

"Dividing One into Two" and "Combining Two into One" Are  
Two Inseparable Aspects of the Law of Contradiction

- A Debate with Comrades Ai Heng-wu (艾恒武), Lin Ch'ing-shan (林青山)  
and Hsiang Ch'ing (项晴) (潘庆斌) -  
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Having read the article "'Dividing One into Two' and 'Combining Two into One'" by Comrades Ai Heng-wu and Lin Ch'ing-shan ("Philosophy" Supplement No. 433 of Kuang-ming Jih-pao, May 29, 1964) and the article "'Combining Two into One' Is Not Dialectics" by Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing ("Philosophy" Supplement No. 434 of Kuang-ming Jih-pao, June 5, 1964), I feel that they have their noteworthy points, but are also one-sided and subjective.\*

Comrade Ai and Lin hold that "'combining two into one' indicates precisely the most basic law of dialectics - the law of the unity of opposites," while "the method of 'dividing one into two' is the fundamental method for knowing things." Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing holds that "what gives true expression to the law of the unity of opposites is 'dividing one into two,' but not 'combining two into one!'" I hold that these ways of looking at things see only one aspect of the problem, but overlook or abandon and even distort the other aspect. We know that the basic core of dialectics - the law of the unity of opposites - is based on "dividing one into two" as well as "combining two into one," and only this kind of "dividing" and "combining" the same thing gives expression to the whole of the unity of opposites in the contradiction. The substitution of this kind of antithesis - unity, "dividing one" - "combining two" in proper sequence constitute the movement (of opposites) in the development of things. There is no room for doubt in this regard. However, Comrades Ai and Lin on the one side and Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing on the other side each adhere to one aspect in rendering them absolute and isolating them. In the unity of opposites in the contradiction, the former sees only unity

\* The Hsiang Ch'ing article has not been translated, but its arguments against the "two into one" theory are extensively quoted in this article. - CB Ed.

but forgets difference, while the latter sees difference but forgets unity. I am now going to set out my views and discuss these problems with Comrades Ai, Lin and Hsiang, and hope that other readers will also join in the discussion.

Things Are "Divided from One into Two"

Comrade Mao Tse-tung taught us: "Contradiction exists in the process of development of all things; ...in the process of development of each thing a movement of opposites exists from beginning to end." ("On Contradiction") He also said: "Motion, things, processes and thinking - all are contradictions." (Ibid.) This is to say that in the entity of any thing there exist for ever contradiction and two opposites. Why is it that the splitting of a thing will give rise to two opposites? This is because there are inherent in all things contradictions which cause the thing "to divide from one into two." However, once these two aspects are separated, they stand against each other as opposites of the contradiction, struggle against each other, permeate each other and depend on each other.

Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing says: "The meaning of 'dividing one into two' in dialectics is twofold. It means on the one hand that any thing contains two opposing parts, aspects and tendencies, that is inner-contradiction. On the other hand, it means the movement of opposites in a thing, and that one aspect will always head for the opposite aspect, thus dissolving and splitting the entity." Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing is right in this connection. He lays stress on the primary, basic aspect of the contradiction (unity of opposites). This is to say that there exist two opposites in all things, and that all things must be "divided from one into two," thus giving rise to the two aspects of struggle.

Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing says: "...unity of opposites, the law of 'dividing one into two,' is an objective, universal law. All things giving the appearance of unity actually contain two contradictory aspects, and are 'divided from one into two!' He goes on to say: 'We hold that what gives true expression to the law of the unity of opposites is 'dividing one into two' but not 'combining two into one!' The greater part of Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing's idea in this regard is correct. But it also indicates that "dividing one into two" is the whole of the unity of opposites, and not only the principal aspect of it. In this connection, he abandons another aspect of the unity of opposites which is secondary but also indispensable, namely "combining two into one." He holds that "antithesis and unity," "(that is 'dividing one into two,')" are identical. I consider this is wrong. It is quite true that an entity's "dividing into two" is the essence of contradiction, and is also the premise of antithesis, the foundation of unity, "combining two into one." But it also cannot be denied that without "combining two into one," there is no way to talk about "dividing one into two." Under such circumstances, I hold that "dividing one into two" is fundamental and primary, while "combining two into one" is secondary and the inevitable outcome of the former. Their reflection in the law of contradiction is the question of struggle and unity. The struggle of opposites is absolute and conditional, but the unity of opposites is relative and conditional. The repetition of struggle - unity, struggle again - unity again; "dividing one into two" - "combining two into one," "dividing one into two" again - "combining two into one" again...in proper sequence constitutes the dialectical development and movement of things (contradictions). With only struggle but no unity, with only unity but no struggle, with only dividing but no combining, or with only combining but no dividing, there is no way to talk about struggle and unity, "dividing" and "combining."

