Talk On Questions Of Philosophy

Mao Zedong

August 18, 1964

[SOURCE: Mao chu-hsi tui P’eng, Hua-ng, Chang, Chou fan-tang chi-t’uan ti p’i-p’an]

It is only when there is class struggle that there can be philosophy. It is a waste of time to discuss epistemology apart from practice. The comrades who study philosophy should go down to the countryside. They should go down this winter or next spring to participate in the class struggle. Those whose health is not good should go too. Going down won’t kill people. All they’ll do is catch a cold, and if they just put on a few extra suits of clothes it’ll be all right.

The way they go about it in the universities at present is no good, going from book to book, from concept to concept. How can philosophy come from books? The three basic constituents of Marxism are scientific socialism, philosophy, and political economy.¹ The foundation is social science, class struggle. There is a struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Marx and the others saw this. Utopian socialists are always trying to persuade the bourgeoisie to be charitable. This won’t work, it is necessary to rely on the class struggle of the proletariat. At that time, there had already been many strikes. The English parliamentary inquiry recognized that the twelve-hour day was less favorable than the eight-hour day to the interests of the capitalists. It is only starting from this viewpoint that Marxism appeared. The foundation is class struggle. The study of philosophy can only come afterwards. Whose philosophy? Bourgeois philosophy, or proletarian philosophy? Proletarian philosophy is Marxist philosophy. There is also proletarian economics, which has transformed classical economics. Those who engage in philosophy believe that philosophy comes first. The oppressors oppress the oppressed, while the oppressed need to fight back and seek a way out before they start looking for philosophy. It is only when people took this as their starting-point that there was Marxism-Leninism, and that they discovered philosophy. We have all been through this. Others wanted to kill me; Chiang Kai-shek wanted to kill me. Thus we came to engage in class struggle, to engage in philosophizing.

University students should start going down this winter — I am referring to the humanities. Students of natural science should not be moved now, though we can move them for a spell or two. All those studying the humanities — history, political economy, literature, law — must every one of them go. Professors, assistant professors, administrative workers, and student should all of them go down, for a limited period of five months. If they go to the countryside for five months, or to the factories for five months, they will acquire some perceptual knowledge. Horses, cows, sheep, chickens, dogs, pigs, rice, sorghum, beans, wheat, varieties of millet they can have a look at all these things. If they go in the winter, they will not see the harvest, but at least they can still see the land and the people. To get some experience of class struggle — that’s what I call a university.

¹ i.e. 1) Marxist philosophy, that is, dialectical materialism and historical materialism, which deals with the general law of development of the contradictions existing in nature, human society and man’s thought; 2) Marxist political economy which elucidates the law governing the development of society’s economy and exposes how the capitalist class exploits the working class (the theory of surplus value); and 3) scientific socialism which shows that the capitalist society is bound to develop to a higher stage of society and that the proletariat is the grave-digger of the capitalist system. (For details see Lenin’s “The Three Sources and the Three Component Parts of Marxism.”)
They argue about which university is better, Peking University or People’s University. ² For my part I am a graduate of the university of the greenwoods, I learned a bit there. In the past I studied Confucius, and spent six years on the Four Books and the Five Classics.³ I learned to recite them from memory, but I did not understand them. At that time, I believed deeply in Confucius, and even wrote essays [expounding his ideas]. Later I went to a bourgeois school for seven years. Seven plus six makes thirteen years. I studied all the usual bourgeois stuff — natural science and social science. They also taught some pedagogy. This includes five years of normal school, two years of middle school, and also the time I spent in the library.⁴ At that time I believed in Kant’s dualism, especially in his idealism. Originally I was a feudalist and an advocate of bourgeois democracy. Society impelled me to participate in the revolution. I spent a few years as a primary-school teacher and principal of a four-year school. I also taught history and Chinese language in a six-year school. I also taught for a short period in a middle school, but I did not understand a thing. When I joined the Communist Party I knew that we must make revolution, but against what? And how would we go about it? Of course we had to make revolution against imperialism and the old society. I did not quite understand what sort of a thing imperialism was, still less did I understand how we could make revolution against it. None of the stuff I had learned in thirteen years was any good for making revolution. I used only the instrument — language. Writing essays is an instrument. As for the content of my studies, I didn’t use it at all. Confucius said: ‘Benevolence is the characteristic element of humanity.’  The benevolent man loves others.⁵ Whom did he love? All men? Nothing of the kind. Did he love the exploiters? It wasn’t exactly that, either. He loved only a part of the exploiters. Otherwise, why wasn’t Confucius able to be a high official? People didn’t want him. He loved them, and wanted them to unite. But when it came to starving, and to [the precept] ‘The superior man can endure poverty,’ he almost lost his life, the people of K’uang wanted to kill him.⁶ There were those who criticized him for not visiting Ch’in in his journey to the West. In reality, the poem ‘In the Seventh Month the Fire Star Passes the Meridian’ in the Book of Odes refers to events in Shensi. There is also ‘The Yellow Bird’, which talks about the affair in which three high officials of Duke Mu of Ch’in were killed and buried with him on his death.⁷

² Peking University, jointly descended from the old Peking University which launched the May Fourth Movement in 1919, and from the American-endowed Yenching University, has continued since 1949 to enjoy the highest prestige in China for general intellectual excellence. People’s University (Jen-min ta-hsüeh), also located in Peking, was specially set up to provide courses more accessible to students from worker and peasant backgrounds.

