonging to the superstructure and turned into a separate category.¹¹⁴ In 1952 Stalin took a further step, when he in effect removed part of the productive relations from the class sphere too. It was held to be a law of the development of socialism that "the old" was "not simply completely abolished, but changes its nature as applied to the new, preserving only its form."

That is how matters stand not only with commodities, but also with money [...], as well as with banks [...] from the old categories of capitalism we preserved mainly the form, the external outlook. But in essence we changed them fundamentally as applied to the needs of the development of the socialist economy.¹¹⁵

Thus, whereas in 1950 language – as the "form of culture" – had been removed from the sphere determined by the economic system, two years later the "form" of the relations of production – commodity and money relations – was also made independent of the system of property. All such "forms" were directly determined by the productive forces, which meant in practice that they were preserved for the sake of societal and productive efficiency. It seems that Stalin was in the process of formulating a concept in which the "form" of cultural, political and economic life was removed *in toto* from the class sphere, and absorbed by "society," which was another word for the national community. Had he been able to continue with this, the result would have been a historical materialism in which cultural, political and economic phenomena were for a significant part made directly dependent upon national and technological factors.

CONCLUSIONS

Stalin's two alleged contributions to historical materialism – the occasional primacy of the ideological factor; and the existence of social phenomena directly derived from the technological needs of society instead of from its class structure – were copied from Plekhanov's work. In the latter's monist interpretation of materialism the economic basis and the ideological superstructure are closely integrated in one common social whole. This has two consequences. Firstly, there can never be opposition between the basis and the superstructure. The latter can only lag behind. This again creates the need for a special segment of the superstructure (the vanguard party or the state) to accelerate the development of the rest of the ideological-political sphere. Under such circumstances the superstructure becomes the decisive factor, which must change – and effects the change – in order to come to conform to the economic basis. Secondly, Plekhanov identified the productive forces as the unifying social principle directly underlying both the basis and the superstructure. This implied that the ideological and political sphere was for a part unrelated to class and directly derived from the nature of society's technical productive process.

Fundamentally, Stalin's theses of the enormous role of ideas and of language as a social phenomenon added nothing to this. However, it must be admitted that on both points he did provide some distinctive formulations of his own. To begin with, the primacy of the vanguard party under capitalism and of the proletarian state in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism can be understood within the context of Plekhanov's model. But to insist on the primacy of the idea even under achieved socialism cannot easily be accommodated in that model. Furthermore, the idea of a non-class sphere was elaborated more sweepingly than in Plekhanov's work, by taking it out of the superstructure, turning it into a new category of social phenomena, and by including elements of the productive relations. As a result, though couched in wooden formulas, Stalin's historical materialism acquired a certain flexibility. It created a balance between technological, economic and ideological factors which a less rigid mind could have elaborated to some benefit.

Stalin's concept of dialectics was part of the non-Hegelian tendency in Marxism. He never believed in 'interpenetrating opposites'

and the ‘negation of the negation’. Moreover his mechanicism became more pronounced in the course of time. After he hollowed out the ‘law’ of qualitative transition and made external causation completely dominant over the principle of internal contradiction, he ended up at a position almost indistinguishable from Bukharin’s theory of equilibrium. In effect he thereby largely abandoned his own ‘biological’ interpretation of dialectics, centring around internal struggles between life and death forces. In summing up, Stalin’s philosophy was a compound of Plekhanovist historical materialism and Bukharinist quasi-dialectics, but, the simplistic and schematic formulations notwithstanding, with some original admixtures of his own.

We are, finally, still faced with the problem of the apparent contradiction between Stalin’s insistence on the importance of non-economic and class-neutral factors and his firm rejection of idealist dialectics. But the inconsistency is more apparent than real. To begin with, I have noted that monism naturally leads to subsuming matter under mind or the other way around, i.e. to either a pure Hegelian or a pure materialist position. Plekhanov was not consistent enough to acknowledge this. Like Engels and Lenin, he combined philosophical materialism with a few logical-dialectical ‘laws’ isolated from Hegel’s work. But, in adopting monism, Stalin had the consistency to draw the conclusion drawn by Bogdanov and Bukharin – to liquidate the Hegelian heritage. Furthermore, the non-economic factors he introduced were on closer inspection not purely ideological. The idea continued to reflect the economic basis and its function was only to accelerate the development of the economic system. And the non-class factor reflected the demands of technology. Appearances to the contrary, then, Stalin’s historical theory was not to become an ‘idealist’ construct but remained a variety of materialism.

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NOTES

¹ Evert van der Zweerde: *Soviet Historiography of Philosophy; istoriko-filosofskaja nauka*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht/Boston/London, 1997, p. 38.

² Anton Donoso: 'Stalinism in Marxist Philosophy', *Studies in Soviet Thought* 19 (1979), p. 113.

³ Gustav A. Wetter: *Der dialektische Materialismus. Seine Geschichte und sein System in der Sowjetunion*, Verlag Herder, Vienna, 1958, pp. 251f.