We may as well give an example for illustration. At the time of the fall of the feudal society and the rise of capitalism, the capitalists, workers and peasants constitute one aspect of the class struggle, while the feudal nobility, etc., constitute the other aspect of this struggle. After the overthrow of the latter by the former, the capitalist society is established, and the feudal society and its rulers are wiped out. But simultaneously with the establishment of the capitalist regime by one aspect (capitalists, workers and peasants) of this struggle (contradiction), this aspect is "divided from one into two," and what is originally one aspect of the contradiction is

divided from one into two aspects of contradiction to form a new pair of opposites which determine the essence of the capitalist society. This gives rise to the antithesis of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the capitalist society. This process is a process of "dividing one into two," but this process of dissolution is not complete, and through the class struggle in the capitalist society, the proletariat is bound to grow strong and triumph, and transform itself into the principal aspect of the contradiction, and the capitalists are bound to be wiped out. Moreover, once the proletariat gains predominance in this kind of contradiction, it will wipe out the capitalists at one stroke, and establish the socialist and communist society. In the communist society, this process of "dividing one into two" is obviously turned into the process of "combining two into one." The capitalists are wiped out by the proletariat, and their vestiges are also eliminated.

At the beginning of the article "'Dividing one into Two' and 'Combining Two into One,'" Comrades Ai and Lin say: "The unity and struggle of opposites is the most fundamental law in the development of things. The method of 'dividing one into two' is a fundamental way of knowing things (underlines added). Dialectics requires us to grasp antithesis in unity and also unity in antithesis in the course of observing, analyzing and handling problems. We must adhere to the concrete historical unity of subjectivity and objectivity and of theory and practice..." They have said here the right thing in most places, and ought to be able to come to the correct conclusion that this "unity and struggle of opposites" and "the need to grasp antithesis in unity and also unity in antithesis" (underlines mine) are precisely the laws of "dividing one into two" and "combining two into one" in things and the dialectics of objective things. They should not have said that "dividing one into two" is the law of "knowing things," and only "combining two into one" gives expression to the law of the unity of opposites - the most fundamental law of dialectics."

Reading on, we will find the mistake of Comrades Ai and Lin hidden in the aforesaid quotation. They say: "An objective thing is 'combined from two into one,' and it is 'divided from one into two' only when it is known. When mapping out the guidelines and policies for transforming the world and handling work, it is also necessary 'to combine two into one,' to grasp unity in antithesis, and also to grasp antithesis in unity." This clearly tells us what Comrades Ai and Lin describe as the method of "dividing one into two" is only "the fundamental method of knowing things," "but not inherent in objective things, while "combining two into one" is inherent in things and is "an objective law that does not shift with the will of man..." No wonder Comrades Ai and Lin call for "the concrete historical unity of subjectivity and objectivity, theory and practice" in the beginning, for subjectivity is "dividing one into two," and objectivity is "combining two into one"; and theory is also "divided from one into two" and practice is "combined from two into one." How are they united? Can it be the forcible imposition of "dividing one into two" which is only a subjective method of knowing things on to "combining two into one" which is "inherent" in objective things? This obviously cannot be established, for how then can we say that "in order to analyze things with the method of 'dividing one into two' and in order to know the law of development of things based on 'combining two into one,' we must formulate lines, guidelines, policies and measures for transforming the world, running all undertakings and handling all problems according to the laws of the objective things themselves?" (Underlines added.) The unity and integration of this kind of "knowledge" and "objectivity" cannot be effected without a leap. Such unity and integration also find expression in the following words by Comrades Ai and Lin. They say: "Work in a locality, sector or unit is itself made up of two opposites and is 'combined from two into one.' To understand and analyze it, the method of 'dividing one into two' must also be used." This is obviously not a logical deduction, for how can it be deduced that "the method of 'dividing one into two' must be used to know and analyze it," because objectivity is "combined from two into one?"

