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Arden Roy
a03roy@gmail.com

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Arden Roy

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Part I: Introduction

In the midst of nineteenth-century German intellectual life, Eugen Dühring was to be cemented as one of the most brilliant yet simultaneously polarizing thinkers active in academia at the time. A true renaissance man, Eugen Dühring made several highly significant contributions to philosophy, economics, law, and the natural sciences, all the while incapacitated with blindness. In a world where the state, church, and education system had a monopoly on thought, Dühring sought to annihilate and strike down all that reeked of religious prejudice and superstition. While the cultural climate in Germany was still indebted to literary romanticism and philosophical idealism, Dühring looked towards the emerging positivist and materialist philosophies of the nineteenth century as
a viable alternative in line with the natural sciences. Dühring’s “philosophy of the actual,” or “Wirklichkeitsphilosophie,” was a grand, multi-disciplinary project that sought to lend itself to every facet of knowledge, life, and society.

Ever restless and iconoclastic, Dühring invoked the ire of the scholarly establishment which would later blacklist him from academia, rendering Dühring increasingly bitter and outright vulgar, an indisputable aspect of his decline into obscurity. It was mainly through the engagement of Friedrich Nietzsche and Friedrich Engels that Dühring is even remembered at all. As I aim to present in this essay, critical elements of Nietzsche’s philosophy, as well as the development of a mature, fleshed-out Marxism wouldn’t exist without their respective grappling with Dühring’s thought. Despite many of his flawed personal sentiments, particularly his role within the history of German anti-semitism, Eugen Dühring nonetheless remains a fascinating and important character in the history of ideas who deserves to be further engaged within the English speaking world, where his corpus remains vastly untranslated.¹

Part II: Life

The life of Eugen Dühring is a rather peculiar story: a brilliant polymath that quickly rose to fame and recognition ended his life in an almost biblical fall from grace due to a penchant for outrageous, petty, and emotionally-charged quarrels with the academic establishment. Karl Eugen Dühring was Born on January 12, 1833, in Berlin, Germany to Wilhelm Ferdinand Dühring, whereas his mother is mostly unacknowledged in his autobiography Sache, Leben und Feinden. Wilhelm Ferdinand was a bureaucrat

¹ Unfortunately, the only full-length work of Dühring’s to be translated into English is his vitriolic and anti-semetic work on the ‘Jewish question.’
and former soldier in the Napoleonic wars who was largely responsible for his son’s streak of intellectual iconoclasm, going as far as to undertake his son’s education himself to avoid the dull, mechanical nature of institutionalized education. Wilhelm Ferdinand instilled Dürring with rather progressive views for the time, and it was from his father that Eugen learned to truly think freely.

Dürring’s early intellectual life was fostered by his admission into several of the best schools in Prussia at the time, which would culminate in studying law at Friedrich-Wilhelm University in Berlin by 1853. Dürring deeply resented the religious overtones inherent in the German education system as well as the over-emphasis on historicism that became prominent within the university. In 1861, Dürring finished his dissertation and began his profession as a lawyer. It was around this period that Dürring began to experience issues with his eyesight for the first time, which halted his legal career in its tracks. It was at this point in his life that Dürring would seriously consider making a living as a scholar and writer. After pursuing his post-doctoral qualification, Dürring became fully blind.

Despite his impairment, Dürring set out to become an unstoppable force in the German academic world of the 19th century, and would initially create a rather comfortable life for himself and his family; Dürring ended up marrying his aunt Caroline’s nurse Emilie Gladow and bore two children from their relationship. Due to his debilitating eye condition, he would often have his wife read to him and compose his thoughts into the plethora of books and articles he authored. In his monograph of Dürring, E. James Gay describes Dürring’s new lease on life as follows,
“His blindness actually increased his enthusiasm for justice, truth, and trying to create a new unique approach to scholarship. He believed that fate had instructed him to give up the advantages of academic life in his own way. He would now strive for what he had missed in his studies. Instead of dry historicism with heaps of facts and rhetorical language, he would approach science in a different, fresher way.”

Dühring’s condition, strangely enough, bestowed a vigorous, newly found energy unto him. In 1864, after receiving his habilitation, Dühring started his career as a lecturer, which was wildly successful in the beginning. To supplement the income Dühring received from his lectures, he began writing encyclopedia articles and bits for scholarly journals. When Dühring began writing his first books, he was able to produce them in rapid succession, writing five within the span of two years on a diverse array of topics relating to economics, the natural sciences, and philosophy. Dühring experienced breakout success with the publication of his scientific work, the *Neue Grundmittel und Erfindungen Geschichte des Algemeinen Principes des Mekanik*, winning first prize in a notable essay competition, greatly furthering his fame. At this point, emotional outbursts and megalomania began to seize this rising star in academia intensely, and Dühring’s virulent narcissism would be cemented as a crucial facet of the blind scholar’s legacy. A number of disputes with respected men ranging from government officials to university professors would simultaneously threaten his career yet nonetheless enlarge his growing reputation among students eager to tune into the life of the controversial lecturer.