⁴ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 3, *The Breakdown*, Oxford University Press, Oxford etc., 1981, pp. 62, 97–98.

⁵ Wetter, *Der dialektische Materialismus*, p. 255.

⁶ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: *Werke*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1965–1974, vol. 4, p. 474 [MEW].

⁷ V.I. Lenin: *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenij. Izdanie pjatoe*, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, Moscow, 1958–1972, vol. 6, pp. 30, 39, 41n, 79 [PSS].

⁸ Neil Harding: *Lenin's Political Thought*, vol. 1, *Theory and Practice in the Democratic Revolution*, The MacMillan Press Ltd., London/Basingstoke, 1977, chapters 2, 6, 7 (especially pp. 167f); Moira Donald: *Marxism and Revolution. Karl Kautsky and the Russian Marxists, 1900–1924*, Yale University Press, New Haven/London, 1993, pp. 24f.

⁹ John H. Kautsky: *Karl Kautsky. Marxism, Revolution and Democracy*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick/London, 1994, especially pp. 59f.

¹⁰ Cit. in: *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹¹ G.V. Plekhanov: *Sotsializm i Politicheskaja Bor'ba. Nashi Raznoglasija*, OGIZ/Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, Moscow, 1948, p. 77.

¹² PSS, vol. 6, pp. 39–40; Kautsky, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 59.

¹³ D. Riazanov (ed.): *G.V. Plekhanov. Sochinenija*, vol. 13, Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, Moscow/Leningrad, 1926, pp. 118–121.

¹⁴ Plekhanov, *Sotsializm i Politicheskaja Bor'ba*, p. 53.

¹⁵ Riazanov, *G.V. Plekhanov*, vol. 13, pp. 124, 128–129.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 12, 1924, p. 15.

¹⁷ G.V. Plekhanov: *O Materialisticheskom Ponimanii Istorii*, OGIZ/Gospolitizdat, Moscow, 1948, p. 29.

¹⁸ Hal Draper (*The "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" from Marx to Lenin*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1987, especially pp. 64f) argues that it was Plekhanov who first adopted the Blanquist concept, not Lenin, who only followed his lead. But this analysis has been countered by Robert Mayer ('The Dictatorship of the Proletariat from Plekhanov to Lenin', *Studies in East European Thought* 4 (1993)).

¹⁹ See Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought*, vol. 1, chapter 9.

²⁰ PSS, vol. 11, pp. 4–5.

²¹ According to D.N. Kostyshin (“‘Nebol’shoe pis’metso” iz gromadnoj fabriki lzhi’, *Kentavr*, May–June 1992, pp. 76n), it has been “irrefutably established” that the letters were not written by Stalin, but by Aleksandr Tsulukidze. However, he does not give any references. The letters have been found in Lenin’s correspondence, but only in Russian translations. The Georgian originals have been lost. (I.V. Stalin: *Sochinenija*, vol. 1, 1901–1907, OGIZ/Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo Politicheskoy Literatury, Moscow, 1946, p. 396 [*Sochinenija*]) The style of both letters is characteristic for Dzhugashvili.

²² *Sochinenija*, vol. 1, pp. 56–58, 60.

²³ *Ibid.* pp. 97–98, 102–104.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 162, 165.

²⁵ In October 1905 Lenin wrote a flattering comment on this last article by Koba. He summarised it as follows: socialist consciousness is produced by a few intellectuals; it is carried into the class by the party (including its proletarian members); and it is favourably received by the class because of its instinctive attraction to socialism. See *Sochinenija*, vol. 1, pp. 404–405. Lenin was apparently content with this article by his Georgian disciple, and, to be sure, he had no reason not to be. But that was as much because of what the article had said as because of its omissions.

²⁶ Robert C. Tucker: *Stalin as Revolutionary. 1879–1929. A Study in History and Personality*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York/London, 1974, p. 118.

²⁷ *Sochinenija*, vol. 1, pp. 297–298, 305; *MEW*, vol. 21, p. 270; see also Van der Zweerde, *Soviet Historiography of Philosophy*, pp. 22 (incl. note 117), 33 (incl. note 48).

²⁸ *Sochinenija*, vol. 1, pp. 312–313, 317–319. Engels claimed that the mind was produced by the brain, though being no part of it, and that ideas reflected an objectively existing outer reality, like mirror-images. See *MEW*, vol. 20, pp. 33; vol. 21: 275–278.

²⁹ *Sochinenija*, vol. 1, pp. 314–319, 326.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 312–313, 318, 327.

³¹ Cit. in: G.V. Plekhanov (N. Bel’tov): *K Voprosu o Razviti Monisticheskogo Vzglyada na Istoriju*, OGIZ/Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo Politicheskoy Literatury, Leningrad, 1938, p. 3. Plekhanov included the term ‘monism’ in the title of the book, instead of ‘materialism’, in order to get it past the censors. But the monism was as essential a part of his argument in the book as the materialism.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 6–8, 98.

