

## EMPIRICISM AND ETHICS IN DIETZGEN

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Most of the attention given to the thought of Joseph Dietzgen has come about through his connection with the socialist movement in Europe and the United States. At the Hague Congress of the International Workingman's Association Marx introduced Dietzgen, according to his son's report, with the words: "Here is our philosopher." Though Marx criticized *The Nature of Human Brain Work*, Dietzgen's first and major book, for certain confusions and repetitiousness, he found it to contain many ideas which were excellent and especially admirable for having come from the independent thought of a workingman.<sup>1</sup> In *Ludwig Feuerbach* Engels credited Dietzgen—somewhat loosely we may conclude later—with the independent discovery of "materialist dialectics." These references linked Dietzgen's thought with Marxism, but his views became the center of sharp polemics in the European socialist movement. His followers in Germany and Russia claimed that he had significantly enriched Marxism with an explicit theory of knowledge and a monistic world view.<sup>2</sup> That claim was challenged by Plekhanov, Mehring, and Lenin who followed up Marx's references to Dietzgen's confusions. Lenin argued that where Dietzgen was not confused as an empiricist he was a materialist and strict Marxist like himself.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of the controversy in Europe Dietzgen's views received wider attention. A number of writers found in his theory of knowledge a striking anticipation of the "empirical monism" which was developed independently by Ernst Mach<sup>4</sup> and influenced philosophical thinking in the United States through the "radical empiricism" of William James. But Dietzgen's effort to extend his theory of

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Letters to Dr. Kugelmann* (New York, 1934), 80, 55; Dona Torr, ed. and trans., *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Correspondence: 1846-1895* (London, 1934), 252f.

<sup>2</sup> See Henriette Roland-Holst, *Joseph Dietzgens Philosophie* (Munich, 1910), Ch. III; Ernst Untermann, *Die logische Mangel des engeren Marxismus, Georg Plechanow et alii gegen Josef Dietzgen* (Munich, 1910); Paul Dauge, "J. Dietzgen und sein Kritiker G. Plechanow" in E. Dietzgen, ed., *Erkenntnis und Wahrheit* (Stuttgart, 1908), 409, 414f., referring to the sympathetic treatment of Dietzgen's views by Andrejew, Hellfond, and other Russian writers.

<sup>3</sup> See Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, trans. D. Kvitko (New York, 1927), Chs. II, III, VI; Georg Plechanow, "Josef Dietzgen" in E. Dietzgen, ed., *Erkenntnis und Wahrheit*, 359-93; G. Bammel, "Joseph Dietzgen," *La Revue Marxiste*, 3 (1 April 1929), 313-16.

<sup>4</sup> See Adolf Hepner, *Josef Dietzgens Philosophische Lehren* (Stuttgart, 1916), 16, with reference to the writings of Max Adler, Christian Eckert, and others dealing with Dietzgen's anticipation of Mach's "empirical monism"; Viktor Thomas, *Das Erkenntnisproblem* (Stuttgart, 1921), 177-92, criticizing the "idealist tendencies" in Mach and Avenarius from the point of view of Dietzgen's "monism."

knowledge into the field of ethics, his attempt to develop a "scientific" or "inductive" ethics, has been generally neglected. Though it has been mentioned or summarized by a few writers,<sup>5</sup> there has been no close examination of its historical roots and affinities. Typical of this neglect is the 1923 edition of Überweg's *Geschichte der Philosophie*. It gives particular attention to Dietzgen's theory of knowledge as akin to Mach's "empirio-criticism" but deals with his ethical views in a single misleading sentence.

The neglect of Dietzgen's moral philosophy seems unfortunate. To be sure, his thought in this area as in other parts of his philosophy is often rough and abrupt, a reflection of his militant socialism and lack of university education. But it shows originality and insight at a number of points. In stressing the relativity of means and ends and the rootage of moral values in reflectively criticized needs it anticipates, as we shall see, some influential views developed later and independently by John Dewey.

## I

Born in 1828 near Cologne, Germany, Joseph Dietzgen had an elementary education and brief periods in high school prior to learning the trade of his father, a well-to-do master tanner.<sup>6</sup> In the hours of recreation from the tannery he studied literature, economics, and philosophy and learned to speak French fluently. His study of French economists, the conditions of the times, and the *Communist Manifesto*—according to his son's report—"made a class-conscious socialist out of him in 1848." The reaction which followed the events of 1848 drove him to America where he worked at various jobs, tramped over a large part of the country, acquired a command of English, and came to know at first hand something of America and its people. Among those who left Germany at this time were Friedrich Sorge and Albrecht Komp, pioneers of the socialist movement in the United States, with whom Dietzgen maintained correspondence and friendship in subsequent years.