³ Among the Confucian classics, the Four Books represent the core studied by beginners, the Five Classics a somewhat larger corpus.

⁴ Among his varied educational experiences, Mao Tse-tung has long singled out the six months he spent reading in the Hunan Provincial Library, in the winter of 1912-13, as one of the most valuable.

⁵ The first sentence is from the Doctrine of the Mean, the second is from Mencius, Book IV.

⁶ The quotation is from the Confucian Analects. The incident in which the people of K’uang detained Confucius and wanted to kill him is referred to in the Analects.

⁷ Mao’s reasoning is apparently that, whether or not he went there, Confucius had nothing against Ch’in (a state which existed in the first millennium B.C. in present-day Shensi, whose ruler ultimately conquered the whole of China and founded the Ch’in dynasty in 221 B.C.), since he included in the Book
Ch’ien had a very high opinion of the Book of Odes. He said the 300 poems it contains were all written by sages and worthies of ancient times when they were aroused. A large part of the poems in the Book of Odes are in the manner of the various states, they are the folk songs of the common people, the sages and worthies are none other than the common people. ‘Written when they were aroused’ means that when a man’s heart was filled with anger, he wrote a poem!

You sow not nor reap;
How do you get the paddy for your three hundred round bins?
You do not follow the chase;
How do we see the quails hanging in your courtyards?
O that superior man!
He would not eat the bread of idleness!

The expression ‘to neglect the duties of an office while taking the pay’ comes from here. This is a poem which accuses heaven and opposes the rulers. Confucius, too, was rather democratic, he included [in the Book of Odes] poems about the love between man and woman. In his commentaries, Chu Hsi characterized them as poems about clandestine love affairs. In reality, some of them are and some of them aren’t; the latter borrow the imagery of man and woman to write about the relations between prince and subject. In Shu [present-day Szechwan] at the time of the Five Dynasties and Ten Countries, there was a poem entitled ‘The Wife of Ch’in Laments the Winter’, by Wei Chuang. He wrote it in his youth, and it is about his longing for his prince.

To return to this matter of going down, people should go beginning this winter and spring, in groups and in rotation, to participate in the class struggle. Only in this way can they learn something, learn about revolution. You intellectuals sit every day in your government offices, eating well, dressing well, and not even doing any walking. That’s why you fall ill. Clothing, food, housing and exercise are the four great factors causing disease. If, from enjoying good living conditions, you change to somewhat worse conditions, if you go down to participate in the class struggle, if you

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8 Ssu-ma Chien (145-90 B.C.) was China’s first great historian, who compiled shih-chi (Historical Records) relating history of China from the origins to his own day.

9 The translation of the above poem, and of the titles of the two mentioned previously, are taken from Legge’s version of the Book of Odes.

10 Love poems have traditionally been interpreted by Chinese critics as an allegory for the relations between an official and his prince; Chu Hsi (see below, note 42) held that they should be taken at face value. Mao puts the commonsense view that they should sometimes be taken literally, and sometimes not.

11 Wei Chuang (c. 858-910) was an eminent poet of the late T’ang and early Five Dynasties (began 907) period. Mao is arguing that the same principles of interpretation should be applied to the Book of Odes and to all classical poetry.
The “Four Clean ups” and “Five antis,” were parts of the Socialist Education Movement, launched by the CPC in 1962.

If you don’t engage in class struggle, then what is this philosophy you’re engaged in? Why not go down and try it? If your illness gets too severe you should come back — you have to draw the line at dying. When you are so ill that you are on the verge of dying, then you should come back. As soon as you go down, you will have some spirit. (K’ang Sheng interjects: ‘The research institutes in the Departments of Philosophy and Social Science of the Academy of Science should all go down too. At present, they are on the verge of turning into institutes for the study of antiquities, of turning into a fairyland nourishing itself by inhaling offerings of incense. None of the people in the Institute of Philosophy read the Kuang-ming jih-pao.’) I read only the Kuang-ming jihpao and the Wen-hui pao,¹³ I don’t read People’s Daily, because the People’s Daily doesn’t publish theoretical articles; after we adopt a resolution, then they publish it. The Liberation Army Daily is lively, it’s readable. (Comrade K’ang Sheng: ‘The Institute of Literature pays no attention to Chou Kuch’eng,¹⁴ and the Economics Institute pays no attention to Sun Yeh-fang¹⁵ and to his going in for Libermanism, going in for capitalism.’)

Let them go in for capitalism. Society is very complex. If one only goes in for socialism and not for capitalism, isn’t that too simple? Wouldn’t we then lack the unity of opposites, and be merely one-sided? Let them do it. Let them attack us madly, demonstrate in the streets, take up arms to rebel — I approve all of these things. Society is very complex, there is not a single commune, a single hsien, a single department of the Central Committee, in which one cannot divide into two. Just look, hasn’t the Department of Rural Work been disbanded?¹⁶ It devoted itself exclusively to accounting on the basis of the individual household, and to propagating the ‘four great freedoms’ — freedom to lend money, to engage in commerce, to hire labor, and to buy and sell land. In the past, they put out a proclamation [to this effect]. Teng Tzu-hui had a dispute with me. At a meeting

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¹² The “Four Clean ups” and “Five antis” were parts of the Socialist Education Movement, launched by the CPC in 1962.