³³ Plekhanov, *O Materialisticheskoy Ponimani Istorii*, pp. 7–9, 10–11.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19; Hal Draper (*Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution*, vol. 1, *State and Bureaucracy*, Monthly Review Press, New York/London, 1977, pp. 237f) presents a case establishing that Marx and Engels also thought along these lines.

³⁵ *Sochinenija*, vol. 1, pp. 298–301.

³⁶ *MEW*, vol. 21, pp. 278, 280, 292f; see also vol. 20, p. 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 20, pp. 20–21, 55–58, 112.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 111–133.

³⁹ See for instance Plekhanov, *K Voprosu o Razviti*, . . . pp. 43–47, 51–52.

⁴⁰ Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 2, pp. 51–52; Massimo Salvadori: *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution, 1880–1938*, London, 1979, pp. 23f; Hans-Josef Steinberg: *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie. Zur Ideologie der Partei vor dem I. Weltkrieg*, Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschichte, Hannover, 1967, pp. 43f.

⁴¹ *Sochinenija*, vol. 1, p. 307.

⁴² Possibly his background as a Georgian social-democrat was significant in developing his standpoint. According to Soviet studies, two Transcaucasian social-democrats, Alesha Tsulukidze and Stepan Shaumjan, put their mark on Marxist philosophy in the area. See for instance V.A. Gagoidze: *Osnovnye Napravlenija Filosofskoj Mysli v Gruzii XIX Veka (Avtoreferat Dissertatsii)*, Tbilisi, 1963, pp. 52f, 57f; S.G. Shaumjan: *Izbrannye Proizvedenija v Dvukh Tomakh*, vol. 1, 1902–1916 gg., Gospolitizdat, Moscow, 1957, pp. 30f. Tsulukidze built his dialectics around the notion of permanent “struggle between the new and the old.” Gagoidze, *Osnovnye Napravlenija*, p. 58. In 1905 Shaumjan published an article “Evolutionism and revolutionism in social science.” Though like Plekhanov warning against automatic transfer of biological models to social science, he explained that in sociology as well as in biology progress took the form of quantitative, evolutionary change climaxing in qualitative, revolutionary jumps. Shaumjan, *Izbrannye Proizvedenija*, vol. 1, pp. 64, 66, 68–69.

⁴³ For Bogdanov’s philosophy see Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 2, pp. 424f; Wetter, *Der dialektische Materialismus*, pp. 106f; K.M. Jensen: *Beyond Marx and Mach. Aleksandr Bogdanov’s Philosophy of Living Experience*, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht/Boston/London, 1978.

⁴⁴ See Wetter, *Der dialektische Materialismus*, pp. 120–121; Frederick C. Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia. From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1986, p. 263.

⁴⁵ Aleksandr Svanidze, brother of Dzhugashvili’s deceased wife, published a brochure *Empiriocriticism* in support of Mach’s philosophy. He was supported by Kote Tsintsadze, another good acquaintance of Dzhugashvili. See Ts.P. Agajan et al. (eds.): *Ocherki Kommunisticheskikh Organizatsij Zakavkaz’ja*, vol. 1, 1883–1921 gg., Tbilisi, 1967, p. 215. But Stepan Shaumjan (*Izbrannye Proizvedenija*, vol. 1, pp. 285–286) opposed them. In November 1908 he wrote in a letter to Misha Tskhakaja, more or less on behalf of the Baku organisation of which Dzhugashvili was a leading member: “Concerning [Bogdanov’s] empiriomonism we are nevertheless great sceptics, to the say the least, [...] I read his *From the Psychology of Society*. Until now my opinion is very negative. According to me, his thesis of the *identity* of being and consciousness completely destroys Marx’s system. But I repeat that I consider my opinion to be not yet final.”

⁴⁶ Robert C. Williams: *The Other Bolsheviks. Lenin and his Critics, 1904–1914*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1986, p. 121. The published fragments of the letters used by Williams do not differ from the archival text.

⁴⁷ *Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History*, f.558, op.1, d.5262, ll.7–9 [RGASPI].

⁴⁸ *PSS*, vol. 8, see for instance p. 92.

⁴⁹ *RGASPI*, f.558, op.1. d.5225, l.8. Bogdanov's new book most likely meant *Vera i nauka*, which was the latter's answer to Lenin's. Bogdanov listed so many of his critic's "blunders" that we do not know to which of them Dzhughashvili was referring, but the book indeed stated, among other points of critique, that Lenin refused to acknowledge that his concept of materialism differed from Plekhanov's. *Vera i Nauka* was published in 1910. See A. Bogdanov: *Padenie Velikogo Fetishizma (Sovremennyj Krizis Ideologii). Vera i Nauka (O knige V. Il'ina "Materializm i Empiriokrititsizm")*, Tipografija V. Rikhter, Moscow, 1910, pp. 163f, in particular p. 171. The date represents a problem, because Koba's letter was from early January 1910, which would have given him no time to read the book, and most probably not even to see it. I still think it must have referred to *Vera i Nauka*. There was no other "new book" by Bogdanov, except for *Padenie*, . . . which was also from 1910. (see Dietrich Grille: *Lenins Rivale. Bogdanov und seine Philosophie*, Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, Cologne, 1966, pp. 255–256) Moreover, what the letter said about the book fits all too well. Possibly the book appeared on the market in 1909 despite the official date, or the date of the letter is not accurate.