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Unfortunately for Dühring, he would be fired from his university position in 1877 due to his quarrels with the academic establishment—largely relating to the content of his books—permanently ending his career as a professional academic. This event would cause a great scandal for the university, with many—even theoretical rivals such as Friedrich Engels—coming out in support of the former lecturer, and vast protests were led by the student body. A year later, in 1878, Freidrich Engels published his enduring critique of Dühring, which would only accelerate the decline of Dühring’s influence among the German social democrats. Without the income from his lectureship or the support of the now ostensibly Marxist social democrats, Dühring’s fall into obscurity ended up being as quick as his ascension to fame. Despite this, he retained a small group of dedicated, albeit cultish followers who contributed to his newspaper *Der Personalist und Emanzipator* until his quiet death on September 21, 1921.

Part III: Philosophy

Dühring’s philosophical project distinguishes itself from the general views of his idealist contemporaries for more or less founding the tradition of German positivism. Auguste Comte, the founder of positivism, was mostly ignored by German academics, but Dühring found a certain level of profundity in the teachings of Comte, particularly the exhortations of the natural sciences and condemnation of the grand metaphysical and theological systems that were popular among Dühring’s contemporaries. Two other German figures—namely Arthur Schopenhauer and Ludwig Feuerbach—were also major points of influence, and in the case of the former, a profound disagreement would emerge that would shape Dühring’s early philosophical career.
Dühring’s reckoning with Schopenhauer was the key event that put Dühring on the stage of thinkers worth taking seriously. Like his successors, the logical positivists, Dühring is keen on making a philosophy that adheres to the logic of the natural sciences. But to Dühring, Comte didn’t go far enough in eliminating the transcendent and superstitious, leaving room for what he saw as factors that limited the extent of human reason, a criticism that Dühring applied to Kant as well. However, Dühring’s worldview has an intense ethical and emotional element, which he extrapolates from his particular brand of realism and employs in his critique of Schopenhauer. As Frederick Beiser elaborates,

“Positivism meant for Dühring having a positive attitude toward life, an affirmative stance toward existence. The positivist sees the facts of this life as the ultimate reality, as the sole form of existence, so we should not trouble ourselves about some other kind of reality above or beyond them. We should seek redemption in this life because there is no life hereafter. The highest good therefore must be sought in the here and now.”

Dühring’s philosophy of the actual emphasizes strong ethical connotations and defies the common misconception that materialism is a bleak, mechanistic worldview. Like his spiritual predecessor, Diderot, Dühring sought to synthesize reason with imaginative capacities, thereby giving life aesthetic merit. The evil, painful, and overall negative qualities of life are of great necessity insofar as pleasure and happiness are available to only emerge only in juxtaposition to these negative qualities as Dühring reminds his readers.

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3 Beiser, Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy 1860-1900, 100
Dühring is arguably the first thinker in Germany to respond to the problem of nihilism at length in his work *Der Werth des Lebens*, far before his far more famous contemporary Nietzsche pondered the abyss in his own writings. Unlike Nietzsche, who held to a predilection for aristocratic nostalgia, Dühring championed the cause of the popular masses that were barred from enjoying “the banquet of life” by the decadent ruling classes. Domenico Losurdo observes,

“In Dürring’s eyes, Christian nihilism was rooted ultimately in the profligacy and decadence of the ruling classes of the Roman Empire: ‘Debauchery produces repugnance’, ‘the cult of nothingness of decrepitude’. Even if he proceeded differently, even a prominent leader of German Social Democracy like Bebel ended up blaming on the ruling classes ‘the destruction of the flesh’ of Christianity: it was a polemical and extremist reaction to the ‘bestial materialism that held sway among the rich and powerful of the Roman Empire’.”

From Feuerbach, Dürring finds an endearing source of atheism, humanism, and realism. The critique of Christianity as the alienated essence of man is taken up by Dürring, and greatly informs his zealous critique of religion. Like Kant, Dürring believes a coherent philosophical project can only begin by constructing an epistemology—in this case—where being and thought are ultimately connected in a grand totality, *the actual*, through Dürring’s idea of *sein* (being) that mediates between the two, producing accurate knowledge of the world in the process. In Dürring’s dissertation *De tempore, spactio, causalitate atque de analysis infinitesimalis logica*, the first elements of Dürring’s worldview can be discovered, which will later sprout into the fruitful plant of

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Natürliche Dialektik four years later, providing a much more mature, developed exposition of his ideas.

In Dühring’s philosophy, there is no room for a thing-and-itself that exists outside of man’s capacity to reason; he realizes a plethora of mystical, unconditioned concepts can be smuggled in through this domain—whether it be anything from God to Schopenhauer’s will, and thus vehemently rejects anything that transcends the empirical world, a world which can be totally apprehended by the rational mind. It should be noted though, when Dühring speaks of the mind, he is somewhat evasive in giving a fleshed-out vision of the inner workings of consciousness, vaguely gesturing at a sort of epiphenomenalism. The overall thrust of Dühring’s conception of the actual lends itself to a brand of unitary, materialist monism that refuses the presence of various dualisms, largely taken from his interpretation of the Eleatics. In his Cursus der Philosophie, Dühring says, “Nature and history have a constitution and development whose essence largely corresponds to the general logical relationships of all concepts.”