¹³ Kuang-ming jih-pao organ of the China Democratic League, took the lead in criticisms of the party in April 1957, when the ‘blooming and contending’ was in full flood. The Wen-hui pao, published in Shanghai, was a non-Party organ which had been criticized by Mao for its bourgeois tendencies in 1957. In November 1965, it was to serve as the channel for the opening shot in the Cultural Revolution.

¹⁴ Chou Ku-ch’eng was the author of numerous works on Chinese and world history. Since 1950 he had been a professor at Futan University in Shanghai. In 1962 he published an article on history and art, in which he expressed ideas on the ‘Zeitgeist’ which were said to be an expression in the realm of esthetics of Yang Hsien-chen’s philosophical theories (see below, note 19 to this text).

¹⁵ Sun Yeh-fang was at this time Director of the Institute of Economics of the Academy of Science; he was dismissed in 1966. As K’ang Sheng’s remark indicates, he had adopted the ideas of some Soviet and Eastern European economists with whom he had been in professional contact about the role of the profit motive in a socialist economy.

¹⁶ In the summer of 1955, just before Mao’s speech of 31 July gave a new impetus to the formation of agricultural producers’ cooperatives, the Party’s Rural Work Department (at the instigation of Liu Shao-ch’i) had disbanded a number of cooperatives which were said to have been hastily and prematurely formed.
of the Central Committee, he put forward the idea of implementing the four great freedoms.\textsuperscript{17}

To consolidate New Democracy, and to go on consolidating it for ever, is to engage in capitalism.\textsuperscript{18} New Democracy is a bourgeois-democratic revolution under the leadership of the proletariat. It touches only the landlords and the comprador bourgeoisie, it does not touch the national bourgeoisie at all. To divide up the land and give it to the peasants is to transform the property of the feudal landlords into the individual property of the peasants, and this still remains within the limits of the bourgeois revolution. To divide up the land is nothing remarkable — MacArthur did it in Japan. Napoleon divided up the land too. Land reform cannot abolish capitalism, nor can it lead to socialism.

In our state at present approximately one third of the power is in the hands of the enemy or of the enemy’s sympathizers. We have been going for fifteen years and we now control two thirds of the realm. At present, you can buy a [Party] branch secretary for a few packs of cigarettes, not to mention marrying a daughter to him. There are some localities where land reform was carried out peacefully, and the land reform teams were very weak; now you can see that there are a lot of problems there.

I have received the materials on philosophy. [This refers to the materials on the problem of contradictions — note by stenographer.] I have had a look at the outline, [This refers to the outline of an article criticizing ‘two combine into one’\textsuperscript{19} — note by stenographer.] I have not been able to read the rest. I have also looked at the materials on analysis and synthesis.

It is a good thing to collect materials like this on the law of the unity of opposites, what the bourgeoisie says about it, what Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin say about it, what the revisionists say about it. As for the bourgeoisie, Yang Hsien-chen talks about it, and Hegel of old talked about it. Such people existed in the olden days. Now they are even worse. There were also Bogdanov and Lunacharsky, who used to talk about deism. I have read Bogdanov’s economics. Lenin read

\textsuperscript{17} Teng Tzu-hui (1895-1972) had been head of the Rural Work Department since 1952, though his influence had declined since the late 1950s, because of his share of responsibility for the ‘disbanding’ or ‘weeding out’ of cooperatives in 1955. It would appear, however that he still possessed sufficient status to put his views energetically in opposition to those of Mao when, in the early 1960s, the policies enumerated here by Mao were a subject of dispute within the Party. Both the Rural Work Department and Teng zu-hui were severely criticised by comrade Mao during debate on cooperative transformation. [For more details refer pp. 224-225 of S.W. Vol. V.]

\textsuperscript{18} As a symbol to cover this whole spectrum of policies, emphasizing the role of material stimulants, the private plot, etc., the expression ‘four great freedoms’ is less common, in documents published since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, than ‘Sanzi yibao’ (‘three freedoms and one fix, or guarantee’). On this concept, which is supposed to sum up the reactionary line of Liu Shao-ch’i and his sympathizers in the countryside, see the article ‘Struggle between Two Roads in China’s Countryside’, Peking Review, No. 49 (1967), pp. 11-19.

\textsuperscript{19} A right opportunist view advocated by Liu Shao-chi and others. In this connection see comrade Mao’s speech at the PB meeting of the CC of the CPC “Refute the Right Deviationist Views that Depart from General Line”, S.W. Vol. V pp. 93-94.

\textsuperscript{19} The view that ‘two combine into one’ was put forward in the early 1960s by Yang Hsien-chen (c. 1899- ), who had been, since 1955, President of the Higher Party School. Beginning in July 1964 this formulation was violently attacked in the press on the grounds that it minimized the importance of struggle and contradiction, and contrasted with Mao’s view that ‘one divides into two’, i.e. that struggle, and in particular class struggle, constantly re-emerges, even when particular contradictions have been resolved. The ‘outline of an article’ referred to in the stenographer’s note was presumably a summary of one of the forthcoming attacks on Yang, submitted to the Chairman in advance for his approval.
The defense of Madrid, starting in October 1936, lasted for two years and five months. In 1936, fascist Germany and Italy made use of the Spanish fascist warlord Franco to launch a war of aggression against Spain. The Spanish people, led by the Popular Front Government, heroically defended democracy against aggression. The battle of Madrid, the Capital of Spain, was the bitterest in the whole war. Madrid fell in March 1939 because Britain, France and other imperialist countries assisted the aggressors by their hypocritical policy of "non-intervention" and because divisions arose within the Popular Front. The point of this criticism is obviously not that the Spanish republicans fought to the end, but that they failed to grasp the axiom that territorial strong points are not in themselves decisive.