⁵⁰ In the book Bukharin used "dialectical materialism" as a term referring to the general Marxist approach to all fields of knowledge. In the introduction he wrote: "The working class has its own proletarian sociology, known as *historical materialism*. In its main outlines this theory was elaborated by Marx and Engels. It is also called 'the materialist method in history' or simply 'economic materialism'." See Nikolaj Bukharin: *Historical Materialism*, The University of Michigan Press, 1969, p. 14. So he no longer used the term "historical materialism" in the general way as Engels had, but as the application of the Marxist system to human history. See: *Ibid.*, chapter three. In 1919 Ivan Skvortsov-Stepanov had translated Herman Gorter's little book on historical materialism into Russian. At that time there was hardly anything available on the subject in the Soviet Union. See I. Stepanov: *Istoricheskij Materializm i Sovremennoe Estestvoznanie. Marksizm i Leninism. Ocherki Sovremennogo Mirovozzrenija*, Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, Moscow, 1924, p. 3. In his book the Dutch communist H. Gorter (*Het Historisch Materialisme voor Arbeiders Verklaard*, Proletarisch Links, Amsterdam, 1972, pp. 5–7) had made a sharp distinction between a "philosophical" materialism, which treated questions like mind and matter, and a "historical materialism" that treated the development of society. Perhaps he was the first to make this distinction so clearly. We see it in any case return in Skvortsov-Stepanov's own work of 1924. See Stepanov, *Istoricheskij Materializm i*, . . . pp. 23, 56, 83. In 1922 Deborin (*Vvedenie v Filosofiju Dialekticheskogo Materializma s Predislavijem G.V. Plekhanova*, Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, Moscow, 1922, p. 312) adopted the same distinction Bukharin made between a general "philosophical or dialectical materialism" and a "historical materialism" applied to society. By the late nineteen-twenties the division between 'dialectical' and 'historical' materialism seems to have been generally accepted. See for instance I. Stepanov: *Dialekticheskij Materializm i Deborinskaia Shkola*, Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, Moscow/Leningrad, 1928, pp. 87, 95; A. Deborin: *Dialektika i*

Estestvoznanie, Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, Moscow/Leningrad, 1929, p. 23; see also M. Mitin, I. Razumovskij (eds.): *Dialekticheskij i Istoricheskij Materializm*, vol. 2, *Istoricheskij Materializm*, Partijnoe Izdatel'stvo, Moscow, 1932, p. 1; M. Mitin: *Dialekticheskij i Istoricheskij Materializm v 2-kh Chastjakh. Uchebnik dlja Komvuzov i Vtuzov*, vol. 1, *Dialekticheskij Materializm*, Partijnoe Izdatel'stvo, Moscow, 1933, pp. 8–9.

⁵¹ I.V. Stalin: *Sochinenija*, vol. 1 [XIV], 1934–1940, The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace/Stanford University, Stanford, p. 279 [*Sochinenija*].

⁵² Bukharin, *Historical Materialism*, pp. 44, 63–64, 67, 72–75, 79, 81.

⁵³ *MEW*, vol. 20, p. 348.

⁵⁴ According to a friend of the important 'Deborinist' Ian Sten, the latter was asked in 1925 by Stalin to direct his studies of Hegelian dialectics. The Soviet leader was reported to have followed two lessons a week, and next to Hegel they included the ideas of Kant, Feuerbach, Fichte and Schelling. But, as Sten confided to the friend, he experienced great difficulties because of his student's "inability to master Hegelian dialectics." Stalin ended the lessons in 1928. See Roy Medvedev: *Let History Judge. The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, pp. 438–439; Dmitrij Volkogonov: *Triumf i Tragedija. Politicheskij Portret I.V. Stalina v 2-kh Knigakh*, vol. I.2, Izdatel'stvo Agentstva Pechati Novosti, Moscow, 1989, pp. 126–127. I find this doubtful. Even assuming that Stalin was not eager to learn, two lessons in classical German philosophy a week in the course of three years must have had a profound impact on his understanding of the subject. However, nothing like that shows in the philosophical chapter of the *Kratkij kurs*.