In setting up the first principles of his philosophy, Dühring turns to the ontology of numbers, beginning with the concept of the infinite. Here, Dühring seeks to ground his system in what he dubs the law of determinate number. This law states the impossibility of an infinite, or undetermined number, and proclaims, rather, that all numbers are ipso facto complete and determined. To Dühring, it would be contradictory to suggest otherwise, an determined infinite number is simply nonsense. From this, Dühring proposes that the general concept of infinity of events is absurd. However, it is

5 Qtd. in Gay, 70
6 Dühring himself summarizes: “the law of determinate number: the accumulation of identities of any actual species of separate things is only conceivable as forming a definite number.” Qtd. in Engels, Anti-Dühring, 55
imperative to distinguish *infinity of events* with a simple *infinite series*, or the ability to count an infinite amount of numbers greater than one another. To Dühring, *infinity of events*, is synonymous with *infinite existence*; the concept of infinity is not something to be tacked onto the nature of reality, instead, *infinity* is nothing less than a *procedure* that describes counting. Dühring continues, every number that exists must be divisible into a finite level of parts. Dühring extends the law of determinate number further, as Robin Small states, “we can assert with certainty that everything in nature which has a magnitude must have a certain determinate magnitude.” Furthermore, Dühring’s argument against the concept of an infinite number carries over to his attack on the use of an “unconditioned,” viewing it as a “hypostasis of rules of explanation.”

From the analysis of the law of determinate number, Dühring proceeds to a broader examination of his metaphysics. To Dühring, time must be finite, and therefore, must be a moment when the world *began*. However, Dühring isn’t necessarily propagating creation *ex nihilo*, rather, time *begins* when the world as we know it starts to evolve from out of a primordial nucleus of sorts that has *always been*. This evolution is governed by what is called the “law of difference,” which is a force of antagonism that animates evolution, rearranging matter from the primordial state and preventing stagnation. This might seem inconsistent at first glance, but it is necessary to keep in mind Dühring’s rejections of various dualisms that act in opposition to one another, Gay elaborates that “the Actual entails an interplay between the *persistent* and the *changing*.” Gay later states, “Dühring’s train of thought is dualistic as far as it, on the one hand, follows the intellect and, on the other, adheres to sensual perception.”

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7 Small, *Nietzsche in Context*, 60
8 Ibid. 70
remains an epistemological problem that Dühring largely fails to completely eliminate in his system. That being said, Dühring’s attempt to synthesize the two are no doubt inventive.

For Dühring, rationality is more or less synonymous with the Lockean account of understanding. As stated previously, Dühring sees rationality as essentially a creative process that reorganizes what is taken in by the sense perceptions into patterns and concepts; Dühring's rationalism leans heavily towards intuition and scorns abstraction, always remaining connected to the harmonious unity of the actual. In his later work, Ersatz der Religion durch Vollkommeneres, Dühring seeks to mend the chasm left by the erosion of religion by taking a cue from Comte and Feuerbach in instituting a new humanistic religion, in this case, where liberatory social structures can fulfill the spiritual needs formerly assuaged by religious superstition.

Part IV: Socio-Political Economics

Dühring’s approach to politics, economics, and the social sciences, in general, is, much like his general philosophy, based on an understanding of the harmonious totality of the actual. Whereas the English economists of the previous generations, namely Smith and Ricardo, were focused primarily on micro-interactions between atomized individuals, Dühring finds himself engaged in a more holistic analysis of society, with an approach that almost borders on Confucian in his advocacy of harmony between labor and capital. Dühring finds two main paragons in political economy, namely, Friedrich List and Henry Charles Carey. From his two mentors, Dühring inherits the critique of laissez-faire from a largely protectionist perspective. However, Dühring is passionately
opposed to protection imposed by the state, and largely critiques the role of government in the economy, believing it to be one of the chief causes of the creation of the obscene imbalance of power between capitalists and workers. Like Carey, Dühring vehemently believes that the social sciences have normative value in approaching the organization of the government and society, thereby lending tremendous influence to Dühring’s political conceptions.

Dühring’s argument for protection is rather applied to social classes rather than nations competing economically. Dühring is of the persuasion that current discrepancies between bourgeoisie and proletariat can be remedied by the self-organization of wage-laborers into worker’s coalitions that will ultimately allow a return to balance within society. Dühring levies his chief criticisms against the Marxist socialists who see revolution as a *deus ex machina* that will usher in a communist utopia due to the inevitable preconditions set down by history, preferring peaceful evolution out of the current system instead. Although Dühring wasn’t necessarily immune to a sense of historical teleology himself, he believed that the French revolution of 1789 was *already* the great transformative moment in history, and that progress could only go upward from there, thereby reflecting an ostensibly liberal disposition in contrast with Marx and Engels’ attempt at a post-liberal framework.