In 1851 he was back at work in his father's tannery. Shortly after his marriage to a devout Catholic—with whom he lived in "rare

<sup>5</sup> For example, Karl Kautsky, *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History*, trans. J. B. Askew (Chicago, 1906); Adolf Hepner, *op. cit.*, 29-37; Karl Vorländer, *Kant und Marx* (Tübingen, 1911), 96ff.

<sup>6</sup> The main sources of the biographical data in this section are: Eugene Dietzgen, "Joseph Dietzgen: A Sketch of His Life," trans. E. Untermann in Joseph Dietzgen, *Philosophical Essays* (Chicago, 1906), 7-33; F. A. Sorge, *Briefe und Auszüge aus Briefen von Joh. Phil. Becker, Jos. Dietzgen, Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx u. A. an F. A. Sorge und Andere* (Stuttgart, 1921), 196, 216, 226f., *et passim*; Eugene Dietzgen, ed., *Josef Dietzgens Sämtliche Schriften*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1911), III, 5n, 12n, 63, 67ff., *et passim*.

harmony" despite his naturalistic views—he opened a combined grocery store and tannery. The success of this venture led him to establish a branch store in a nearby village, but he carefully planned his work so as to devote only a half a day to business and the rest to "diligent study, from pure thirst of knowledge and without other incentive."

To secure greater economic independence he went to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1859. There he established a friendship with Julius Livingston, another pioneer of the American socialist movement, and wrote his first essay, "Schwarz oder Weiss," which set forth several ideas he was to develop later. One morning he found some of his friends "strung up in front of their houses" as Northern sympathizers. With the outbreak of the Civil War he returned to Germany.

Dietzgen conducted his father's business in Uckerath until 1864 when he was employed by the Russian government to reorganize its large tannery in St. Petersburg. In a few years he increased its productivity fivefold, wrote articles on *Capital* which Marx commended, and completed his first and major book, *The Nature of Human Brain Work*,<sup>7</sup> which set forth the basic features of his theory of knowledge and ethics, a "monist-naturalist theory of understanding," to use his son's description. His later books and articles developed this theory in different contexts and explicitly moved toward a world-view emphasizing the organic unity of all things.

After his return from St. Petersburg in 1869 Dietzgen operated a tannery in Siegburg and continued his studies and writing. Though he was arrested for speaking in Cologne and ran unsuccessfully for a seat in the Reichstag, he was relatively detached from immediate political affairs. He had little association with other members of the Social-Democratic party and little contact with regular party activities. According to Dr. Bruno Wille, a frequent visitor from the University of Bonn, Dietzgen "led a rather lonely, almost hermit-like existence."

After his business had suffered in competition with larger units

<sup>7</sup> *Das Wesen der menschlichen Kopfarbeit, dargestellt von einem Handarbeiter. Eine abermalige Kritik der reinen und praktischen Vernunft* (Hamburg, 1869). This work appears in a translation by W. W. Craik along with twenty-four letters on logic (1880-83) and *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy* (1887) in a volume entitled *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy* (Chicago, 1906). One of Dietzgen's later books, *Excursions of A Socialist into the Domains of Epistemology* (1887), and several articles are translated by M. Beer and Th. Rothstein in Joseph Dietzgen, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. Eugene Dietzgen and Joseph Dietzgen, Jr. (Chicago, 1906). Together, *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy* and *Philosophical Essays* contain translations of almost all of the first and second volumes of *Josef Dietzgens Sämtliche Schriften*. Several of Dietzgen's philosophical essays and many brief articles on current issues which appeared in *Der Sozialist* (New York), 1885-6, and *Chicagoer Arbeiterzeitung*, 1886-8, are not included in the *Sämtliche Schriften*.

and his means had been reduced by needy friends and relatives, he followed his son to America where he rented an old, almost dilapidated house in Hoboken, New Jersey. "I can be at ease," he explained to Sorge, "in barbarian surroundings, provided my private economy is so arranged that I can devote myself without care to the superstructure." From 1884 to 1886 he edited *Der Sozialist* in New York and then joined his family in Chicago. After the Haymarket bomb exploded and the editors of the *Chicagoer Arbeiterzeitung* had been arrested, Dietzgen offered his services to the Socialist Publishing Society. He became editor of three papers and in that capacity tried to lessen the differences between socialists and anarchists as required by his philosophical principle that there are no absolute differences but only differences of degree. His position on the anarchists was opposed to that of the national executive committee of the Socialist Labor Party, but he remained convinced to the end of his life that he had "accomplished some good by it." He died in the spring of 1888 and was buried at the side of the anarchists in the Waldheim Cemetery near Chicago.