⁵⁵ The leader underlined Marx's remarks on the dialectical method in a preface to a 1934 copy of the first volume of *Das Kapital*. See: *RGASPI*, f.558, op.3, d.206, pp. 20–21. The books with notes include a 1930 collection of writings by Marx, Engels, Plekhanov and Lenin on dialectical materialism; a 1931 copy of Engels' *Anti-Dühring, Dialektik der Natur and Ludwig Feuerbach*, . . . as well as separate copies of *Anti-Dühring* from 1933 and 1950; a 1933 copy of Lenin's *Filosofskie tetrady*; a 1934 volume by M.B. Mitin on dialectical materialism; and a 1947 copy of *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. See: *ibid.*, dd.243, 199, 376, 377, 178, 55, 153. They were read intensely, though sometimes only parts of them, but the notes are disappointing. They are almost exclusively marks and underlinings and hardly any comments at all. The very few comments that are there are of little significance, for instance a firm "No!" next to a passage in Mark Mitin's book that Lenin's main theoretical works were written in the same period as Plekhanov's. See: d.55, p. 284. The comments in a 1939 copy of Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* and in G.F. Aleksandrov's 1940 *Filosofskie Predshestvenniki Marksizma* are not in Stalin's hand. See dd.1, 167. A 1938 textbook on political economy contains Stalin's remark in the margin: "'dialectics': there is nothing eternal, there are no eternal econ. relat., everything changes etc." See: d.257, p. 218.

⁵⁶ In an October 1938 speech he quoted comrade Mitin who had quoted Marx to the effect that the working class was "one of the most important instruments

of production.” But that had been the early Marx. Later, in *Das Kapital*, the prophet had used “more precise and specific formulations.” Together with the “objects” of labour, the “instruments” of labour formed the “means of production.” The latter category did not include the labourer, who was, however, part of the “productive forces,” which were again the ‘instruments of production plus the people, who put the means of production into motion’. See: N.N. Maslov: ‘I.V. Stalin o “Kratkom kurse istorii VKP(b)”’, *Istoricheskij arkhiv* 5 (1994), pp. 23–24; see also: *RGASPI*, f.17, op.120, d.313, ll.12–13. On further terminological matters see D.T. Shepilov: ‘Vospominanija’, *Voprosy istorii* 7 (1998), p. 9.

⁵⁷ There is, for instance, a 1945 book by K.V. Ostrovitjanov on the economies of pre-capitalist formations. Judging by the underlinings Stalin read the book in part, but he did not make any notes. See: *RGASPI*, f.558, op.3, d.244. The same goes for an undated *Foundations of Historical Materialism*, in which he underlined for instance a passage by Engels on the influence of ideas on the economy. See d.242, p. 713. A 1938 copy of Plekhanov’s book on the monist interpretation of history does contain some comments, though again not many. He wrote in the margin: “Ideas lag behind being, they arise with a delay, they are secondary, produced.” And there is a “Not so” next to a passage where the author claimed that in the very earliest times of *homo sapiens* the productive instruments were not yet decisive in determining the nature of society. See: d.251, pp. 67, 90. In a 1938 textbook on political economy Stalin wrote: “‘being determines consciousness’, or: the ‘material’ (the basis), as the foundation, and the ‘ideal’ as the superstructure (the *materialist* understanding of history)” See: d.257, p. 218. The only substantial piece of writing I found is a long, hand-written note on the “slave-owners’ society,” which Stalin inserted in this 1938 textbook on political economy. It described Roman society as one in which the free peasantry was progressively less able to survive the competition with the slave-worked *latifundia*. An ever larger number of ruined peasants had to sell themselves into slavery, thus speeding up the process of the division of society into “two hostile camps, the slaves and the slave-owners.” This process undermined Roman society from two angles. Firstly, the free peasantry became disillusioned and their deplorable fate ruined the fighting capabilities of the army, of which they made up the bulk. Secondly, slavery, which became ever more important, was inherently a harmful system. Not only were slaves driven to numerous uprisings, such as the one led by Spartacus. Also, “slaves cannot serve as a reliable point of support for society. The economic interests of society were alien to the slaves, because this was an economy of their enemies, the slave-owners. Therefore they worked badly and did not have any interest in the growth and improvement of production. The state interests of society were also alien to the slaves, because this was a state of their enemies, the slave-owners. They did not only fail to help the state in the event of serious problems arising, but, on the contrary, they tried to use any fitting occasion to create new problems for it.” See d.257, inserted papers. Stalin seems to have had a special interest in this type of society. In his memoirs Shepilov (‘Vospominanija’ 7, p. 10) quotes another long exposé written by the leader in 1950 in another version of the textbook. See also Vera Tolz: *Russian Academicians and*

the Revolution. Combining Professionalism and Politics, MacMillan Press Ltd., Houndmills etc., 1997, p. 80.

⁵⁸ *Sochinenija*, vol. 12, pp. 69–70.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 143–146.

⁶⁰ See Wetter, *Der dialektische Materialismus*, pp. 156–157; Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 3, p. 72.

⁶¹ Stalin also accused Plekhanov of a “geographical deviation from Marxism in questions of historical materialism.” *RGASPI*, fF.17, op.120, d.24, ll.1–7. For other relevant remarks concerning Plekhanov and the geographical factor see also *Sochinenija*, vol. 6, p. 90; vol. 1 [XIV], pp. 302–303.