Core to Dühring’s socioeconomic framework is a rejection of mercantile cosmopolitanism as borrowed from List’s nationalist perspective, and an emphasis on decentralization and localism, as advocated by Carey, on whom he had written two books. The local center, to Carey, was a place of “More specialization and
diversification: more interdependence is created within and without the local unit.”9

Whereas with centralization, “one large center gains predominance at the expense of the smaller locales, political and economic interdependence is lost.”10 Carey’s thought, along with sympathetic yet ultimately critical engagements with the utopian socialists (Fourier, Saint-Simon, and Owen) paved the way for Dühring’s “free society,” a system of independent, socialist communes that freely trade between one another, which bears a superficial resemblance to anarchism. As anarchist historian Max Nettlau points out,

“The ideas, called ‘socialitarian’, and also ‘anticratic’, were fundamentally those of the anarchist collectivism of those years, held by the groups of producers freely federated (economic communes). He [Dühring] laid strong emphasis on the free accessibility of the producers to these groups, and even the collectivists of the International had no objection to this, not wishing to create closed corporations which would have led to collective monopolies.”11

Dühring’s theory of exploitation also resembles the anarchist wing of the socialist movement more than the Marxists insofar as it puts emphasis on the political facets of exploitation over the economic facets. The anarchist Proudhon identified capitalist exploitation as a droit d’aubaine, or a legal right inherent in capitalist conceptions of property to reap the collective force that is not sowed by the appropriator, not too far from Dühring’s own conception of exploitation.12 Dühring’s theories have indeed been lauded by many historical anarchists, particularly Gustav Landauer and Johann Most,

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9 Ibid. 94
10 Ibid. 94
11 Nettlau, A Short History of Anarchism, 47
12 For more information, see Proudhon, What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and Government
who read Dühring’s economic works assiduously, with praise primarily directed at the
*Cursus der National und Sozialökonomie* ¹³ When approaching Dühring’s theory of
exploitation, it is necessary to point out, as Gay states,

“He aims to distinguish the factor of the “natural” as opposed to the “manmade”,
i.e. the “pure” phenomena of nature as opposed to “social” conditions created by man.
Production is seen as a pure element of the economic process, reflecting man’s
relationship to nature; distribution, on the other hand, involves man’s affiliation with his
fellow man.”¹⁴

For Dühring, the inequitable distribution of wealth that benefits the powerful and
 crushes the poor is due to ‘criminal government based on force’ and likewise, the
 ‘property based on force’ that it engenders, which flips the Marxist emphasis on the
economic system over the political apparatus on its head. Thus to Dühring, the
impoverished state of the proletariat is very much man-made, and is subject to change if
man chooses, by his own volition, to do so. Once again, a superficial similarity to
Proudhon’s *possession/property* dichotomy might be drawn here, as Dühring is unable
to do away with some conception of property entirely, but rather only absentee
ownership that engenders economic exploitation, which Dühring refers to as
*besitzrente*. The emphasis on the political-legal edifice that in the process of exploitation
puts Dühring squarely in the tradition of ‘juridical socialism,’ alongside Pierre-Joseph
Proudhon and Anton Menger, contra Marx and Engels.

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¹³ E.V. Zenker writes, “Dühring undoubtedly belongs to the Anarchists, and has never very seriously
defended himself against this charge.” Zenker, *Anarchism: A Criticism and History of the Anarchist Theory*, 220
¹⁴ Gay, 187
Dühring’s solution to the ‘social problem,’ as previously stated, lies with neither violent revolution nor political centralization of the means of production into the hands of the government, but rather a system of free, ethnically homogenous voluntary communes, or locally based self-sufficient economies that would freely trade amongst one another with metallic currency. The state will operate as little as possible, only intervening under the gravest violations of justice. The dignity of the sovereign individual is to be respected at all costs within these communities; borders, wage labor, and capitalist conceptions of exploitative property are promptly done away with in Dühring’s ‘societarian’ or ‘anticratic’ free society. However, in the later period of his career, Dühring shifted his doctrine towards a favorable view of atomized economic self-sufficiency, going as far as to delete the passages on economic communes in the third edition of the *Cursus der National und Sozialökonomie*, distancing himself from his socialist adjacent “societarianism” in favor of “personalism,” now taking the stance of a mostly apolitical individualist.

