

power. The return to 'nature' and the idea that man is responsible for the order of the external world are characteristic of the intellectual life of the time. The anti-metaphysical scientism of the empiriocritics, and their biological, pragmatic view of knowledge, attracted Marxists in search of a new and more thoroughgoing interpretation of the universe in accordance with the revolutionary spirit.

#### 4. *Bogdanov and the Russian empiriocritics*

The principal Russian empiriocritics were the Bolsheviks Bogdanov, Lunacharsky, and Bazarov. There is, however, nothing specifically Bolshevik about their philosophy, although they themselves believed that their political and philosophical positions were closely connected. The same applies to the Mensheviks Yushkevich and Valentinov, and to the S.R. Viktor Chernov. All these were in search of a 'monistic' philosophy embracing the whole of experience and practical politics, but in a different way from that of Engels and Plekhanov, which seemed to them naïve, arbitrary, and unsupported by any analysis of the concepts they used.

The output of the Marxist empiriocritics is enormous and has not as yet been fully studied. Bogdanov was certainly the most important of them, both as a philosopher and as a politician. He was a doctor by profession but a man of varied learning, versed in psychology, philosophy, and economics, a novelist and one of the most active Bolshevik organizers and ideologists. In all his work he was obsessed with the monistic quest for a philosophy containing the key to every problem and explaining everything by a single principle.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bogdanov (real name Malinovsky) was born at Tula in 1873. He studied natural science at Moscow, and medicine at Kharkov until 1899. He was a populist until 1896, when he became a social democrat together with Bazarov (Rudnev). In 1897 he published a popular Marxist handbook of economics, of which Lenin wrote a highly favourable review. This work presented a conspectus of all economic systems in a catechetic form and did much to create the conventional schemata of economic history which became part and parcel of Marxism-Leninism. In 1899, fascinated by the 'energism' of Wilhelm Ostwald, he published *Basic Elements*

of the *Historical View of Nature*, which sought to construct a monistic world-view based on the concept of energy. In this work he displays the relativist tendency which he regarded as a corner-stone of Marxism: all truths are historical in the sense that they express man's biological and social situation; truth is a matter of practical applicability, not objective validity. He later took the view that energism was only a certain way of observing the world, but did not explain the 'stuff' it was made of and therefore could not satisfy the mind's monistic aspirations.

Arrested in Moscow in 1899 and sentenced to exile, Bogdanov lived in Kaluga and then Vologda until 1903. During this period he met Berdyayev, as well as Lunacharsky and other social democrat intellectuals. He was the inspirer and part-author of a collective work of 1904 entitled *An Outline of the Realist World-View*, and answer to *Problems of Idealism*; other contributors were Lunacharsky, Vladimir Fritche, Bazarov, and Suvorov. In 1904-6 Bogdanov published his three-volume magnum opus, *Empiriomonism*, an attempt to adapt the epistemology of Mach and Avenarius to historical materialism.

Bogdanov was a Bolshevik from 1903 onwards. Lenin, despite Bogdanov's heretical views on philosophy, maintained political ties with him for some years; he encouraged Lyubov Akselrod to write against empiriocriticism, but did not himself join the fray until the philosophical deviationists also opposed his policy towards the Duma. After the split in the social democratic party Bogdanov was Lenin's chief lieutenant in St. Petersburg; from 1906 he worked to rebuild the united organization there, and joined Lenin in Finland as one of the three Bolshevik members of the Central Committee. He opposed the participation of social democrats in the Duma elections, and was later an 'ultimatist'. The left-wing Bolsheviks who, with different degrees of firmness, rejected legal methods and pressed for the continuation of a directly revolutionary policy after 1907 were all more or less adherents of the empiriocritical philosophy. In 1909 Bogdanov and his friends were expelled from the Bolshevik Centre, and afterwards from the Central Committee. For a time the group published its own journal and, with financial help from Gorky—who, to Lenin's anxiety, sympathized with the unorthodox trend—founded a party school at Capri as a centre for the revival of revolutionary Bolshevism. The school functioned for some