⁶² *Ibid.*, vol. 12, pp. 141–142.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1 [XIV], p. 293.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 84–85, 92–94.

⁶⁵ In the early nineteen-thirties one of the theoreticians of Lysenkoism, I.I. Prezent, formulated it even more explicitly: “Only productive practice is the criterion of truth and the essence of concrete cognition [...] only such socio-economic practical mastery is the true meaning of cognition.” See David Joravsky: *The Lysenko Affair*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge M., 1970, p. 238. Another good formulation of the Stalinist productivist concept of science was provided by S. Kaftanov (‘Sovetskaja Nauka v Bor’be za Rastsvet nashej Rodiny’, *Bol’shevik* 13–14 (1946), p. 39): “Science forms a generalisation of the practical experience of mankind, accumulated by society in the process of the struggle for the satisfaction of his material needs, in the process of social labour.”

⁶⁶ *Sochinenija*, vol. 1 [XIV], pp. 275–277.

⁶⁷ Maslov, ‘I.V. Stalin o, ...’ pp. 11–12, 18, 25; see also *RGASPI*: f.17, op.120, d.313, ll.10, 13.

⁶⁸ M. Mitin: *Gegel’ i Teorija Materialisticheskoy Dialektiki (K 100-Letnej Godovshchine Smerti Gegelja)*, Partijnoe Izdatel’stvo, Moscow, 1932, pp. 26, 42, 47–48; Mitin, *Dialekticheskij i Istoricheskij Materializm*, ... pp. 75, 83, 140f, 143, 145; M. Mitin: *Boevye Voprosy Materialisticheskoy Dialektiki*, Partizdat TsK VKP(b), Moscow, 1936, pp. 62, 64; see also Wetter, *Der dialektische Materialismus*, pp. 184–185.

⁶⁹ See Wetter, *Der dialektische Materialismus*, p. 210.

⁷⁰ *Sochinenija*, vol. 1 [XIV], pp. 279–283, 286, 290–291, 293–296; see also vol. 13, p. 120.

⁷¹ Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 3, p. 62.

⁷² *Sochinenija*, vol. 1 [XIV], p. 296.

⁷³ In his 1924 *On the Foundations of Leninism* he rejected, in very general terms, what he called the “‘theory’ of spontaneity” and the “so-called theory ‘of the productive forces’”. See: *Sochinenija*, vol. 6, pp. 90–93. See also vol. 12, p. 147.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 13, p. 106. See also vol. 1 [XIV], p. 11.

⁷⁵ G.W. Plechanow: *Über die Rolle der Persönlichkeit in der Geschichte*, SWA-Verlag, Berlin, 1946, pp. 18, 61–64.

⁷⁶ Cit. in: D.L. Brandenberger, A.M. Dubrovsky: ‘“The people need a tsar”: the emergence of national bolshevism as Stalinist ideology, 1931–1941’, *Europe-Asia Studies* 5 (1998), pp. 874–875.

⁷⁷ In October 1938 Stalin attacked Engels’ thesis of the equal importance of the human sexual reproduction and material production in the development of society. Marx had not agreed with Engels, Stalin alleged. See: Maslov, ‘I.V. Stalin o, . . .’ pp. 15–16. See also *RGASPI*, f.17, op.120, d.313, l.8. In the 1937 copy of *Der Ursprung . . .* Stalin commented on the term “group marriage”: “And on what basis did the group marriage arise?” See f.558, op.3, d.378, p. 46; see also p. 217. In a speech in January 1941 Stalin castigated Engels’ historical schemes of “the stone age, the bronze ages, the tribal system, the matriarchate, the patriarchate, and then still wildness and barbarism” as unnecessarily confusing. See Anatolii Latyshev: ‘Kak Stalin Engel’sa svergal’, *Rossijskaja gazeta*, 22 December 1992.

⁷⁸ *Sochineniia*, vol. 1 [XIV], pp. 298–299, 301, 304–311, 318–319, 324.

⁷⁹ Maslov, ‘I.V. Stalin o, . . .’ p. 14.

⁸⁰ Wetter, *Der dialektische Materialismus*, pp. 252–253.

⁸¹ See for example Engels: *MEW*, vol. 20, p. 25; vol. 21, p. 300; vol. 37, pp. 436, 463.

⁸² G. Plechanow: *Die Grundprobleme des Marxismus*, Verlag für Literatur und Politik, Vienna/Berlin, 1929, p. 63.

⁸³ See *Sochineniia*, vol. 10, p. 119.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1 [XIV], p. 367.

⁸⁵ *PSS*, vol. 42, p. 278.

⁸⁶ For a Stalinist author, F.V. Konstantinov, treating this problem extensively, see “Rol’ teorii marksizma-leninizma v razvitii sotsialisticheskogo obshchestva,” *Voprosy filosofii* 2 (1948), pp. 41–42; Konstantinov (ed.): *Istoricheskij Materializm*, Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, Moscow, 1950, pp. 687, 689, 691, 693, 698; Konstantinov in: G. Glezerman, et al. (eds): *Voprosy Marksistsko-Leninskoj Filosofii. Sbornik Statej*, Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, Moscow, 1950, p. 216; “O dvizushchikh silakh razvitija sotsialisticheskogo obshchestva,” *Voprosy filosofii* 3 (1949), p. 55.

