

Anton Pannekoek (1873–1960) in his *Lenin as Philosopher* (Pannekoek, 1938), argues that Lenin's pragmatism deformed Marx's work.

Lenin's development of Marxism was primarily a function of pragmatic concerns. Lenin determined to establish a clearly materialist basis for revolutionary praxis and in so doing engaged positivist philosophers, notably Ernst Mach, in a debate designed to discredit suggestions Lenin perceived as harmful to revolutionary praxis. Lenin argued that Mach was idealist in his reassessment of the production of science and that his thesis was essentially solipsist. Pannekoek (1975) argues that this merely reflects Lenin's own inadequate reading of Mach and represents a political rather than a philosophic appraisal and analysis of Mach's view. Essentially, Pannekoek argues, Lenin has a naïve notion of materialism, which is essentially pragmatic and dogmatic. Lenin's analysis of materialism is superficial. Lenin's attempt to establish a dialectical materialism out of historical materialism is marred by his failure to transcend bourgeois materialism. This failure is examined in detail

The outcome is a reconstitution of the 'science versus ideology' debate in terms of class/world perspectives. Lenin assumes that materialism necessitates, in Engels' terms, preceding from things to sensation and thoughts. Mach and Avenarius, he argues, proceed from thoughts and sensations to things. This is idealist and solipsist for Lenin. However, Pannekoek points out that Lenin confuses Hegelian idealism with Mach's sensationalism. Thoughts do not determine the world for Mach but simply that the world is apprehended through sensations. As a corollary, laws of nature, based on conceptual entities are convenient devices for apprehending the essential nature of the world. For Lenin, this implied a denial of objective knowledge [which he could not endorse]. Lenin here confuses matter with explanations of material existence. He sees the denial of the objective nature of physical laws as identical with the denial of the physical world, or, conversely, to suggest that humans create natural laws rather than discover them is, for Lenin, to imply that the material world proceeds from thought. This simplistic dualism reflects bourgeois materialism. By confounding the real world with physical concepts, by equating nature and physical matter, Lenin proposes bourgeois materialism. (Mach had proposed matter as an abstract concept formed out of sensations).

Bourgeois materialism, by identifying objective reality with physical matter makes all aspects of reality, including the spiritual, a property of matter. Lenin's essentially bourgeois materialist stance led him to a view of materialism opposed to spiritualism. His attacks tended to centre on the role and function of religion and led him to condemn Mach for fideism.

Pannekoek argues that Lenin's analysis fails to adopt an historical materialist stance, and this is manifest in Lenin's failure to elaborate the class base of competing theories of science. Class is not mentioned, Pannekoek (1975, p. 88) notes, 'the theoretical differences hang in the air.'

As Mattick (1975) has pointed out, Lenin did not conceive of Marxist materialism as fundamentally different from bourgeois materialism, but saw it as only a difference of degree. He did not conceive of the difference of Marxist materialism and bourgeois materialism as

'an unbreachable opposition arising from a real conflict of classes. He conceived it rather, as a more or less radical expression of one continuous revolutionary movement.' (Mattick, 1975, p. 114).

References:

Pannekoek, A., 1938, *Lenin as Philosopher*, first published in Amsterdam as *Lenin als Philosoph. Kritische Betrachtung der philosophischen Grundlagen des Leninismus*, under the pseudonym John Harper, by the Bibliothek der Rätekorrespondenz, No.1. Ausgabe der Gruppe Internationaler Kommunisten in Holland, in 1938. The first English translation was published by New Essays in New York in 1948. Published by Merlin Press (London) in 1975 as *Lenin as Philosopher: A critical examination of the philosophical basis of Leninism*, with additional material by Paul Mattick and Karl Korsch. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1938/lenin/index.htm>, accessed 10 June 2019.

Mattick, P., 1975, 'Lenin's philosophy', in Pannekoek, A., (1975) *Lenin as Philosopher: A critical examination of the philosophical basis of Leninism*, pp. 109–119, London, Merlin Press.