## II

Dietzgen's ethical views were based on a theory of knowledge which strenuously opposed pure speculation or *a priori* thinking. Pure speculation, Dietzgen held, is the prototype of wrong thinking because it seeks to arrive at truth without the help of experience and rejects the evidence of the senses. Its typical product is metaphysics as found in the great historic systems which agree only in disagreeing. It reinforces the dualism of mind and sense, thought and fact, spirit and matter—typical expressions of the cleavage between a supernatural order and the natural realm of human experience.

The chief support of the speculative method, Dietzgen held, is the claim that basic truths about the world are innate and can be produced from the depths of the mind by pure thought. He allowed that some propositions appear to be innately true and independent of all experience—for example, that there is always a valley between two mountains and that the angles of a triangle equal two right angles. But these cases of so-called apodictical knowledge, on examination, turn out to be tautologies (*Tautologien*).<sup>8</sup> They hold so long as the names applied to experienced things retain their assigned meanings. They require no pure, supernatural mind. "Where only

<sup>8</sup> *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, 419f. (*Dietzgens Sämtliche Schriften*, II, 349). Dietzgen seems to have developed this view, which anticipates one aspect of recent "logical empiricism," from his study of Kant and Feuerbach, unaware of Leibniz's contribution along these lines. See Eugene Dietzgen, "Dietzgen und Kant" in *Dietzgen Brevier für Naturmonisten* (Munich, 1915), x; Joseph Dietzgen, *Philosophical Essays*, 143.

the wet is called water," said Dietzgen, "we don't need any special transcendental faculty to know categorically that water must be wet."

In contrast to the speculative method, the way to genuine knowledge, Dietzgen held, lies in the inductive method or *a posteriori* thinking which is based on "some perceptible material, some given object." Genuine thinking, like all activity and work, must have an object or content which is the world of sense, perceptible phenomena, or matter. This is equally true of thinking about thinking. "We perceive (*wahrnehmen*) thought or mind," said Dietzgen, "just as sensibly as we perceive walking, pain, and other feelings."<sup>9</sup> While thought is not tangible (*greifbar*), it is material in the sense that it is perceptible and thus actual, as perceptible and actual as the intangible scent of a rose or heat of a stove. It does not differ from tables, light, or sound any more than these things differ among themselves. All these things—thought, the scent of a rose, sound—have a common nature as being "perceptible, material, i.e., actual" (*sinnlich, materiell, das heisst wirklich*).

Genuine or *a posteriori* thinking, however, is not a mute staring at perceived fact any more than it is a transcendental activity of pure intellect. It is not to be found in Büchner's maxim, "What I want are facts," nor in Lange's resort to an imperceptible faculty of cognition. Rather it is to be found, as Alexander von Humboldt suggested, in the clarification of sensuous facts by discovering the general in particulars, by classifying and systematizing the world of sense.<sup>10</sup> Thus genuine thinking assimilates what is common in the multiplicity of sense-objects. Since this activity truly defines "mind," one might say that everything in the world has a mental or unitary quality. But only relatively so. In relation to the sense-objects from which genuine thought cannot be separated the world is manifold, diverse, a multiplicity. Both perspectives are necessary because genuine thinking is "dialectical." It mediates differences or distinctions and sees how things are alike as well as different, one as well as many.

Dietzgen's theory of knowledge reflected the influence of Bacon, Kant, and especially Feuerbach. He agreed with Bacon's emphasis on the practical control of nature that comes through generalizations based on sense-particulars. He referred, with approval, to Kant's "limitation of reason by experience" but rejected the "supersensible world" as mere belief or faith. His attacks on speculative thought

<sup>9</sup> *The Nature of Human Brain Work in Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, 84. Cf. *ibid.*, 85-90 (*Dietzgens Sämtliche Schriften*, I, 11f. Cf. *ibid.*, 12-16).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 122f., where Dietzgen quotes at length from Humboldt's *Cosmos*. While Humboldt was strongly attracted to the views of Auguste Comte and was one of the small but select audience to which Comte first presented his "positive philosophy," Dietzgen's empiricism, as we shall see, was developed primarily from Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of speculation.