⁸⁷ S.V. Kuleshov et al.: *Nashe Otechestvo. Opyt Politicheskoi Istorii*, vol. 2, Terra, Moscow, 1991, p. 349. No source is given for this conversation. See also: E.G. Plimak: “‘Nado osnovatel’no prochistit’ mozgi” (K 50-letiju filosofskoi diskussii 1947 goda,” *Voprosy filosofii* 7 (1997), p. 11.

⁸⁸ *Sochineniia*, vol. 1 [XIV], pp. 366–367. In November 1936 Stalin announced the liquidation of the exploiting classes. The contradictions among the remaining non-exploiting classes were fading away. But at the time he did not yet discuss the alleged disappearance of ‘antagonism’. See pp. 142, 146.

⁸⁹ Soviet philosophers also managed to dig up a Lenin quotation to support the distinction between the two different types of contradictions: “Antagonism and contradiction is absolutely not the same thing. The former will disappear, the latter will remain under socialism.” See for example V.E. Kozlovskii: “K voprosu o prirode protivorechij v sovetskom obshchestve,” *Voprosy filosofii* 2 (1952), p. 55. In 1952 Stalin remarked that his 1938 claim of complete corre-

spondence between the productive forces and the productive relations in the USSR should not have been taken literally. The point was only that, under the condition of a correct policy, such “contradictions [*protivorechija*]” need not develop into “contradictoriness [*protivopolozhnost'*]” and “conflict.” *Sochinenija*, vol. 3 [XVI], pp. 249–250, 262–270. Stalin’s “law of the obligatory correspondence of the productive relations to the character of the productive forces” (*ibid.*, p. 194) signified that in the end technology determined the direction of socio-economic development. When Shepilov (‘*Vospominaniya*’ 7, p. 5) wrote in *Bol'shevik* in early November 1952 that the law had been discovered by Stalin, the leader telephoned him to say that Marx could claim that honour.

⁹⁰ A.A. Zhdanov: “Vystuplenie na diskussii po knige G.F. Aleksandrova “Istorija zapadnoevropejskoj filosofii” (24 ijunja 1947 goda),” *Bol'shevik* 16 (1947), p. 21.

⁹¹ See: V.D. Esakov: “K istorii folosofskoj diskussii 1947 goda,” *Voprosy filosofii* 2 (1993), pp. 91–92.

⁹² *Sochinenija*, vol. 3 [XVI], pp. 140–142.

⁹³ For Soviet philosophers discussing Stalin’s “new dialectical law” of “jumps of two types” – the one explosive and the other gradual – see: V.M. Kaganov: “O putjakh perekhoda ot starogo kachestva k novomu v protsesse razvitija,” *Voprosy filosofii* 2 (1952), pp. 67–71; V.M. Kedrov in: I.D. Andreev et al. (eds.): *Voprosy Dialekticheskogo i Istoricheskogo Materializma v Trude I.V. Stalina “Marksizm i Voprosy Jazykoznanija”*, vol. 2, Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, Moscow, 1952, especially pp. 132f. See also F.I. Kaloshin in: G. Kurbatova (ed.): *O Dialekticheskom Materializme. Sbornik Statej*, Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoy Literatury, Moscow, 1952, especially pp. 177f; V.M. Kaganov, in: Glezerman et al.: *Voprosy Marksistskoj-Leninskoj Filosofii*, pp. 79f.

⁹⁴ *Sochineniia*, vol. 1, p. 301.

⁹⁵ *RGASPI*, f.17, op.120, d.124, l.6.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, f.558, op.1, d.5325, pp. 66–67; In Stalin’s library there are further traces of the same viewpoint. In a March 1948 issue of *Novyj mir*, in which the great role of Russian scholars in the development of world science was explained, Stalin underlined passages such as “the works of Michurin, the transformer of nature,” as well as parts lauding Lysenko and Michurin for having shown that heredity was not fixed like “fate in antiquity” and that plants could be “changed under the hands of the scholar.” Heredity could be “subjected to the guiding force of science.” Summer wheat could be turned into winter wheat and back. See *Ibid.*, op.3, d.234, pp. 182–185. For another example we have a 1950 copy of Engels’s *Anti-Dühring*. In this book Engels defended Darwin against the charge that the concept “struggle for existence” was inapplicable to nature because it had been artificially transplanted from Malthus’s population theory. Stalin underlined a passage in which Engels stressed that Darwin’s theory only accounted for the way selection made some hereditary changes predominant within a species, and not for how these changes arose in the first place. He also underlined Engels’s expression “Lamarck’s merits” used in this context. See: *Ibid.*, d.377, p. 70. See also: *MEW*, vol. 20, pp. 62–70.