Stalin felt that he had made mistakes in dealing with Chinese problems, and they were no small mistakes. We are a great country of several hundred millions, and he opposed our revolution, and our seizure of power. We prepared for many years in order to seize power in the whole country, the whole of the Anti-Japanese War constituted a preparation. This is quite clear if you look at the documents of the Central Committee for that period, including "On New Democracy." That is to say that you cannot set up a bourgeois dictatorship, you can only establish New Democracy under the leadership of the proletariat, you can only set up a people’s democratic dictatorship led by the proletariat. In our country, for eighty years, all the democratic revolutions led by the bourgeoisie failed. The democratic revolution led by us will certainly be victorious. There is only this way out, there is no other way out. This is the first step. The second step will be to build socialism. Thus, “On New Democracy” was a complete program. It discussed politics, economics, and culture as well; it failed to discuss only military affairs. (K’ang Sheng: ‘On New Democracy is of great significance for the world communist movement. I asked Spanish comrades, and they said the problem for them was to establish bourgeois democracy, not to establish New Democracy. In their country, they did not concern themselves with the three points: army, countryside, political power. They wholly subordinated themselves to the exigencies of Soviet foreign policy, and achieved nothing at all.’) These are the policies of Ch’en Tu-hsiu! (Comrade K’ang Sheng: ‘They say the Communist Party organized an army, and then turned it over to others.’) This is useless.

(Comrade K’ang Sheng: ‘They also did not want political power, nor did they mobilize the peasantry. At that time, the Soviet Union said to them that if they imposed proletarian leadership, England and France might oppose it, and this would not be in the interests of the Soviet Union.’

How about Cuba? In Cuba they concerned themselves precisely to set up political power and an army, and also mobilized the peasants, as [we did] in the past; therefore they succeeded.

(Comrade K’ang Sheng: ‘Also, when they [the Spanish] fought, they waged regular war, in the manner of the bourgeoisie, they defended Madrid to the last. In all things, they subordinated themselves to Soviet foreign policy.’)

Even before the dissolution of the Third International, we did not obey the orders of the Third International. At the Tsunyi Conference we didn’t obey, and afterwards, for a period of ten years, including the Rectification Campaign and down to the Seventh Congress, when we finally adopted a resolution (‘Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of our Party’), and corrected [the errors of] ‘leftism’, we didn’t obey them at all. Those dogmatists utterly failed to study China’s peculiarities; ten-odd years after they had betaken themselves to the countryside, they utterly failed

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20 The defense of Madrid, starting in October 1936, lasted for two years and five months. In 1936, fascist Germany and Italy made use of the Spanish fascist warlord Franco to launch a war of aggression against Spain. The Spanish people, led by the Popular Front Government, heroically defended democracy against aggression. The battle of Madrid, the Capital of Spain, was the bitterest in the whole war. Madrid fell in March 1939 because Britain, France and other imperialist countries assisted the aggressors by their hypocritical policy of "non-intervention" and because divisions arose within the Popular Front. The point of this criticism is obviously not that the Spanish republicans fought to the end, but that they failed to grasp the axiom that territorial strong points are not in themselves decisive.

to study the land, property, and class relationships in the countryside. You can't understand the countryside just by going there, you must study the relations between all the classes and strata in the countryside. I devoted more than ten years to these problems before I finally clarified them for myself. You must make contact with all kinds of people, in tea houses and gambling dens, and investigate them. In 1925 I was active at the Peasant Movement Training Institute, and carried out rural surveys. In my native village, I sought out poor peasants to investigate them. Their life was pitiable, they had nothing to eat. There was one peasant whom I sought out to play dominoes (the kind with heaven, earth, man, harmony, Mei Ch’ien, Ch’ang Sang, and the bench), afterwards inviting him to have a meal. Before, after, and during the meal, I talked to him, and came to understand why the class struggle in the countryside was so acute. The reasons he was willing to talk to me were: first, that I looked on him as a human being; second, that I invited him to have a meal; and third, that he could make a bit of money. I kept losing; I lost one or two silver dollars, and as a result he was very well satisfied. There is a friend who still came to see me twice! , after Liberation. Once, in those days, he was really in a bad way, and he came looking for me to borrow a dollar. I gave him three, as non-refundable assistance. In those days, such nonrefundable assistance was hard to come by. My father took the view that if a man did not look after himself, heaven and earth would punish him. My mother opposed him. When my father died, very few people followed the funeral procession. When my mother died, a great many followed the procession. One time the Ko Lao Hui robbed our family. I said they were right to do so, for people had nothing. Even my mother could not accept this at all.