months in 1909, and again at Bologna in 1910-11. Besides Bogdanov its lecturers included Lunacharsky, Aleksinsky, Menzhinsky (a future head of the OGPU), and occasionally Trotsky. Lenin was invited to give a lecture at the school, but declined. In 1911 Bogdanov's group disintegrated and he returned to Russia for good. He continued to pour out philosophical writings, seeking more and more generalized formulas in which to express his monistic views. Together with other deviationists he published two collective works: *Essays on the Philosophy of Marxism* (1908; Bogdanov, Bazarov, Berman, Lunacharsky, Yushkevich, Suvorov, and Helfand) and *Essays on the Philosophy of Collectivism* (1909; Bogdanov, Gorky, Lunacharsky, Bazarov). Among his own publications were *The Decline of Fetishism* (1910), which analysed 'fetishism' in general terms as a cognitive and social phenomenon; *The Philosophy of Living Experience* (1913), a popular account of empiriomonism; and *Tectology, a Universal Organizational Science* (1913; vol. ii, 1917). The last was an attempt to lay the basis of a universal science comprising philosophy, sociology, physics, and technology: it may be regarded as a forerunner of praxeology. In addition Bogdanov published manuals of economics that were much reprinted, and several dissertations on 'proletarian culture': he pursued this with vigour after the Revolution and was one of the chief ideologists of the institution known as 'Proletkult'.

During the war Bogdanov served at the front as an army doctor. He did not rejoin the party; in 1926 he was appointed director of the Haematological Institute in Moscow, and two years later he died as the result of a transfusion experiment on himself. Even this had its philosophical bearing: blood transfusion was, to him, a proof of the biological unity of mankind, and was thus linked with the 'collectivist' outlook.

An author who produced over fifty books and innumerable articles on all kinds of subjects could not be a philosopher of the first rank. He was also a bad writer: his principal work is diffuse, chaotic, vague, and repetitive. Nevertheless, he was the most influential expounder of 'proletarian philosophy', and for many years the whole Bolshevik party learnt economics from his books. As a philosopher he was superior to Lenin in all respects: erudition, knowledge of his subject, independence of thought, and skill in formulating problems. He also appears to

have been an excellent organizer. He lacked, however, what Lenin possessed in full measure, the non-doctrinaire ability to change tactics in a new situation: like most ideologists, he was too consistent for his own good.

Bogdanov's 'empiriomonist' philosophy is based on three main ideas. All spiritual and mental activities are instruments of life in the biological and social senses; psychic and physical phenomena are alike from the ontic point of view; the life of the human race tends towards the integral harmony of all its manifestations. The first two ideas are found in Mach, but Bogdanov gives them a distinctive interpretation on the strength of which he calls his theory empiriomonism and not empiriocriticism. The third point is specifically connected with socialist doctrine.

According to Bogdanov, Mach's philosophy supports Marxism inasmuch as they both treat cognitive processes as instruments of man's fight for existence, and reject the possibility of ideas not derived from experience. The 'objectivity' of acts of cognition lies in the fact that they are valid for human societies and not only for the individual. This collective aspect distinguishes physical phenomena from 'subjective' ones. 'The objective character of the physical world consists in the fact that it exists not for me personally but for all, and has for everyone a definite meaning, the same, I believe, as it has for me' (*Empiriomonism*, i, 25). Nature is 'collectively organized experience'. Space, time, and causality are forms in which men co-ordinate their respective perceptions; but this co-ordination is not as yet complete. There are experiences, socially significant and with a social origin, which nevertheless conflict with other experiences. This is due to social antagonisms and the class division, which have the effect that human beings only understand one another within certain limits, while their discordant interests inevitably produce conflicting ideologies. In an individualistic society like ours each person's experience centres on himself, whereas in primitive communist societies the 'self' was merged in the community. In the society of the future it will be different again, when work is collectively organized and there will be no possibility of conflict between my own self and another's.

