Reexamining Engels’s Legacy in the 21st Century

Edited by
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CHAPTER 4

Engels’s Conception of Dialectics in the Plan 1878 of Dialectics of Nature

Kaan Kangal

What follows is an attempt to question the ways of how Engels coined the term “dialectics” in his Dialectics in Nature. My focus is directed by an interest in re-reading Engels’s undertaking from the perspective of his much-celebrated and downplayed Plan 1878. I would like to make clear from the outset that, by Engels’s dialectics, the Plan 1878 and Dialectics of Nature, I refer neither to a complete and compact account of dialectics nor to the list of contents of Engels’s work nor to a “book.” Rather, I occupy myself with a “work in progress” that reached some stage of maturity at the end of 1870s (documented in a plan), and a work before it posthumously became a “book.” In this regard, a couple of remarks seem to be in order.

Written between 1873 and 1882, Dialectics of Nature was first published in 1925 posthumously under the title Nature-dialectics. In a second edition (1927), the title was changed to Dialectics and Nature. Until the Adoratskii edition (1935), we have had the 1929 and 1931

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