and his view that the content of genuine thinking is the world of sense especially reflected the influence of Feuerbach whom he greatly admired and with whom he corresponded. "For a long time," Dietzgen wrote to Marx in 1867, "my object has been a systematic world-view; Ludwig Feuerbach showed me the way to it."<sup>11</sup> Dietzgen followed Feuerbach's view that the essence of thought is "universality," but it must be determined through sense-perception if it is to be "real" or "objective." Genuine thought is thus concerned with the opposite of thought—with sensuous, actual things—and man himself is a sense-object inasmuch as he perceives himself and others.<sup>12</sup> True philosophy, in contrast to speculative philosophy, must identify itself with natural science. "My philosophy," Dietzgen repeated after Feuerbach, "is no philosophy."

Though Dietzgen insisted that the world is a multiplicity in relation to the sense-objects from which genuine thought cannot be separated, he sometimes inconsistently detached thought from sense and relied on *a priori* arguments—"the logical essence of nomenclature" and "the ontological argument"—to prove the oneness of all things.<sup>13</sup> With references to the "absolute all-existence" and "absolutely coherent reality" he asserted that the very existence of any particular thing depends on its relations to everything else. But there was another sense in which he was a "monist." This becomes most apparent in his effort to reconcile idealism and materialism. The world is one, he asserted, in that all things fall into the category of "perceptible phenomena" or "empirical material." To be "perceptible, material, i.e., actual," as he put it in *The Nature of Human Brain Work*, is the "common nature," the one common element in the infinite diversity of things. In this respect mind and matter, subject and object, thoughts and things are one. In this respect there is a "democratic equality of all things in nature."<sup>14</sup> This side of Dietz-

<sup>11</sup> *Dietzgens Sämtliche Schriften*, III, 67. In the same letter Dietzgen also mentions having learned much from Marx's *Critique of Political Economy* and his earlier writings published in Hamburg, apparently articles in the *Neue Rheinische Revue*, 1850, including "Class Struggles in France, 1848-50." Dietzgen seems to have been unaware that Marx and Engels had followed Feuerbach's critique of speculation in *The Holy Family* published in 1845. According to Mrs. Eugene Dietzgen, now living in California, the letters between Ludwig Feuerbach and Joseph Dietzgen were lost when Dietzgen moved to the United States.

<sup>12</sup> See Ludwig Feuerbach, *Kleine Philosophische Schriften* (Leipzig, 1950), 152, 154f., 159f.; Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. Marian Evans [George Eliot], (London, 1893), viiff.

<sup>13</sup> *Dietzgens Sämtliche Schriften*, III, 157; "Letters on Logic" in *Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, 284f.

<sup>14</sup> *Philosophical Essays*, 206. Cf. *ibid.*, 151ff., 219-22, 294-301; *Dietzgens Sämtliche Schriften*, III, 161, 174, 183f.

gen's theory of knowledge foreshadowed the "empirical monism" of Mach and Avenarius.

### III

On the basis of his critique of knowledge Dietzgen sought to develop a "scientific," "inductive," or "materialistic" theory of morals. Again he saw speculation, pure reason, or *a priori* thinking as the great source of error and confusion. In distinguishing between good and bad or right and wrong we can get no real guidance from pure reason which pretends to furnish absolute rules and standards. What is "right in general" for all mankind under all circumstances without exception amounts only to such "uninformative and indefinite generalities" as the assertion that the whole is greater than any part or that good is preferable to bad. In themselves, Dietzgen held, absolute moral rules are a persistent source of intolerance as well as a danger to human freedom and progress. They may readily be used by powerful individuals and groups to foist on others their particular interest and purposes as eternally good. "Moses, Aristotle, Christ, Luther, Kant and Hegel had a most beneficial effect on the course of history until they became saints."<sup>15</sup>

Like all genuine thinking, reasoning in the field of morals must rest on given, concrete materials. While sense-perceptible materials are the touchstone of truth in general, experienced needs and interests are the materials out of which reasoning fashions moral truth. Here, again, Dietzgen seems to have leaned on Feuerbach. True and objective thought, Feuerbach had insisted, must proceed from the opposite of thought—from perception, passion, desire, and need.<sup>16</sup> But Dietzgen went on to develop his own view as to how, specifically, thought deals with experienced needs and interests. Moral reasoning is not a catalog of wants and needs any more than scientific reasoning is a tabulation of perceived facts. On the contrary, moral reasoning works upon given needs and interests to distinguish the general from the particular. This distinction, in turn, marks the difference between good needs and bad, true interests and assumed interests, essential wants and accidental appetites. Moral reasoning arrives at these distinctions by determining what is "generally useful or appropriate" (*allgemein Zweckmässig*).