Work is genetically prior to all other forms of community life.

However, when the immediate expenditure of energy in the fight with nature is supplemented by organizational forms to increase the efficiency of labour, these call into being ideological instruments including all modes of communication: language, abstract knowledge, emotions, customs, moral norms, laws, and arts. 'The ideological process constitutes all that part of social life that lies outside technical processes, beyond the immediate struggle of social man with external nature' (ibid. iii, 45). Science is not an ideology, for it develops as an immediate organ of technology. Ultimately, however, all forms of collective spiritual life, whether ideological or scientific, are subservient to the struggle for existence and have no significance apart from their function in that struggle. This subordination of all forms of life to the requirements of technology and increased efficiency is not yet visible to all, on account of ideological delusions which keep alive countless metaphysical fetishes; but it is becoming visible to the proletariat, and in the future it will be common to all mankind. 'The technical value of products, replacing the fetish of exchange value, is the sum of the social energy of human labour crystallized in those products. The cognitive value of an idea is its power to increase the volume of social energy of labour, by planning and "organizing" the forms of men's activity and the instruments they use. The "moral" value of human behaviour consists in increasing the social energy of labour by harmoniously uniting and concentrating human activity and by organizing it in the direction of maximum solidarity' (ibid. 135-6).

This purely pragmatic (but, it should be added, socially pragmatic) interpretation, according to which knowledge and the life of the mind generally are an assemblage of instruments whose 'ultimate' purpose is to assist technical progress, leaves no room for the concept of truth in the traditional sense, i.e. the conformity of our judgements to independent reality. The 'natural' world, in Bogdanov's view, is the result of the social organization of experience, and 'truth' means utility in the struggle for existence. This attitude, he claims, is strictly scientific, as it sweeps away all the metaphysical fetishes that have deluded philosophers and common men over the centuries. Having reduced the universe to collective experience, and cognitive values to socially useful ones, we have no need of

such categories as 'substance' or 'thing in itself', or such specifications as 'spirit', 'matter', 'time', 'cause', 'force', etc. Experience contains nothing that answers to these concepts, and they are not required for the practical handling of objects.

Bogdanov's critique of the 'thing in itself' as a superfluity which can be eliminated from Kantian philosophy is based on a misunderstanding. Bogdanov and Mach, from whom he took this interpretation, appear to think that in Kant's view there is behind every phenomenal object a mysterious 'thing in itself' to which we have no access: if it be removed, the phenomena remain as they were and nothing has been lost except a 'metaphysical' construction. This, however, is a parody of Kant's thinking. What he held was that the 'phenomenon' is the mode in which things appear, so that they are immediately accessible to us, but organized in *a priori* forms. If the 'thing in itself' were removed, the phenomenon would be removed also. In short, the concept of a 'phenomenon' must mean something quite different for Bogdanov and Mach than it does for Kant, but they do not explain this meaning.

Mach's merit, according to Bogdanov, was that he broke with the dualism of 'mind' and 'matter' and introduced instead the concept of 'experience', in which phenomena appear as mental (psychical) or physical according to whether we connect them with one another or relate them to our own bodies. But Mach did not completely eradicate the dualism, as he retained these two aspects and did not explain why they should be different. The answer offered by experimontism is that the 'stuff' of mental and physical phenomena is identical; there is no area of 'subjectivity' in the universe, only the discordance between individual and collective experience, which is due to social causes and which history will in time remove.

We come here to the obscurest part of Bogdanov's philosophy. He appears to be saying that our thoughts, feelings, perceptions, acts of will, etc. are made of the same material as water or stones, but that this material is in some sense 'ultimate' and therefore cannot be defined: encompassing everything, it cannot be explained in terms of anything specific. In this respect, of course, Bogdanov's concept of 'experience' is on a par with all fundamental categories in all monistic doctrines, including 'matter' as understood by the materialists. Apart from this there

is only the general idea that man's being is entirely a part of nature, that our subjectivity is no different in kind from the rest of the universe. In this sense the doctrine is a 'materialist' one, i.e. it reduces man to the functions prescribed by his position in nature and regards him as wholly explicable within the natural order. But the matter becomes more complicated when Bogdanov tries to describe this identity in his nebulous theory of 'substitution'.