Once there broke out in Changsha rice riots in which the provincial governor was beaten up. There were some hawkers from Hsiang Hsiang who had sold their broad beans and were straggling back home. I stopped them and asked them about the situation. The Red and Green Gangs in the countryside also held meetings, and ate up big families. This was reported in the Shanghai newspapers, and the troubles were only stamped out when troops were sent from Changsha. They did not maintain good discipline, they took the rice of the middle peasants, and so isolated themselves. One of their leaders fled hither and thither, finally taking refuge in the mountains, but he was caught there and executed. Afterwards, the village gentry held a meeting, and killed a few more poor peasants. At that time, there was as yet no Communist Party; these were spontaneous class struggles.

Society pushed us on to the political stage. Who ever thought of indulging in Marxism previously? I hadn't even heard of it. What I had heard of, and also read of, was Confucius, Napoleon, Washington, Peter the Great, the Meiji Restoration, the three distinguished Italian [patriots] — in other words, all those [heroes] of capitalism. I had also read a biography of Franklin. He came from a poor family; afterwards, he became a writer, and also conducted experiments on electricity. (Ch’en Po-ta: ‘Franklin was the first to put forward the proposition that man is a tool-making animal.’)

He talked about man being a tool-making animal. Formerly, they used to say that man was a thinking animal, ‘the organ of the heart can think’; they said that man was the soul of all creation. Who called a meeting and elected him [to that position]? He conferred this dignity on himself. This proposition existed in the feudal era. Afterwards, Marx put forward the view that man is a tool-maker, and that man is a social animal. In reality it is only after undergoing a million years [of evolution] that man developed a large brain and a pair of hands. In the future, animals will

22 Mao began his activity at this institute in 1925, but it was in 1926 that he actually served as principal and made his main contribution.

23 The quotation is from Mencius, Book VI, Part A, Ch. 15.
continue to develop. I don’t believe that men alone are capable of having two hands. Can’t horses, cows, sheep evolve? Can only monkeys evolve? And can it be, moreover, that of all the monkeys only one species can evolve, and all the others are incapable of evolving? In a million years, ten million years, will horses, cows and sheep still be the same as those today? I think they will continue to change. Horses, cows, sheep, and insects will all change. Animals have evolved from plants, they have evolved from seaweed. Chang T’ai-yen knew all this. In the book in which he argued about revolution with K’ang Yu-wei, he expounded these principles.\(^{24}\) The earth was originally dead, there were no plants, no water, no air. Only after I don’t know how many tens of millions of years was water formed; hydrogen and oxygen aren’t just transformed immediately in any old way into water. Water has its history too. Earlier still, even hydrogen and oxygen did not exist. Only after hydrogen and oxygen were produced was there the possibility that these two elements could combine to give water.

We must study the history of the natural sciences, it won’t do to neglect this subject. We must read a few books. There is a great difference between reading because of the necessities of our present struggles, and reading aimlessly. Fu Ying\(^{25}\) says that hydrogen and oxygen form water only after coming together hundreds and thousands of times; it is not at all a simple case of two combining into one. He was right about this, too; I want to look him up and have a talk. (Speaking to Lu P’ing:\(^{26}\) You people should not oppose absolutely everything by Fu Ying.

Hitherto, analysis and synthesis have not been clearly defined. Analysis is clearer, but there hasn’t been much said about synthesis. I had a talk with Ai Ssu-ch’i.\(^{27}\) He said that nowadays they only talk about conceptual synthesis and analysis, and do not talk about objective practical synthesis and analysis. How do we analyze and synthesize the Communist Party and the Kuomintang, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the landlords and the peasants, the Chinese and the imperialists? How do we do this, for example, in the case of the Communist Party and the Kuomintang? The analysis is simply a question of how strong we are, how much territory we have, how many members we have, how many troops, how many bases such as Yenan, what are our weaknesses? We do not hold any big cities, our army numbers only 1,200,000, we have no foreign aid, whereas the Kuomintang has a great amount of foreign aid. If you compare Yenan to Shanghai, Yenan has a population of only 7,000; adding to this the persons from the

\(^{24}\) This is presumably a reference to Chang Ping-lin’s celebrated article, published in 1903, entitled ‘A Refutation of K’ang Yu-wei’s Letter on Revolution’. In this article, Chang sharply attacked K’ang not only on the issue of revolution versus gradual reform, but on the importance of racial differences between the Chinese and the Manchus, which K’ang tended to minimize. The Manchus, Chang argued, were an alien and decadent race, totally unfit to rule China. It was in this context that he discussed evolution, indicating that the existing racial differences were the product of history.

\(^{25}\) Fu Ying is apparently a Chinese scientist who was alive in 1964, since Mao says he wants to look him up.

\(^{26}\) Lu P’ing (c. 1910- ) was President of Peking University at this time; he was removed and ‘struggled against’ in June 1966.

\(^{27}\) Ai Ssu-chi (c. 1910-66) was, at the time of his death, Vice President of the Higher Party School. He was one of the Party’s leading philosophical spokesmen, who had translated works on dialectical materialism from the Russian, and written many books and articles which aimed to make Marxism accessible to the masses. On 1 November 1964 he published an article in People’s Daily attacking Yang Hsien-chen, the ‘bourgeois’ philosopher Mao refers to earlier in this talk in connection with the principle of ‘two combining into one’.
The metaphor of ‘dissecting a sparrow’ is an applied theory and a work method to acquire knowledge and sum up experiences. Instead of attempting to generalize about a vast number of repetitions of a phenomenon, this work method advocates the in-depth analysis, thorough study and investigation of a prototype, and a summing-up experience through such analysis. The slogan is derived from the common saying “while a sparrow is small, it contains all the vital organs.” Here, Mao makes the point that, in the broader international context, China as a whole is a microcosm of the problems of revolution in the world today.
Leng Tzu-hsing discusses on the mansion of the Duke of Jung-kuo in Chapter 2 of the book (The Story of the Stone). The ‘Talisman for Officials’ was a list of the rich and influential families in the area which the former novice from the Bottle-Gourd Temple said every official should carry in order to avoid offending them and thereby wrecking his career (The Story of the Stone).