Just as knowledge in general hinges on "the definite formulation of the problem," on the demarcation of given sense-objects to be

<sup>15</sup> "The Ethics of Social Democracy" (1875) in *Philosophical Essays*, 171. Cf. *The Nature of Human Brain Work in Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, 152f., 159ff.

<sup>16</sup> *Kleine Philosophische Schriften*, 68, 166. Cf. Paul Tillich, "Existential Philosophy," this *Journal*, 5(1944), 53f.

explained, so in morals the accurate determination of what is useful depends on the demarcation of the end or objective (*Zweck*) expressing the needs of particular persons in particular social circumstances. No human action can be useful or reasonable in itself. "The end-in-view," said Dietzgen, "is the measure of the useful." But it must be a definite, delimited end or objective. Then what is useful or appropriate can be determined scientifically or inductively. That action is most reasonable which realizes its end "in the widest, broadest, most general way."<sup>17</sup>

Dietzgen was aware that this version of moral reasoning and moral truth committed him to the principle that "the end justifies the means" and exposed his view to reproaches commonly levelled against the Jesuits. So he undertook to rehabilitate the principle through analysis of the relation of means and ends.

It is a major and common mistake, he held, to treat the distinction between means and ends as absolute and fixed. To be sure, any particular action may be viewed as a means to some end. But thinking must not stop there. Genuine thinking is dialectical and takes account of the diverse relations of things. Any particular action may also be viewed as an end whose means are the various moments of which it is composed. Dietzgen explained the relativity of means and ends as follows: "We eat in order to live; but in as far as we live while we eat, we live in order to eat. As life is to its functions, so the end is related to its means. Just as life is only the sum (*Inbegriff*) of all life's functions, so the end is the sum of all its means."<sup>18</sup> The relative distinction between means and ends thus reduces itself to the difference between particular and general. When actions are viewed as particulars, they are means. When they are viewed in community with other actions, they are ends.

From a standpoint which surveys all human actions there is only one end—human welfare (*menschliche Heil*). This, said Dietzgen, is the "end of all ends" in relation to which all particular ends are means. Only those ends deserve the predicate "good" which are themselves means to the totality of ends defining human welfare. Neglect of this relationship leads to misuse of the principle that the end justifies the means, a misuse largely responsible for its ill repute. The means of the Jesuits, Dietzgen asserted, are evil because their ends—the extension and glorification of the order—would deprive us of other essential ends such as public and bodily security. Even murder and manslaughter achieve some particular ends, but they are wrong because they frustrate a wider totality of ends. In this re-

<sup>17</sup> *The Nature of Human Brain Work in Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, 150f., 159, 161, et passim (*Dietzgens Sämtliche Schriften*, I, 64f., 72, 74, et passim).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 166f. (*Dietzgens Sämtliche Schriften*, I, 77).



spect, then, "welfare" is a principle of ethical criticism bidding us to evaluate any particular ends as a means in relation to other and wider ends.

But welfare, the community of all ends, Dietzgen warned, is itself an "abstraction" whose particular content is as different as are the times, nations, and persons seeking it. The determination of what is wholesome and conducive to human welfare requires definite conditions and relations. "Where man seeks his welfare in bourgeois life, in production and commerce, in the undisturbed possession of his private property, he clips his long fingers with the commandment 'Thou shalt not steal.' But where, on the other hand, as among the Spartans, war is regarded as the supreme good, and craftiness as a necessary quality of a good warrior, there roguery is employed as a means of acquiring cunning, and theft is sanctioned as a means to the end."<sup>19</sup> In respect to its content, then, "welfare" is relative to social and historical circumstances.