This theory involves a psychophysical parallelism, not on the basis that mental and physical phenomena are 'two aspects' of a single process—for this involves the error of 'introjection', as though the body was the receptacle of the mind—but in the sense that there is a functional link between them analogous to that, for example, between the visual and tactile qualities of a single body. This is not a monism of 'substance', but a 'monism of the type of organization in accordance with which experience is systematized, a monism of the method of cognition' (*Empiriomonism* i, 64). Within the field of uniform 'experience' there is no problem of transition from inanimate to organic nature, for the whole of nature is an assemblage of homogeneous elements, and it is only our abstract thinking that calls parts of it 'inanimate', whereas they too are parts of our own life. This does not signify, however, that they have a 'psychical' character (for that would mean that they were valid only for the individual), but that there is in them a substratum of which we know nothing specific but which is related to their 'physical' aspect in the same way as mental phenomena are related to physiological ones in human beings. In human life physiological processes are the 'reflection' of direct experiences, and not the other way about. 'Physiological life is the result of the collective harmonization of the "external perceptions" of a living organism, each of which is the reflection of a single complex of experiences in another organism (or in itself). In other words, physiological life is the reflection of direct life in the socially organized experience of living subjects' (ibid. 145). Physical nature itself is derivative in relation to direct complexes which differ in their degree of organization; we must suppose that the world we perceive is of like nature to our experience, for otherwise we could not imagine the one affecting the other; we must therefore accept a kind of panpsychism, but without

the assumption of different substances. Within the totality of experience, lower forms of organization 'corresponding to' the inorganic world precede higher ones corresponding to the human mind, and in this sense the 'priority' of nature *vis-à-vis* human existence remains valid. The following passage, though somewhat lengthy, is the most concise summary of Bogdanov's epistemology:

'The mental' and 'the physical' as forms of experience do not correspond to the concepts of 'mind' and 'nature'. The latter have a metaphysical sense and relate to 'things in themselves'; but we, discarding metaphysical 'things in themselves' as empty fetishes, place in their stead 'empirical substitution'. This substitution, which originates in each man's recognition of the psyche of others, presupposes that the 'basis' of the phenomena of physical experience consists of direct complexes organized in different degrees, including 'psychic' complexes. In recognizing that the physiological processes of the higher nervous centres, as phenomena of physical experience, are the reflection of psychic complexes which can also be 'substituted' for them, we also saw that all the physiological processes of life admit of the substitution of 'associative', i.e. psychic complexes; but in proportion as the physiological phenomenon is less complex and less highly organized, so also are the substitutes. We noted, further, that in the 'inorganic' world outside physiological life empirical substitution still takes place, but the 'direct complexes' that are to be substituted for inorganic phenomena have an organizational form that is not associative but of another, lower kind: they are not 'psychical' combinations but are less definite, less complex and at a lower level of organization, which in the lowest, limiting phase appears simply as a chaos of elements.

Thus it is among the direct complexes that we substitute for physical experience that we must seek analogies for 'nature' and 'mind' in order to establish their mutual relation. But the very formulation of this question suggests the answer: 'nature', that is to say the inorganic and the simplest organic complexes, is genetically prior, while 'mind', i.e. the higher organic and associative complexes, and particularly those which constitute experience, are genetically secondary.