Ho Ch’i-fang (1911-), a lyric poet and powerful figure in the literary world, had defended Yü P’ing-po up to a point at the time of the campaign against him in 1954, saying that Yü was wrong in his interpretation of the Dream of the Red Chamber, but politically loyal. He himself came under attack at the time of the Great Leap Forward.

Wu Shih-ch’ang’s work on this subject has been translated into English: On ‘The Red Chamber Dream’ (Clarendon Press, 1961.)

Mao’s statement here concords with the views of Lu Hsün.

The King of the Ocean
Goes along,
When he’s short of gold beds,
To the Nanking Wang.
The Nanking Hsueh
So rich are they,
To count their money
Would take all day. . .

The Dream of the Red Chamber describes each of the four big families. It concerns a fierce class struggle, involving the fate of many dozens of people, though only twenty or thirty of these people are in the ruling class. (It has been calculated that there are thirty-three [in this category],) The others are all slaves, over three hundred of them, such as Yueh Yang, Ssu-ch’i, Second Sister Yu, Third Sister Yu, etc. In studying history, unless you take a class-struggle view as the starting-point, you will get confused. Things can only be analysed clearly by the use of class analysis. More than 200 years have elapsed since the Dream of the Red Chamber was written, and research on the book has not clarified the issues, even down to the present day; from this we can see the difficulty of the problem. There are Yü P’ing-po and Wang K’un-lun, who are both of them specialists. Ho Ch’i-fang also wrote a preface. A fellow called Wu Shih-ch’ang has also appeared on the scene. All this refers to recent research on the Dream of the Red Chamber, I won’t even enumerate the older studies. Ts’ai Yuan-p’ei’s view of the Dream of the Red Chamber was incorrect; Hu Shih’s was somewhat more correct.

What is synthesis? You have all witnessed how the two opposites, the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, were synthesized on the mainland. The synthesis took place like this: their armies came, and we devoured them, we ate them bite by bite. It was not a case of two combining into one as expounded by Yang Hsien-chen, it was not the synthesis of two peacefully coexisting opposites. They didn’t want to coexist peacefully, they wanted to devour you. Otherwise, why would they have attacked Yenan? Their army penetrated everywhere in North Shensi, except in three hsien on the three borders. You have your freedom, and we have our freedom. There are 250,000
of you, and 25,000 of us.\textsuperscript{34} A few brigades, something over 20,000 men. Having analysed, how do we synthesize? If you want to go somewhere, you go right ahead; we still swallow your army mouthful by mouthful. If we could fight victoriously, we fought; if we could not win, we retreated. From March 1947 to March 1948, one whole army [of the enemy] disappeared into the landscape, for we annihilated several tens of thousands of their troops. When we surrounded I-ch’uan, and Liu K’an came to relieve the city, the commander-in-chief Liu K’an was killed, two of his three divisional commanders were killed and the other taken prisoner, and the whole army ceased to exist. This was synthesis. All of their guns and artillery were synthesized over to our side, and the soldiers were synthesized too. Those who wanted to stay with us could stay, and to those who didn’t want to stay we gave money for their travelling expenses. After we had annihilated Liu K’an, the brigade stationed in I-ch’uan surrendered without fighting. In the three great campaigns Liao-Shen, Huai-Hai, and Peking-Tientsin — what was our method of synthesis? Fu Tso-i was synthesized over to our side with his army of 400,000 men, without fighting, and they handed over all their rifles.\textsuperscript{35} One thing eating another, big fish eating little fish, this is synthesis. It has never been put like this in books. I have never put it this way in my books either. For his part, Yang Hsien-chen believes that two combine into one, and that synthesis is the indissoluble tie between two opposites. What indissoluble ties are there in this world? Things may be tied, but in the end they must be severed. There is nothing which cannot be severed. In the twenty-odd years of our struggle, many of us have also been devoured by the enemy. When the 300,000-strong Red Army reached the Shen-Kan-Ning area, there were only 25,000 left. Of the others, some had been devoured, some scattered, some killed or wounded.

We must take life as our starting-point in discussing the unity of opposites. (Comrade K’ang Sheng: ‘It won’t do merely to talk about concepts.’)

While analysis is going on, there is also synthesis, and while synthesis is going on, there is also analysis. When people eat animals and plants, they also begin with analysis. Why don’t we eat sand? When there’s sand in rice, it’s not good to eat. Why don’t we eat grass, as do horses, cows and sheep, but only things like cabbage? We must analyze everything. Shen Nung tasted the hundred herbs,\textsuperscript{36} and originated their use for medicine. After many tens of thousands of years, analysis finally revealed clearly what could be eaten, and what could not. Grasshoppers, snakes, and turtles can be eaten. Crabs, dogs, and aquatic creatures can be eaten. There are some foreigners who don’t eat them. In North Shensi they don’t eat aquatic creatures, they don’t eat fish. They don’t eat cat there either. One year there was a big flood of the Yellow River, which cast up on shore several tens of thousands of pounds of fish, and they used it all for fertilizer.