Thus, particular acts of conduct are good insofar as they achieve a given end "in the widest, broadest, most general way" and insofar as that end, in turn, furthers the totality of ends which define human welfare. No action is in itself good or bad, right or wrong. Truth-telling, chastity, and honesty are virtues because of their wide human consequences. Since ends express man's various needs and interests, their maximum mutual fulfillment in given social circumstances is the goal of moral endeavor and the general standard of moral value. Man's interests include "the spiritual as well as the physical," the heart as well as the purse. Hence "welfare" takes account of "the positive side of modern idealism." It includes enjoyments "of the eye, the ear, of art and science, in short, of the *whole* man."<sup>20</sup> "Duty," "right," and "good" are to be defined in relation to this general standard. Whether a particular act of conduct is reasonable and appropriate, whether it achieves a given end "in the widest, broadest, most general way," is to be determined, Dietzgen held, by inductive, scientific thinking. This type of thinking also applies to ends since ends are the sum of their means and themselves means to other ends as implied in the concept of "welfare." Thus there is one pattern of thinking which applies to all aspects of morality as well as to all aspects of nature.

Dietzgen's ethical views were explicitly related to his philosophy of religion. As might be expected, he opposed supernaturalism in all its forms. He regarded the dualism between God and the world—like that between soul and body or thought and sense—as a mischievous product of *a priori* speculation. He saw clericalism as its

<sup>19</sup> *Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, 172f.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 136, 178.

typical social manifestations and relentlessly attacked it at every opportunity.

Though man's welfare is actually "the origin and foundation of the holy," it can be understood, Dietzgen maintained, only if we go beyond the specifically human standpoint. Man's good depends on his relations to the cosmos as well as to his fellow men. These wider relations, Dietzgen recognized, are the foundations of a naturalistic religion. He urged his fellow social democrats to search for the perfect and sublime not in some transcendent spirit or supernatural personality but in "the communion and intimate connection of all men and things."

Dietzgen's search for the cosmic dimension of human good finally led him to an explicit defense of pantheism. In this he was influenced by Feuerbach and especially Spinoza. "God, truth, nature," said Dietzgen, "are names for the same thing."<sup>21</sup> He condemned "frivolous atheism" because it leads to idol worship which only the "divine world-truth" can exterminate. He saw the cosmos as similar to the "infinite being" of whom Jakob Böhme said: "He is neither light nor darkness, neither love nor anger, but the eternal One." Is the "world god," the Alpha and Omega, the "absolute world-being" anything more than an idea? To prove its inescapable reality Dietzgen resorted to one of the most purely *a priori* arguments in the history of western thought—the ontological argument of Anselm and Descartes.

Perhaps the most serious ambiguity in Dietzgen's thought on ethics lies in the shift of his views between *The Nature of Human Brain Work* and "The Ethics of Social Democracy." In the former his conclusions as to right and wrong were based on inductive appraisal of means and ends. In the latter they were based on the supposedly verifiable progress of social evolution toward mutual aid, cooperation, and the brotherhood of man.<sup>22</sup> Dietzgen was apparently unaware of the difference between these two positions. The actual trend of social evolution might be inductively verified. But to call it "progress" is to make a moral judgment, and Dietzgen never explained how the presence of a social trend settles the question of moral value.

<sup>21</sup> *Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, 230. See also *ibid.*, 231f., 284.; *Dietzgens Sämtliche Schriften*, III, 157, 223ff.; "Die Gottlosen," *Der Sozialist*, I, 5 (1885), 1. Cf. S. Rawidowicz, *Ludwig Feuerbachs Philosophie. Ursprung und Schicksal* (Berlin, 1931), 455; Cornelia Huygens, "Dietzgens Philosophie," *Die Neue Zeit*, XXI, 1 (1902), 199ff., emphasizing the kinship between Dietzgen's views and Spinoza's *Ethics*.

<sup>22</sup> *Philosophical Essays*, 155-72. One of Dietzgen's ardent disciples, Ernest Untermann, sought to base ethics on "the course of evolution," a universal standard which is "intelligible to everyone." See his *Science and Revolution* (Chicago, 1905), 163ff.

There may be grounds for discounting the importance of Dietzgen's shift toward evolutionary ethics. "The Ethics of Social Democracy," it might be argued, was simply a popularized defense of mutual aid and cooperation. His main view, it might be maintained, is to be found in the earlier and more precise treatment of ethics in *The Nature of Human Brain Work*. Whatever be the merits of this approach, there can be little doubt that his earlier discussion of ethics was fuller and more systematic.