Part V: Natural Sciences

Although much of Dühring’s time was spent engaging with the philosophical and social-scientific problems of his day, much of his studies were also directed towards the realm of the natural sciences, writing books on Mechanics, chemistry, physics, and a

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15 Dühring states, “The right to land and soil and to economic infrastructures, as well as obviously that to dwelling-houses, no longer has the character of the old exclusive property, suited to the ruinous exploitation of the labour force. It is replaced by a form of availability under public law, which outwardly also does not have the power to behave exclusively, since there is freedom to move between the different communes and settle anywhere and an obligation to accept new members according to given legal norms and administrative regulations.” Qtd. in Chilosi, *Dühring’s “socialitarian” model of economic communes and its influence on the development of socialist thought and practice* published in *Journal of Economic Studies*, 297
work on one of his personal heroes, the physicist Robert Mayer. Dühring himself claimed to have invented the *rhigometer*, a device used to measure extremely low temperatures, a claim lambasted by Friedrich Engels in the preface to *Anti-Dühring*. Dühring also cemented his legacy in thermodynamics with the introduction of *Dühring’s rule*, which proclaims a linear relationship between two temperatures that exert the same vapor pressure, an idea invaluable in the manufacturing of evaporators and crystallizers.\(^{16}\)

Much of Dühring’s scientific career surrounded a defense of Robert Mayer, particularly in his book *Robert Mayer: der Galilei des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, accusing Herman Helmholtz of plagiarizing Mayer’s theory of energy equivalence. Dühring would later accuse his contemporaries Winklemann and de Modesir of plagiarizing his ideas on corresponding boiling points in his two-volume work *Neue Grundgesetze zur Rationelle Physik und Chemie*.

Part VI: Encounters with Nietzsche

Often overlooked by Nietzsche scholars is the influence Dühring had on the young philologist turned philosopher. Nietzsche himself owned seven of Dühring’s works, reading and annotating at least three of them extensively.\(^{17}\) The work which arguably had the most influence of these was Dühring’s *Der Werth Des Lebens*, which

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\(^{16}\) According to Jaime Wisniak, “Dühring’s rule has been shown to hold remarkably well for single substances over limited ranges of pressure, particularly when the boiling points of the substance in question are plotted against the known boiling points of a chemically similar substance. In the range of several thousands of millimeters of mercury, the deviations rarely amount to more than 10%.” Wisniak, *Karl Eugen Dühring: Scientist and Political Extremist* in *Journal of Phase Equilibria* Vol. 22 No. 6 2001, 617

\(^{17}\) Nietzsche refers to Duhring, alongside Eduard von Hartmann, as two “lions of Berlin” Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 94
Nietzsche read in the summer of 1875, writing a 50-some page summary in the process. Nietzsche attests to having undertaken this project, “to study Dühring, as the attempt to sort out Schopenhauer and to see what I have in Schopenhauer, what not. Thereafter, yet again read Schopenhauer.”

Nietzsche's opinions towards Der Werth Des Lebens were mainly negative, with much of the criticism directed at the emotivist theory of justice expressed in the book, which postulated revenge as the basis of justice. In Dühring’s view, it is ressentiment—a concept vigorously attacked by Nietzsche—that incites an individual to action when harmed or wronged by another, thereby balancing the scales of justice. Revenge, then, is the reactive sentiment that restores a balance of force, which was, to Dühring, synonymous with justice itself. Nietzsche, the great ‘immoralist,’ however, found plenty to disagree with in Dühring's theory of justice.

Nietzsche’s greatest problem with Dühring in this case is his emphasis on the negative, reactive impulses as opposed to the life-affirming active drives that incite creativity and spontaneity. Dühring’s theory of justice, in Nietzsche’s eyes, codifies

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18 Qtด. in Brobjer, Sources of Nietzsche’s Knowledge and Critique of Nietzsche, published in Nietzsche-Studien 50 (2021), 307
19 Despite Duhring's pleas of originality, the idea of justice as a balance of force finds its origin far earlier in Proudhon, “Like Kant and Comte, Proudhon also argued that social groups would inevitably clash, but saw no directionality to this clash. What guided history was the predominance and mutual balancing of forces. Justice was that system of collective reason which emerged from the confluence of history to justify a particular hegemony of material and group force. Force was therefore as central to justice as justice was to force.” Prichard, Justice, Order, and Anarchy; The International Political Theory of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 16
20 “So much against this tendency in general: but as for the particular maxim of Dühring’s, that the home of Justice is to be found in the sphere of the reactive feelings, our love of truth compels us drastically to invert his own proposition and to oppose to him this other maxim: the last sphere conquered by the spirit of justice is the sphere of the feeling of reaction...To talk of intrinsic right and intrinsic wrong is absolutely nonsensical; intrinsically, an injury, an oppression, an exploitation, an annihilation can be nothing wrong, inasmuch as life is essentially (that is, in its cardinal functions) something which functions by injuring, oppressing, exploiting, and annihilating, and is absolutely inconceivable without such a character.” Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morality, 85-88
weakness and hatred of the strong into the legal edifice, thereby denying the domineering will-to-power that animates life and health of the spirit. Dühring becomes, for Nietzsche, a stand-in for all anarchists, socialists, and anti-semites, who, to Nietzsche, are the chief apostles of ressentiment after Christians.