Comrades Ai and Lin may think that the infinity, continuity and unity of the world are absolute, and hence are objective and "combined from two into one." And since there is no possibility for us to know them directly, we therefore make subjective use of the cognitional method of "dividing one into two" to cut the infinite, continuous and united world into definite, interrupted and separate parts so that we can realistically grasp them. It must be known that the world of infinity, continuity and unity is a long river of development in time and space, a world that owes its reality to the genesis and resolution of various contradictions. Therefore, there is limitation to the links of infinity in the long river of infinity; interruption in this long river of continuity; and divisibility in this long river of unity. As a consequence, man is given a realistic material world.

Any person who knows some dialectics understands that in the processes of cognition, thinking and practice, man's viewpoint, standpoint and methodology must be identical with the inherent substance, content and connection of the objective world, otherwise they cannot yield any effect and attain any object. This is why Engels said "Freedom is necessity recognized." (Dialectics of Nature) If we do not recognize and observe the inherent law of necessity [inevitability] of objective things, we are bound to meet with frustrations and will accomplish nothing. This is naturally not freedom. Man's subjective activity is manifested in promoting the development, solution and transformation of contradictions in accordance with the objective law of development of contradictions in nature and society. Consequently, this requires our subjective dialectics to conform with objective dialectics, for the former is the subjective reflection of the latter in the mind of man. Precisely because it is a subjective reflection, it can only continuously and approximately approach the objective reflection, it can only continuously and approximately approach the objective reflection through the activity of recognition and practice. This gives manifestation to the law of the endless antithesis and unity of subjectivity and objectivity. How can it be said that objectivity is "combined from two into one," and recognition is "divided from one into two?" And how can the two be "united?" This is bound to be divorced from the foundation of materialism. Comrades Ai and Lin have "united" them. This is to say, "when guidelines and policies are formulated for transforming the world and handling work, they are again required to be 'combined from two into one.'" Such guidelines and policies are not objective things in being, for in the final analysis they are the products of man's cognitional activity. In this regard, the analytical method of "dividing one into two" has obviously been stealthily replaced by "combining two into one" and is not "unity" in any sense.

Things Are Always "Combined from Two into One"

Since things are "divided from one into two," then the antithesis of "dividing" is inevitably "combining." "Combining two into one" is precisely the antithesis of "dividing one into two," thus constituting the dialectical movement of things by way of "dividing" - "combining," and the antithesis of unity and unity of antithesis of contradictions.

Lenin gave the following illustrations:

- "In mathematics: plus and minus, differential and integral.
- In mechanics: action and reaction.
- In physics: positive and negative electricity.
- In chemistry: the combination and dissociation of atoms.
- In social science: the class struggle." ("On Problems of Dialectics")

They reflect precisely the category of the antithesis of objective existence. We can go on to say: In philosophy: matter and spirit, existence and thinking; in the law of contradiction, the "dividing" and "combining," and the struggle and unity of the two aspects of the contradiction; etc. These categories of antithesis are known to all. If a thing is only divided but not combined (Hsiang Ch'ing) or only combined but not divided (Ai Heng-wu and Lin Ch'ing-shan), then such "dividing" and "combining" will promptly lose their basis of existence.

We have said in the above that as soon as the bourgeoisie assumes power, one aspect of the contradiction which it forms with the proletariat is "divided from one into two." They [the bourgeoisie and the proletariat] are opposed to and struggle against each other, but they must exist in a unified capitalist society according to its class relationship, and depend on and condition each other. With one aspect of the two missing, the other aspect does not exist, and such a situation is "combining two into one." This kind of "dividing" and "combining," that is struggle and unity, continuously moves forward, and by the time the proletariat leaps forward to occupy the principal aspect of the contradiction, it will overthrow the capitalists at one stroke, thus bringing this kind of struggle and unity of "dividing" - "combining" to a new turning point. The capitalists are thus thoroughly wiped out, and the two aspects of the contradiction are "combined from two into one." This kind of "combining two into one" is the beginning of "dividing one into two" in a new thing, and the repetition of this process gives rise to the movement of development from a low level to a high level.