#### IV

At several important points there is a striking kinship between Dietzgen's views and the ethical theory developed by John Dewey in his later writings. First, both men seek empirical foundations for ethics. They relate moral value to the concrete satisfactions of wants and needs in particular situations. Like Dietzgen, Dewey attacks rationalism in ethics as a mistaken and socially dangerous effort to separate values from "concrete experiences of desire and satisfaction." He sees the genuine goods of life as remedies for the needs and deficiencies of specific situations.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, Dietzgen and Dewey do not identify moral value with any satisfaction but only with that which can be approved after deliberation, after reflective examination of its conditions and consequences. In Dietzgen's view, moral reasoning works upon given needs and interests to distinguish the general from the particular, essential wants from accidental appetites, good needs from bad. It does this by determining what is "generally useful or appropriate," by seeing whether a particular action realizes its end in "the fullest, broadest, most general way." Similarly Dewey maintains that "there have to be certain conditions fulfilled to transform a satisfaction into a value." Those conditions involve the use of intelligence, empirical knowledge, and reflective judgment. Dewey repeatedly insists that only those satisfactions may properly be termed values which judgment has approved after examining their relations, conditions, and consequences.<sup>24</sup>

Thirdly, there is a kinship between the views of Dietzgen and Dewey on the relation of means to ends. For Dietzgen, we saw earlier, the distinction between ends and means is a relative one, and moral reasoning stops short if it keeps them separate. Dewey frequently endorsed this position. His treatment of the maxim that

<sup>23</sup> See John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York, 1929), 258ff., *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York, 1920), 175, 165, 169; *Theory of Valuation* (Chicago, 1939), 45f.

<sup>24</sup> See *The Quest for Certainty*, 264f.; Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, rev. (New York, 1932), 201, 228.

“the end justifies the means” involved a point of view very close to Dietzgen’s. That maxim is misused, according to Dietzgen, when we judge action in relation to a particular end and fail to see that end as a means in relation to other wider ends. Dewey finds the maxim objectionable insofar as it suggests that some arbitrarily selected fragment of the actual consequences “authorizes means used to obtain it, without the need of foreseeing and weighing other ends as consequences of the means used.” And, with Dietzgen, he further insisted that ends and consequences must themselves “be valued in turn as means to further consequences.”<sup>25</sup> From this view of the interrelation of means and ends it follows that moral judgments can be tested “scientifically” or “inductively.” A particular action as means is judged by its inductively determined consequences. And since ends are inseparable from their means and themselves may be means to other ends, the same method applies to ends. For both Dietzgen and Dewey there is one pattern of thinking which applies to all aspects of morality as well as to all aspects of the physical world.

While there is no evidence that Dewey was influenced by or even acquainted with Dietzgen’s thought, the similarity of their views would seem to be a result, in part, of a common element in their intellectual background—namely, an Hegelian bent toward holism, toward synthesis and unification. Early in his career, under the influence of G. S. Morris, Dewey was an Hegelian idealist. Hegel’s “dissolution of hard and fast dividing walls,” his synthesis of subject and object, matter and spirit, the divine and human, supplied a demand in Dewey for unification and left “a permanent deposit” in his thinking.<sup>26</sup> Dietzgen was influenced by the holistic emphasis in Feuerbach who had followed Hegel early in his career and developed his own philosophy from a critical revision of Hegel’s synthesis of thought and sensation.<sup>27</sup> While Dietzgen’s early writings attacked Hegel as the arch-representative of pure speculation, he later praised him for seeing that there are no “unbridgeable gulfs,” no absolute differences among things. Both Dietzgen and Dewey carried into their philosophies the

<sup>25</sup> J. Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, 42f. Cf. *Quest for Certainty*, 279–86.

<sup>26</sup> John Dewey, “From Absolutism to Experimentalism” in G. P. Adams and W. P. Montague, eds., *Contemporary American Philosophy* (New York, 1930), II, 18–21. See Morton White, *The Origins of Dewey’s Instrumentalism* (New York, 1943), Chs. II and XI.

<sup>27</sup> See Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx* (New York, 1950), 224, 228–32. In an early letter, quoted by Hook, Feuerbach explained his philosophical method as aiming “to achieve a continuous unification of the noble with the apparently common, of the distant with the *near-at-hand*, of the *abstract* with the *concrete*, of the *speculative* with the *empirical*, of *philosophy* with *life*.” Dietzgen, as we have seen, fully shared this aim.

Hegelian animosity toward dualisms. Hence in ethics they opposed and tried to mediate the separation of reason and experience, science and moral deliberation, individual needs and social conditions, means and ends.