There is also ample evidence that Dühring perhaps had a role to play in the formulation of Nietzsche’s idea of the ‘eternal return’, particularly in that Nietzsche was attempting to contradict the mechanistic views of natural sciences in favor of a vitalistic metaphysic. The mystic and philosopher Rudolf Steiner echoes this when he speculates,

“Nietzsche made a statement by which he placed himself in conscious opposition to the points of view which natural science represents. This statement is his often-cited teaching about the “eternal return” of things. In Dühring's Kursus der Philosophie, Course of Philosophy, he found an argument that was to prove that an eternal repetition of the same world events is not compatible with the fundamental principles of

21 Robin Small juxtaposes Dühring’s theory of justice with what Nietzsche termed the “innocence of becoming.” See Small, 265
22 Nietzsche’s engagement with anarchism in his published work seems to be relegated to his portrayal of Dühring as a representative of anarchism. While perhaps a fellow traveler, Dühring holds to the need for a limited state, which rules him out as an adherent to the anarchist tradition.
23 Paolo D’Iorio elaborates on this theory, “Now we can go back to the page that follows the first sketch of the eternal return, which triggered our analysis. As we remember, it began with the warning: “Let you beware (Hütet euch zu sagen) that the world is a living being”. Things have now become clearer: Hüten wir uns is the phrase which Eugen Dühring uses at the end of his refutation of Eduard von Hartmann’s system of the world, a system which he regarded as anti-vitalistic because it led logically to the repetition of the identical. Dühring wrote: “Let us beware from such futile absurdities”...Nietzsche uses a parody of Dühring’s phrase Hüten wir uns (“Let us beware”) in order to ridicule and refute at the same time Caspari’s organicism, Thomson’s mechanism, Hartmann and Dühring’s world process and other false interpretations of the universe. He also uses this debate to develop his arguments in favor of his idea of the eternal return of the same.” D’Iorio, View of the Eternal Return: Genesis and Interpretation, published in, The Agonist, vol. III, issue I, fall 2010, 84
mechanics. It was exactly this that led him to accept such an eternal, periodic repetition of the same world events.  

Nietzsche himself is more specific in the notes that would later comprise The Will to Power, where he criticizes Dühring’s view that a past infinity of time is impossible, a belief Dühring extrapolates from his ‘law of determinate number.’ Nietzsche specifically calls out Dühring, and accuses him of confusing “the head with the tail,” and warns against “equating this correct notion of a regressus in infinitum with an utterly unrealisable concept of an infinite progressus up to the present.” as Dühring supposedly does.  

Despite Nietzsche’s mostly caustic tone towards Dühring, it is clear that the blind scholar had an insurmountable influence on Nietzsche’s thought. The critique of asceticism, the unconditioned, and herd-instinct inherent in religion that forms the ripe fruit of Nietzsche’s thought, finds its seed in Dühring’s voluminous oeuvre.

Part VII: Encounters with Marx and Engels

The intellectual relationship between Dühring, Marx, and Engels that would ultimately culminate in Engels’ Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science, or Anti-Dühring began in 1867 when Dühring reviewed the first volume of Marx’s Capital for a publication entitled Erganzungsblatter zur Kenntniss der Gegenwar. Dühring was one of

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24 Steiner, Freidrich Nietzsche: Fighter for Freedom, 161
25 Qtd. in Small, 64.
26 Dühring reciprocated this, coining a derogatory epithet for Nietzsche: “Nichtske,” a play on words, with ‘nichts’ meaning ‘nothing’ in German.
27 There is a possibility that Nietzsche borrows the dichotomy between master/slave morality from Dühring. Dühring refers to Judaism (and by extension Christianity) as a “slave mentality,” preferring the “manifoldness and freedom as much as connectedness and unity came to expression” of Nordic and Hellenic paganism. See Dühring, The Jewish Question as a Racial, Moral, and Cultural Question with a World-historical Answer, 82.
the first German academics to take Marx’s work seriously, thus both Marx and Engels paid close attention to his review. Marx and Engels initially viewed Dühring’s review with a mix of both curiosity and cautiousness. When Dühring published his Kritische Geschichte der Nationalökonomie und des Sozialismus it had become all but clear that Dühring had made himself out to be a theoretical rival by including scathing criticisms of Marx in his new book. Chief among the criticisms that Dühring doled out were Marx’s reliance on the Hegelian dialectic and an overemphasis on eschatological economic determinism that ignored facets of political force in society. As Richard Adamiak states,

"Such a method necessarily resulted in imprecision of analysis and this confusion was compounded by the fact that Marx was using the most ordinary words in a strange and misleading manner. For example, the word "capital" was converted by him into "a special dialectical historical idea." In Duhring's opinion, such methods served no useful purpose and only created "a historical and logical fantasy.""

It wasn’t long before major players among the German social democrats were quick to take notice of Dühring’s attempt at formulating a new socialist doctrine. Eduard Bernstein, Johann Most, and August Bebel began to sing praises of Dühring, which Marx and Engels perceived as a threat, thereby laying the groundwork for Anti-Dühring, seeking elaborate on the more ill-formulated aspects of Marxist thought. Engels’ Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science, a play on Dühring’s own Carey’s Umwälzung der Volkswirtschaftslehre, appeared in 1878 as a fully-fledged book, collecting a series...