⁹⁷ Ju.A. Zhdanov: “Vo mgle protivorechij,” *Voprosy filosofii* 7 (1993), pp. 69–71.

⁹⁸ Stalin wrote angry comments on a copy of the speech. Nikolai Kremontsov (*Stalinist Science*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997, pp. 165–166) saw the comments, mostly “Ha-ha-ha,” “Nonsense,” “Get out!” and so on. In his speech the young Zhdanov had made the insightful remarks that “we communists are by nature more sympathetic to a doctrine that establishes the possibility of the reconstruction, rebuilding of the organic world, without waiting for sudden, incomprehensible, accidental changes of some mysterious hereditary plasma. It is this aspect in the neo-Lamarckist doctrine that was emphasized and valued by Comrade Stalin in ‘Anarchism or Socialism?’” Stalin commented: “Not only ‘this aspect,’ mister.”

⁹⁹ Zhdanov, “Vo mgle protivorechij,” pp. 82–83; Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science*, pp. 166–167; “Iz istorii bor’by s lysenkovshchinoj,” *Izvestija TsK KPSS* 7 (1991), p. 112.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 119–121; see also Kirill O. Rossianov: “Stalin as Lysenko’s editor: reshaping political discourse in Soviet science,” *Russian History* 1 (1994), pp. 53, 57–60.

¹⁰¹ The address was published in *Pravda* on 4 and 5 August 1948.

¹⁰² “Za rastsvet peredovoj biologicheskoy nauki,” *Bol’shevik* 15 (1948), pp. 3–4, 6. Articles appeared in the Soviet press under titles like ‘Science is the enemy of coincidences’. Michurin, the prophet of the new biology, was glorified as a ‘warrior against adoration for coincidence.’ See: A. Maksimov: “Nauka – vrag sluchajnostej,” *Bol’shevik* 18 (1948), p. 37; V. Stoletov: “Michurin i dal’nejshee razvitie ego uchenija,” *Bol’shevik* 10 (1950), p. 31.

¹⁰³ P. Kupalov: ‘Velikij russkij uchenyj I.P. Pavlov’, *Bol’shevik* 16 (1949), p. 40.

¹⁰⁴ Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science*, pp. 272–275; Rossianov, ‘Stalin as Lysenko’s editor’, p. 61.

¹⁰⁵ *Sochinenija*, vol. 3 [XVI], pp. 189–191, 193, 292.

¹⁰⁶ Robert C. Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind. Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1972, p. 148.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 143–147.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Protiv burzhuaznoj ideologii kozmopolitizma’, *Voprosy filosofii* 2 (1948), pp. 14, 20–21, 23, 26. See also: Werner G. Hahn, *Postwar Soviet Politics. The Fall of Zhdanov and the Defeat of Moderation, 1946–1953*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca/London, 1982, pp. 165–166; L.L. Potkov, ‘Nekotorye epizody iz istorii zhurnala v 1947–1949 godakh’, *Voprosy filosofii* 7 (1997), p. 31.

¹⁰⁹ A. Zvorykin, ‘O sovetskom prioritete v nauke’, *Bol’shevik* 22 (1948), p. 23.

¹¹⁰ *Sochinenija*, vol. 3 [XVI], pp. 114–118, 120–121, 129–130, 133–135, 151.

¹¹¹ See on the natural sciences as falling in this latter category: G.F. Aleksandrov, ‘I.V. Stalin o role nadstrojki v razvitii obshchestva’, *Voprosy filosofii* 1 (1952), pp. 12–13.

¹¹² *Sochinenija*, vol. 3 [XVI], p. 146.

¹¹³ Bukharin, *Historical Materialism*, pp. 203–205, 208.

¹¹⁴ Stalin’s odd treatment of the superstructure as a thinking and acting entity was part of his habit of treating society in organicist terms. It has similarities with the way Bogdanov treated society and its separate institutions in his early works.

But there is no indication that Stalin was inspired by him in this respect. It is more directly reminiscent of Plekhanov's old identification of the superstructure with the social-democratic intelligentsia, which I discussed above. Discussing the superstructure of Soviet society, Stalin obviously thought of the state officials and communist party, concrete political actors who were able to take initiatives and, in case of treason, might even refuse to protect the socialist economic basis of society. In my 'Stalin and the national question' I did not yet identify the Plekhanovist origin of Stalin's theory of society. See: Erik van Ree, 'Stalin and the national question', *Revolutionary Russia* 2 (1994), pp. 214–238.

¹¹⁵ *Sochinenija*, vol. 3 [XVI], pp. 252–253. Wetter (*Der dialektische Materialismus*, pp. 264–265) finds it an example of Stalin's conservatism that he noted in 'Economic problems of socialism in the USSR' that there are laws valid for all societies, for instance the law of the unity of productive forces and productive relations. See: *Sochinenija*, vol. 3 [XVI], pp. 247, 274–275. I think this stretches the point too far. In effect Stalin says no more than that historical materialism is valid for all societies.

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