From the beginning of his philosophical development Dietzgen enthusiastically embraced empiricism and held that thought must be grounded in perceived facts. As we have seen, he derived this position primarily from Feuerbach, reinforced it from Kant, and found it confirmed in Humboldt. After some years in the Hegelian camp, Dewey became an empiricist but in a different way and under different auspices. Dewey's empiricism was shaped by the influence of William James's *Psychology* and evolutionary biology. As a consequence, he conceived "experience" in terms of the purposeful activities of the human organism rather than in terms of given sense-data. The main differences between Dietzgen and Dewey in their theories of knowledge and ethics are traceable to their different views of experience and its relation to thought. While Dewey emphasized the dynamic, problem-solving role of thought in the flow of human activity, Dietzgen stressed its generalizing, schematic relationship to particular data of perception. This difference is further reflected in Dewey's emphasis on "growth"<sup>28</sup> and Dietzgen's special use of "welfare" as the central concept in ethical theory.

There are some significant points of agreement between Dietzgen and Dewey in matters of social philosophy. In attacking "absolute morality" and demanding that moral rules be reflectively based on human needs, Dietzgen defended "the freedom of the individual" as a requirement of his ethical theory. He found a sure ground of tolerance in "the consciousness of the relative validity of our knowledge."<sup>29</sup> In Dewey's writings there is a similar emphasis on freedom and tolerance. Fundamental differences between Dietzgen and Dewey appear in their relationship to Marxism.

Dietzgen proudly acknowledged that his economic views came "ready-made" from Marx and frequently expressed an indebtedness to Marx and Engels for his interpretation of history. Hence he asserted that history as determined by economic development "organically contains" the solution of the problems it raises. In such a view of history he saw the following implications: "We are thus reconciled with the world as it actually is," "Whatever is, ought to be, and

<sup>28</sup> *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 177, 186. See also *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York, 1930), 194f., 210f.; White, *op. cit.*, 112f.

<sup>29</sup> *The Nature of Human Brain Work in Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, 178, 153f. Cf. Joseph Ratner, ed., *Intelligence in the Modern World: John Dewey's Philosophy* (New York, 1939), 775-8, 431ff.

ought not to be otherwise until it is otherwise.”<sup>30</sup> But he never squared this line of thought with the concept of “ends,” “duty,” and “freedom of the individual” in his moral theory or his own moral condemnation of capitalist society. Relying on Marx’s dialectical treatment of history, he endorsed the following contradictions: “We preach eternal peace and stimulate the class struggle. We want to abolish all domination by establishing our own domination.” But he never reconciled this stand with his view that means and ends are inseparable and their relations are to be determined “inductively.”

Dewey noted—and others have developed the point—that there are important affinities between his own views and “democratic socialism.” But he firmly rejected the Marxian view of history and social causation.<sup>31</sup> Such a view, he charged, essentially denies “moving power to human evaluations” and “throws out psychological as well as moral considerations” in asserting against “utopian socialism” and “idealism” that economic production is the only genuine causal factor in history. Its dialectical principle of negating negations is a “simplified romanticism” which is incompatible with scientific social inquiry and the “interdependence of means and ends.”

Dietzgen’s thought is noteworthy for other reasons than its striking anticipation of Dewey’s ethical theory. As part of the educational effort of one of the most influential movements for social reform in Europe and America, Dietzgen’s writings brought to many working people some vistas of European philosophy and indications of the wider applicability of scientific knowledge. His books—along with those of Marx, Kautsky, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Debs, and Darrow—helped the Socialist “locals” in America to become, as Van Wyck Brooks has put it, “cosmopolitan centers of new learning and light.” Dietzgen particularly encouraged the laboring man to discover and develop his own intellectual powers. He urged his readers to learn to think for themselves and devote themselves, as Spinoza did, to “the improvement of the understanding.” In his own example he showed them the possibilities of self-education and the dignity of learning.

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<sup>30</sup> *The Nature of Human Brain Work in Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, 165. Cf. *Philosophical Essays*, 174f., 195, 163.

<sup>31</sup> See especially *Freedom and Culture* (New York, 1939), Ch. IV. Cf. Dewey, *Individualism, Old and New* (New York, 1930), 117–20; Ratner, *op. cit.*, 405–16, 449; Sidney Hook, ed., *John Dewey: Philosopher of Science and Freedom, A Symposium* (New York, 1950), 348f., 370f., and 335–8 where Jim Cork argues, with considerable evidence, that Dewey’s interpretation of Marx neglects primary sources and is inaccurate at several points. Our chief concern here, however, is not the accuracy of Dewey’s interpretation of Marx but what it reveals about his own social philosophy *vis-à-vis* Dietzgen.