I am a native philosopher, you are foreign philosophers.

(Comrade Sheng: ‘Could the Chairman say something about the problem of the three

\textsuperscript{34} The figures Mao gives here, as he shifts to the historical present and calls to mind the final showdown with the Kuomintang, are rather those at the beginning of the Anti-Japanese War than those at the beginning of the renewed civil war in 1946, when the People’s Liberation Army had grown to at least half a million men.

\textsuperscript{35} In January 1949, General Fu Tso-i, commanding the nationalist garrison in Peiping (as it was then called), surrendered the city without a fight to avoid useless destruction. He subsequently became Minister of Water Conservancy in the Peking government.

\textsuperscript{36} The legendary Emperor Shen Nung is said to have taught the art of agriculture in the third millennium B.C., and in particular to have discovered the medicinal properties of plants.
The Lung Shan and Yang Shao cultures, located respectively in north-eastern and north-western China, were the two most remarkable cultures of the neolithic period. As Mao indicates, they are particularly noted for their pottery.

37 The Lung Shan and Yang Shao cultures, located respectively in north-eastern and north-western China, were the two most remarkable cultures of the neolithic period. As Mao indicates, they are particularly noted for their pottery.

38 The book called the Chuang-tzu, which was probably composed only in part by the man of the same name who lived in the second half of the fourth century B.C., is not only one of the classic texts of Taoism (with the Lao-tzu and the Book of Changes), but one of the greatest literary masterpieces in the history of China.
destruction of the old. Socialism, too, will be eliminated, it wouldn’t do if it were not eliminated, for then there would be no communism. Communism will last for thousands and thousands of years. I don’t believe that there will be no qualitative changes under communism, that it will not be divided into stages by qualitative changes! I don’t believe it! Quantity changes into quality, and quality changes into quantity. I don’t believe that it can remain qualitatively exactly the same, unchanging for millions of years! This is unthinkable in the light of dialectics. Then there is the principle, ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’. Do you believe they can carry on for a million years with the same economics? Have you thought about it? If that were so, we wouldn’t need economists, or in any case we could get along with just one textbook, and dialectics would be dead.

The life of dialectics is the continuous movement toward opposites. Mankind will also finally meet its doom. When the theologians talk about doomsday, they are pessimistic and terrify people. We say the end of mankind is something which will produce something more advanced than mankind. Mankind is still in its infancy. Engels spoke of moving from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom, and said that freedom is the understanding of necessity. This sentence is not complete, it only says one half and leaves the rest unsaid. Does merely understanding it make you free? Freedom is the understanding of necessity and the transformation of necessity — one has some work to do too. If you merely eat without having any work to do, if you merely understand, is that sufficient? When you discover a law, you must be able to apply it, you must create the world anew, you must break the ground and edify buildings, you must dig mines, industrialize. In the future there will be more people, and there won’t be enough grain, so men will have to get food from minerals. Thus it is that only by transformation can freedom be obtained. Will it be possible in the future to be all that free? Lenin said that in the future, airplanes would be as numerous in the skies as flies, rushing hither and thither. Everywhere they will collide, and what will we do about it? How will we manoeuver them? And if we do, will things be all that free? In Peking at present there are 10,000 buses; in Tokyo there are 100,000 [vehicles] (or is it 800,000?), so there are more automobile accidents. We have fewer cars, and we also educate the drivers and the people, so there are few accidents. What will they do in Peking 10,000 years hence? Will there still be 10,000 buses? They may invent something new, so that they can dispense with these means of transport, so that men can fly, using some simple mechanical device, and fly right to any place, and land wherever they like. It won’t do just to understand necessity, we must also transform things.

I don’t believe that communism will not be divided into stages, and that there will be no qualitative changes. Lenin said that all things can be divided. He gave the atom as an example, and said that not only can the atom be divided, but the electron, too, can be divided. Formerly, however, it was held that it could not be divided; the branch of science devoted to splitting the atomic nucleus is still very young, only twenty or thirty years old. In recent decades, the scientists have resolved the atomic nucleus into its constituents, such as protons, anti-protons, neutrons, anti-neutrons, mesons and anti-mesons. These are the heavy ones; there are also the light ones. For the most part, these discoveries only got under way during and after the Second World War. As for the fact that one could separate the electrons from the atomic nucleus, that was discovered some time ago.

An electric wire makes use of dissociated electrons from the outside of copper or aluminium. In the 300 li of the earth’s atmosphere, it has also been discovered that there are layers of dissociated electrons. There, too, the electrons and the atomic nucleus are separated. As yet, the electron has not been split, but some day they will certainly be able to split it. Chuang-tzu said, ‘A length of one foot, which is divided in half each day, will never be reduced to zero.’ (Chuang-tzu, Chapter 33 G) ‘On the various schools’, quoting Kung-sun Lung.) This is the truth. If you don’t believe it, just consider. If it could be reduced to zero, then there would be no such thing as science. The myriad things develop continuously and limitlessly, and they are infinite. Time and space are infinite. As
regards space, looking at it both macroscopically and microscopically, it is infinite, it can be divided endlessly. So even after a million years scientists will still have work to do. I very much appreciate the article on basic particles in the Bulletin of Natural Science by Sakata. I have never seen this kind of article before. This is dialectical materialism. He quotes Lenin.