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28 Marx seems to have been rather receptive to the review, stating “Duhring's article ... is very decent, all the more so, in that I have been so hard on his ‘master’ Carey.” Engels, on the other hand was far more scathing in his thoughts claiming that “the whole article embarrassment and funk.” Qtd. in Krause, Eugen Duhring in the perspective of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published in Journal of Economic Studies 4/5 vol. 29 (2002), 347-348

of articles that were originally printed in the social-democratic newspaper *Vorwärts* alongside original contributions by Marx. *Anti-Dühring* is a thorough, albeit charged polemic against Dühring, which covers everything from analyses of the Prussian *Landrecht* to Quesnay’s *Tableau économique.* Several of the later chapters would later be extracted and immortalized as the pamphlet *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific,* which aimed to serve as Engels’ introduction to Marxist philosophy.

Engels’ *Anti-Dühring* begins with a discussion of Dühring’s natural philosophy. Engels begins by pointing out that Dühring’s ‘law of determinate number’ is merely a plagiarism of Kant, then proceeds to take Dühring’s brand of materialism to court. According to Engels, Dühring’s understanding of motion as a basic form of mechanical force is insufficient, ignoring that “motion is the mode of existence of matter,” as making motion merely a mechanical force allows for an arbitrary division of matter and motion that supposes the possibility of matter being able to rest, thereby allowing Scholastic notions of causality to creep in. Thus Engels chastises Dühring by noting that his ‘primordial nucleus’ that proceeds space and time cannot change without a mystical first cause, i.e., God, “We may turn and twist as much as we like, but under Herr Dühring’s guidance we always come back again to—the finger of God.” In dealing with Dühring’s charge of Hegelianism, Engels finds it necessary to embrace the influence of

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30 Engels’ bitter and mocking tone is notably imitative of the style Dühring himself employs, weaponized against him. Engels, for example, employs phraseology such as “Herr Dühring, too, honours himself, when, combining the innocence of a dove with the wisdom of a serpent, he bestows such touching care on the moderate additional consumption of the Dührings of the future.” Engels, 328

31 Engels points to Part I, Section II, Book II, Division II, second paragraph, The Antinomy of Pure Reason in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* see Engels, 65

32 Ibid, 68

33 Ibid, 69
Hegel, albeit with reservations. The Hegelian notion of quantitative change engendering qualitative difference is affirmed.\textsuperscript{34}

When Engels is promptly finished with Dühring the metaphysician, he finds much to take issue with Dühring the biologist, who exhorts Lamarck and scorns Darwin. Dühring’s interpretation of Darwin is center stage here, which is loaded with—according to Engels—misdirected spitefulness and vituperation. Whereas Dühring does much to reject the Darwinian theory of natural selection, Engels claims that Dühring’s protests are merely blatant misreadings and that “we nevertheless find it [Darwinism] in the end readmitted by the back door.”\textsuperscript{35}

Engels tends to echo Nietzsche in his critique of Dühring’s theories regarding morality. Like Nietzsche, Engels views Dühring’s claim to have unearthed uniform, eternal laws as pompous and ridiculous. Engels points to the contingency of values throughout different epochs of history, and how they are ultimately bound to underlying economic modes of production and positions of social class. Engels writes,

“But when we see that the three classes of modern society, the feudal aristocracy, the bourgeois and the proletariat, each have their special morality, we can only draw the conclusion, that men, consciously or unconsciously, derive their moral ideas in the last resort from the practical relations on which their class position is based—from the economic relations in which they carry on production and exchange.”\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{34}Engels points to “the change of the state of water, which under normal atmospheric pressure changes at 0 degrees celsius from the liquid into the solid state, and at 100 degrees celsius from the liquid into the gaseous state, so that at both these turning points the merely quantitative change of temperature brings about a qualitative change in the condition of the water.” Ibid, 138

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid, 84

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid, 104
One of Engels’ gravest critiques of Dühring is indeed his reliance on moralizing in setting up his system. Whereas Marx and Engels sought to understand socialism through positive observation, namely, as the result of the inevitable unfolding of history and the class struggle, Dühring’s “treatment of the questions transfers his whole theory of distribution from the sphere of established material facts to that of more or less unstable opinions and sentiments.”

Engels’ treatment of the Dühringian force theory of by far one of the most peculiar discussions in Anti-Dühring. In his review of Marx’s Capital, the discussion of primitive accumulation in Ch. 26 was one of the handfuls of Dühring’s positive takeaways from the book. In a way, Dühring’s force theory can be seen as building upon Marx’s historiography of the brutal process of enclosure, war, and colonization that led to the current distribution of property and wealth. Curiously, Engels rescinds much of Marx’s (and Dühring’s) insights regarding the development of capitalism out of previous historical epochs.