Thus our viewpoint, although not 'materialist' in the narrow sense, belongs to the same category as 'materialist' systems: it is an ideology of 'productive forces', of the technical process.' (*Empiriomonism*, iii, 148-9)

The obscurity and ambiguity of this philosophy is due to the

fact that Bogdanov, unlike Mach, does not simply deny the validity of the 'metaphysical question' but, having declared it to be meaningless, then proceeds to try and solve it, which he cannot do without contradiction. His starting-point is a kind of collective subjectivism: the world is a correlative to the human struggle for existence, and it is no use ascribing any other meaning to it or inquiring as to its independent nature. Things are crystallizations of human projections, governed by practical ends; they make their appearance only within the horizon that biology determines for the human race; they are components of collective experience, which figures as the one absolute point of reference. Within the framework of this relativization 'mental' phenomena differ from physical ones only inasmuch as the latter are valid collectively and the former only for individuals. Having said this, Bogdanov then presents physiological phenomena as the 'reflection' of mental processes, which does not make sense in terms of the previous distinction. He goes on to seek analogies in the field of inanimate nature and thus falls into a kind of panpsychism; he tells us that it is not really panpsychism, as it does not presuppose any 'substance', but he does not explain its true nature. As a result, we are unable to fathom the meaning he attaches to the 'priority' of experience in relation to the distinction of mental and physical phenomena. He uses the term 'mental' or 'psychical' in at least three senses, though he appears not to be aware of this: sometimes it means 'valid only for the individual', sometimes 'subjective' in the ordinary sense, and sometimes 'reflected in physiological processes'. This results in hopeless confusion, which there is little point in trying to remedy.

None the less, the main intention of Bogdanov's epistemology is clear: to do away with metaphysical 'fetishes', concepts without empirical correlates, and to preserve a strictly anthropocentric point of view in which the whole of reality is presented as the intentional correlate of human praxis. In this way he seeks to eliminate all 'substantial' entities, especially 'matter' and 'subject', and also 'time', 'space', 'causality', and 'force', as well as the concepts of 'truth' and 'objectivity' in the usual sense. The resulting picture, he claims, is strictly scientific, being free from metaphysics, and likewise humanistic, as it firmly relates all reality to human existence. In both respects this is in harmony with the intentions of Marxism, which is a scientific, activist,

and socially pragmatic philosophy: it has no need of the category of individual subjectivity or truth in a transcendental sense, and relates the whole universe to human labour, thus making man the creator and organizer of the world. This, in Bogdanov's judgement, is true not of any form of Marxism but only of that embodied in the Bolshevik movement. He and the other Russian empiriocritics believed that their 'activist' epistemology was well attuned to the spirit of Bolshevism and to its general idea that the revolution would not break out of itself when economic conditions were ripe, but that it depended on the will-power of a group of organizers. Bogdanov, to whom 'organization' was an obsession, used the term with equal freedom in regard to party matters and the principles of epistemology.

Each of the Russian empiriocritics differed from the others in some respects. Some, like Valentinov, were strict Machists; others devised variant names for their ideas, such as Bogdanov's 'empiriomonism' and Yushkevich's 'empiriosymbolism'. However, they all agreed in emphasizing the anti-metaphysical, scientific aspect of Marxism as opposed to the dualism of 'matter' and 'subject', and in envisaging the world in terms of human social praxis. The same viewpoint of collective subjectivism dictated their interpretation of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*.

##### 5. *The philosophy of the proletariat*

Bogdanov endeavoured to apply his theory directly to the prospect of socialism as a system under which all minds would at last share the same picture of the world, and even the separateness of the individual ego would disappear.

The philosophical basis of 'proletarian culture' was as follows. All human cognitive activity is directed to one end, namely man's success in the fight with nature. One can of course distinguish 'scientific' activities, which are directly concerned with technical efficiency, from 'ideological' ones, which perform the same function indirectly through the forms of social organization. This is not a distinction according to epistemological criteria of truth or falsehood, but only relates to the way in which the activities in question increase the productivity of labour. In both cases the principle holds good that 'truth is the living, organizing form of experience; it guides our activity and gives us a foothold in the battle for life' (*Empiriomonism*, iii, p. viii).

# MAIN CURRENTS OF MARXISM

ITS RISE, GROWTH,  
AND DISSOLUTION

*by*  
Leszek Kołakowski

VOLUME II  
THE GOLDEN AGE

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