Comrades Ai and Lin say that "the action and reaction between bodies" "combine two into one" and constitute the mechanical motion of bodies. The attraction and repulsion among molecules within bodies "combine two into one" and constitute physical motion.... The assimilation and dissimilation of organic bodies "combine two into one" and constitute the metabolic motion of life...and so on and so forth. All this is correct. If there is only dividing but no combining, action and reaction cannot give rise to mechanical motion. If there is only dividing but no combining, attraction and repulsion cannot give rise to physical motion. If there is only dividing but no combining, assimilation and dissimilation cannot give rise to the metabolic motion of life. But whence come these opposites which constitute unified things? Obviously they come from the unified things being "divided from one into two." Take an organic body which constitutes life for illustration. It is a unified organic body, but from the time it becomes a unified organic body of life, it gives rise to the antithesis of the new - the old, life - death. This is what is called "dividing one into two," and the supercession of the old by the new and life by death in the organic body. This supercession of the new by the old and life by death, that is "dividing" and "combining," constitutes living motion in the development of the unified organic body. This kind of motion lasts until the old or death occupies the leading position in the contradiction, that is death is approaching. When the death of life takes place, we say that this progressive motion of "dividing one into two" - "combining two into one" in respect of the new and the old, life and death is forever substituted by "combining two into one." This gives shape to a dead body. In this unified dead body, there begins once again a new dialectical motion of "dividing one into two" and "combining two into one."

Consequently, Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing says that "dividing one into two" and "combining two into one" are absolutely "antithetic," that "the idea of 'combining two into one' is in every respect antithetic to the idea of the unity of opposites," and that "combining two into one" inevitably leads to the reconciliation of contradictions, "negates the struggle of opposites," and "rejects the inner contradiction of things, and hence rejecting the inner motive force in the development of things and the transformation of things to the opposite aspect." And so on and so forth. This is one-sided, and it is even subjective to say that "'combining two into one' is not the unity of opposites and is also not 'dividing one into two'." We say that unified things are "divided from one into two," and that "dividing" and "combining," speaking according to the meaning of contradiction, are antithetic in every respect in things, otherwise the name of contradiction does not arise. It is also reasonable to say that "combining two into one" stands for reconciliation of contradictions. This is because the two aspects of a contradiction are split from a unified thing, exist in the entity, and depend on each other for existence in the entity, it can only be this or that, and this bears the meaning of reconciliation. If this theory of reconciliation is described as unity, and a new contradiction arises again on the foundation of unity and gives rise to a new split, then this new split again attains a new unity through struggle. This is the dialectics of the development and motion of things.

Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing says: "Dividing one into two" acknowledges the inherence of contradiction within things. Its presupposition is that one and two exist in one. Conversely, "combining two into one" takes two as the presupposition, and holds that two does not exist in one and that one is combined from or formed by two." This is obviously a one-sided misunderstanding. We say that "when things are 'divided from one into two,' this two exists in one." The whole thing itself is a form of "combining from two into one," but the latter "one" is not identical to the former "one." This new "one" is again "divided from one into two," and hence the "dividing" - "combining" of things is a forward motion, and does not go round in a circle. In saying that "'combining two into one' takes two as the presupposition," Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing is right; but it is wrong for him to say that "two does not exist in one." If it is said that things are only "divided from one into two," how can this two give rise to the movement of opposites in things? Does it not mean that they can be divided forever? This obviously cannot be established, and hence they must inevitably be "combined from two into one." The "two" in question which are "combined" are split from "one," and the "one" thus combined inevitably becomes the presupposition of a new "division of one into two." We therefore say that in the motion of "dividing" - "combining" in unified things, "dividing" is the foundation of "combining," and "combining" is the premise of "dividing." None of the two is dispensable.

If Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing also interprets on the same ground "combining two into one" as "bearing two meanings," one being the inevitable existence of the two aspects of the contradiction in an entity, the other the inevitable unity of the two aspects of the contradiction, then "combining two into one" will be as easily understood and accepted as "dividing one into two," and it will gain the place due to it in the unity of opposites.

Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing says "only the acknowledgement that there is two in one can be dialectics and can seize hold of the unity of opposites..." He goes on to say: "The question can only be thus: Either we acknowledge that things are 'combined from two into one,' that this is a law that does not shift with the will of man, and that the method of 'dividing one into two' is wrong and runs counter to the objective law. Or we acknowledge that 'dividing one into two' is correct, the method of recognition and also the objective law of thing, and that 'combining two into one' is wrong. In this regard, there cannot be any reconciliation." Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing also objects to Comrades Ai and Lin's bringing the concept of "combining two into one" into dialectics. Obviously, Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing has not made a dialectical analysis of things. Such a way of thinking as "either A or B," "either this or that," "A cannot be B and B cannot be A," "this cannot be that and that cannot be this," one is one and two is two, and the two cannot accommodate each other, is metaphysical, one-sided, rigid, and divorced from genuine dialectical thought.