The weakness of philosophy is that it hasn’t produced practical philosophy, but only bookish philosophy.

We should always be bringing forward new things. Otherwise what are we here for? What do we want descendants for? New things are to be found in reality, we must grasp reality. In-the last analysis, is Jen Chi-yu a Marxist or not? I greatly appreciate those articles of his on Buddhism. There is some research [behind them], he is a student of T’ang Yung-t’ung. He discusses only the Buddhism of the T’ang dynasty, and does not touch directly on the Buddhism of later times. Sung and Ming metaphysics developed from the Ch’an School of the T’ang dynasty, and it was a movement from subjective idealism to objective idealism. There is both Buddhism and Taoism, and it is wrong not to distinguish between them. How can it be proper not to pay attention to them? Han Yu didn’t talk sense. His slogan was, ‘Learn from their ideas, but not from their mode of expression.’ His ideas were entirely copied from others, he changed the form, the mode of composition of the essays. He didn’t talk sense, and the little bit he did talk was basically taken from the ancients. There is a little something new in writings like the Discourse on Teachers. Liu Tzu-hou was different, he knew the ins and outs or Buddhist and Taoist materialism. And yet, his Heaven Answers is too short, just that little bit. His Heaven Answers is a product of Ch’u Yuan’s

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39 Sakata Shiyouchi, a Japanese physicist from the University of Nagoya, holds that ‘elementary particles are a single, material, differentiated, and limitless category which make up the natural order’. An article by him expounding these views was published in Red Flag in June 1965.

40 Mao is apparently referring to a collection of essays published by Jen Chi-yü in 1963, and reprinted in 1973: Han T’ang fo-chiao suu-hsiang lun chi (Collected Essays on Buddhist Thought in the Han and T’ang Dynasties) (Peking: Jen-min ch’u-pan-she, 348 pp.) In these studies, he quotes from Lenin at considerable length regarding dialectics.

41 T’ang Yung-t’ung (1892-1964), whom Jen Chi-yü acknowledges as his teacher, was the leading historian of Buddhism, who had written on Chinese Buddhism under the Han, Wei, Chin, and Northern and Southern dynasties, on the history of Indian thought, etc. He was Dean of the Humanities at Peking University from 1948 until he fell ill in 1954.

42 Under the influence of Ch’an Buddhism (better known under its Japanese name of Zen), Chinese philosophers of the Sung and Ming dynasties, of whom Chu Hsi (1130-1200) is the most famous, developed a synthesis between Confucianism and Buddhism in which a central role is played by the concept li (principle or reason), commonly known as Neo-Confucianism. For a Chinese view of the relations between these schools basically similar to Mao’s, see Hou Wai-ju, A Short History of Chinese Philosophy (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1959), pp. 33-51. For an interpretation by a Western specialist, see H. G. Creel, Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-tung (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; and London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1953), Ch. 10.

43 Han Yü and Liu Tsung-yüan. Han Yü sought to recreate the simplicity of the classical period, while avoiding excessive archaism. The slogan about ‘learning from their ideas’ quoted by Mao refers to this aim of seeking inspiration from the ancient Confucian sages, while avoiding outmoded forms of expression. He adopted a critical attitude towards Buddhism, but none the less borrowed some ideas from it. Liu Tsung-yüan, whom Mao calls here by his literary name of Liu Tzu-hou, was a close friend of Han Yü.
Liu Tsung-yüan’s essay T’ien Tui (Heaven Answers) undertook to answer the questions about the origin and nature of the universe raised by Ch’ü Yüan in his poem T’ien Wen (Heaven Asks). The latter is translated under the title ‘The Riddles’ in Li Sao and Other Poems of Chu Yuan, pp. 79-97. It is, as Mao says, suggestive but extremely obscure.
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Talking about the deep philosophical questions on this list can help you do some reflection to consider your own beliefs and allow you to understand other people better. Questions about philosophy, e.g. arguments in philosophy, philosophers' positions, the state of the field (not questions about commenters' opinions). Answers on /r/askphilosophy should be: Substantive and well-researched (i.e. not one-liners or otherwise uninformative). Accurately portray the state of research and literature (i.e. not inaccurate or false). Come only from those with relevant knowledge of the question (i.e. not from commenters who don't understand the state of the research on the question). Comments other than answers on /r/askphilosophy should be one of the following: Follow-up... What philosophical questions are easy to understand and to talk about among laymen like me? 79 comments. share. The big questions of philosophy, simmering since antiquity, still press upon us as they did the Athenians of old (and all ancient people who have philosophized): what obligations do we really owe to family, friends, or strangers? Open Culture, openculture.com. The concerns of philosophy have narrowed since Russell’s time, not to mention the time of Socrates, put to death for leading the youth astray. But professors of philosophy still raise the ire of the public, accused of seducing students from the safe spaces of sacred dogma and secular utility. Philosophy Talk (conversations w/ Stanford Faculty incl. John Perry, formerly Ken Taylor, Ray Briggs, Debra Satz, Josh Landy, et al.) Political Philosophy Podcast (interviews w/ Tobias Buckle).