In order to rebuke the idea that political force is the determining mover of the economic order, Engels resorts to a plethora of digressions including meditations on everything from troop formations to the development of warships to prove that it is in fact development of economic forces that lends itself to changes in the political apparatus in an attempt at throwing Dühring’s force theory on its head as, “from whatever side we approach the Dühring economics, we do not make one step forward.

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37 Ibid, 173
38 Ironically enough, Engels almost naturalizes capitalism as a completely peaceful development of historical conditions in order to strike at Dühring. “Historically, private property by no means makes its appearance as the result of robbery or violence. On the contrary, it already existed, even though it was limited to certain objects, in the ancient primitive communes of all civilized peoples.” Ibid, 179
For everything that he does not like—profit, ground rent, starvation wages, the enslavement of the workers—he has only one word of explanation: force, and ever again force.”

In dealing with Dühring’s practical proposals for the economic reorganization of society, Engels reaffirms the Marxist vision of centralization of the means of production, pointing out that Dühring’s penchant for decentralized economic communes ignores the division between town and country, thereby preserving class distinctions based on regional discrepancies in wealth, “there will therefore be rich and poor communes, and the leveling that takes place through the crowding of the population to the rich communes and away from the poor ones.” The preservation of a market-based system and quasi-capitalist division of labor is also marked as insufficient in freeing humanity from the yoke of capital, “things are removed from the sphere of competition, but men remain under its control.”

In conclusion, Engels sums up his judgment of Dühring “in the words: mental incompetence due to megalomania.” The immediate reception to Engels’ polemic was met with mixed responses from the social democrats. Johann Most in particular sought to bar Engels from publishing his polemics in Vorwärts, the organ of the social democrats. Dühring’s followers jumped to defend their master from Engels’ attacks.

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39 Ibid, 238
40 Ibid, 315
41 Ibid, 354
42 Dühring’s follower Abraham Enss published a short pamphlet, Engels Attentat auf den gesunden Menschenverstand oder Der wissenschaftliche Bankerott im Marxistischen Sozialismus attempting to respond to Engels’ charges against Dühring. Engels himself caustically referred to Enss as Dühring’s “valiant Sancho Panza.” and that “he brings home nothing but the old familiar barber’s basin.” Ibid, 341
but ultimately Engels seems to have won the favor of history, as Dürring’s near-total obscurity attests.

Part VIII: Epilogue

In *The Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche wrote of Duhring, “All kinds of higher men and their oppression and blighting (as a case in point, Dürring, who was ruined by isolation)—on the whole, this is the fate of higher men to-day, they seem to be a species that is condemned to die out.” It seems that in the case of Dürring, history has vindicated this statement. Eugen Dürring, a once-promising interdisciplinary scholar of extraordinary learnedness died in obscurity, his legacy left to dissipate into the sands of time, with his final days leveled by admittedly not undeserved attacks on his character and the cult-like image he had curated among his followers.

In the wake of 20th-century Anglo-American scholarship, Dürring’s legacy has primarily been associated with some of the more extreme manifestations of German anti-semitism. Ironically enough, Dürring’s legacy was almost exclusively carried into the twentieth century by Jewish scholars such as Franz Oppenheimer, Theodor Hertzka, and Benedict Friedlaender who embraced much of Dürring’s socio-political analyses. Dürring found a handful of loyal followers in the wake of the Russian revolution; Konstantin Petrov, chief among them, was murdered by the bolsheviks upon

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43 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 277
44 One of Dürring’s former followers, George Himmelserb would write an attack on his former mentor in 1898. The German-Jewish philosopher famously attacked Dürring in a small pamphlet aptly entitled *Dühring’s Haß* in 1922, a year after Dürring’s death.
45 Oppenheimer’s most enduring work *Der Staat* is probably one of the most lucid applications of the Dürringian force theory to sociology
their seizure of power, smiting any proliferation of Dühringian or alternative socialist ideas.\textsuperscript{46}

The value to be found in studying the life and work of Eugen Dühring is not only to be found in his influence on some of the greatest minds of the 21st century, such as Marx, Engels, and Nietzsche but as an original thinker in his own right, one of the last manifestations of the interdisciplinary \textit{renaissance man}. The life of Eugen Dühring also provides a cautionary tale of the knee-jerk contrarian that seeks to alienate all dissenters in order to preserve originality and independence, which in the case of Dühring, merely to his academic destruction and isolation. Currently, Dühring’s dense oeuvre remains almost entirely untranslated and unengaged within the English-speaking world. It is imperative for scholars of intellectual history to account for the thought of the past, as it gives tremendous insight into where we are at the present. The neglected work of Eugen Dühring remains a lost—if not forgotten—continent waiting patiently to be rediscovered.

\textsuperscript{46} Max Nomad claims, “Dühring also became very popular, as a philosopher, with the Russian democratic terrorists (“nihilists”) of the late 1870s and early 1880s.” Nomad, \textit{Aspects of Revolt}, 77