"Dividing One into Two" and "Combining Two into One" Are  
Objective Reflections of the Unity of Opposites

The law of contradiction in dialectics, that is the law of the unity of opposites, to express it with a popular term, is "dividing one into two" - "combining two into one." There is no room for doubt in this regard. Chairman Mao said: "All opposites... are on the one hand opposed to each other and on the other hand interconnected, interpenetrating, interpermeating and interdependent, and this character is described as identity." ("On Contradiction") In this connection, interconnection, interpenetration, interpermeation and interdependence refer to none other than unity, and mean precisely "combining two into one."

Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing says: "'Combining two into one' acknowledges that there is two in one, that is, inner contradictions in things. It is precisely due to the mutual exclusion and mutual struggle of these inner contradictions that things change and develop continuously and transform themselves to the opposite." This is also a one-sided interpretation of contradiction. Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing sees only that a contradiction is "divided from one into two" and the relationship of opposites in "mutual exclusion and mutual struggle," but fails to see that contradictions are "combined from two into one," and the unified relationships of interconnection, interpenetration,

interpermeation and interdependence of the two aspects of the contradictions. If there is only struggle and exclusion, but not connection, penetration, permeation, and interdependence for existence, how can there be opposites based on "dividing one into two" in things? How can there be "uninterrupted changes and development? And how can there be transformation of opposites? There cannot be "transformation" with exclusion and struggle alone, but no connection, penetration and permeation. The aforesaid idea of Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing is in contradiction with the following statement of his: "It is very obvious that objective things contain inner contradictions which cannot be resolved without struggle, and without the resolution of contradiction, there will be no development, much less the transformation of things." This means to say that objective things are "divided from one into two." Such struggle and antithesis of "dividing one into two" leads to the resolution of contradictions and "combining two into one." Without such resolution and "combining two into one," there will be no development and transformation of things. If this is the case, it is obviously correct.

There are many instances of such "dividing one" and "combining two" in nature, and it can also be said that they can be found everywhere. If the new and the old, life and death, of the organic body of life are only divided but not combined, how would there be life? If the magnetic bodies of the north pole and the south pole, positive electricity and negative electricity, are only divided but not combined, how would there be the existence and motion of the magnetic field and electricity? If the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the serfs and the serf owners, the slaves and the slave owners are only divided but not combined, how would there be the capitalist society, the feudal society and the slave society? And how would there be any class struggle and social development and movement?

Chairman Mao taught us: "To consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat... is in fact to prepare the conditions for abolishing this dictatorship... To establish and build the Communist Party is in fact to prepare the conditions for the elimination of the Communist Party and all political parties.... to carry on revolutionary war is in fact to prepare the conditions for the permanent elimination of war.... These opposites are at the same time complementary." ("On Contradiction") Here, we are told by Chairman Mao that things which are "divided from one into two" are in fact making preparations for "combining two into one." Chairman Mao's thought is in fact the dialectical thought of "dividing one into two" and "combining two into one." Chairman Mao's statement to the effect that contradictions are things, motion and processes (underlines added) also fully embodies the unity of opposites and the idea of "combining two into one." Can we imagine that there is only struggle but no unity in the two aspects of a contradiction, in action and reaction, in repulsion and attraction, in the positive and the negative, and in life and death? With only "dividing one into two" but no "combining two into one," can there be "things," "motion," or "processes?"

The law of contradiction is the core of dialectics and the natural law reflecting the unity of opposites in objective things. This does not shift with the will of man. The essence of this law of contradiction - the natural law of the unity of opposites - is "dividing one into two" and "combining two into one." The repetition in proper sequence of such antithesis and unity, antithesis again and unity again, such "dividing" - "combining," "dividing again" - "combining again" constitutes the essence in the dialectical development and motion of objective things, and we must not look upon it with any skepticism.

Comrades Ai and Lin see only the latter half. They see only "combining" but forget about "dividing," and even look upon "dividing" as a law of recognition that does not reflect objective existence. Comrade Hsiang Ch'ing sees only the first half. He sees only "dividing," but forgets about "combining" and even excludes "combining." Both are incomplete. Only the unity of them, only "dividing one into two" - "combining two into one" is inherent in things, the most basic law of dialectics, and the whole of the law of contradiction.

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