



PHILOSOPHICAL COMPARISON AND CONTRAST BETWEEN HEGELIAN DIALECTICS AND MARX'S DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND ITS SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS-A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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Abstract: Various scholars and indeed followers of Marxist ideology have always misconstrued the concept of dialectics as well as its major precursors. Many attribute its cursory ideas vis-à-vis historical constellations to Karl Marx due to the overreaching approaches adopted by pure Marxism in their conceptual discourse. This study focuses on the one hand, on the historical background of dialectics with the attendant contributions made by the two prominent writers. On the other hand, the areas of convergence in orientation as well as the divergent views of the champions of dialectics will be scholarly discussed. This study is purely predicated on content analysis which will avail us the opportunity to dwell more on literature consideration to drive home our arguments with absolute precision.

Keywords: Dialectics, Marxism, materialism, dialectical materialism, Hegelian dialectics.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of dialectics is mostly philosophical and has been used for centuries but its basic idea is the centrality of contradictions. While philosophies, and indeed common sense treat contradictions as mistakes, a dialectical philosopher believes that contradictions exist and that the most appropriate way to understand reality is to study the development of those contradictions.

Dialectics is philosophically the art of discovering and using truth by discussion and logical arguments. It is also the criticism that deals with metaphysical contradictions and how to solve them. Dialectics is also a method of

thinking and interpreting the world of both nature and society. It is a way of looking at the universe which is predicated on the axiom that 'everything is in a constant state of change and flux'. Moreover, dialectics explains that change and motion involve contradictions and can only take place through contradictions. So, instead of a smooth, uninterrupted line of progress, we have a line which is interrupted by sudden and explosive period in which slow accumulated changes (quantitative changes) unleashes a rapid acceleration which causes the state of quantity to be transformed into quality. In a nutshell, Dialectics is the logic of contradictions.

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HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF DIALECTICS

Dialectics has been perceived as the practice of arriving at a conclusion by the exchange of logical arguments, usually in the form of question and answer. The word dialectic originated in Greece and was made popular by Plato in the 'Socratic dialogue'. Socrates favoured truth and considered it the highest value. He proposed that truth could be discovered through reason and logic in discussion. He also favoured rationality instead of emotion as the proper way of persuasion. In ancient Greece, philosophers employed the method of dialectics in their teachings.

However, over the years, different forms of dialectical reasoning have emerged throughout history right from indosphere (Greater India), the West (Europe), Socratic Method, Hindu, Buddhist, Medieval, Hegelian dialectics, Marxist dialectical materialism, Talmudic and Neo-orthodoxy.

It is important to point out that dialectics is not synonymous with Debate and Rhetoric, "A Debater" can present his views about a subject with an emotional commitment which may becloud rational judgment and hopes to convince others through persuasion and the use of oratorical skills. However, people who are involved in dialectical discourse are guided by rationality and logical reasoning. On the other hand, Zeno, the Stoic Philosopher, suggested that while dialectics is a closed fist, rhetoric is an open hand. Rhetoric is a contradiction of asking questions without seeking an answer and is intended to persuade, inform, and motivate an audience.

AN OVERVIEW OF HEGELIAN DIALECTICS

G.W.F. Hegel (1717 -1831) was a German Philosopher. He propounded what is known as Hegelian dialectics. Hegelian dialectics is the method through which human history unfolds and progresses in a dialectical process. Hegel presented a history of human consciousness as a journey through stages of explanations of the world. Each successive explanation created problems and opposition within itself, which led to tension that could only be overcome by adopting a view capable of accommodating the opposition at a higher unity.

Hegelian dialectics is usually presented in a three-fold manner which is made up of three dialectical stages of development: a thesis (which gives rise to its reaction) – an Antithesis (which contradicts or negates the Thesis). This leads to disagreement and tension between the two and is resolved through the means of a Synthesis (Hegel, 1807). It is important to note that the above dialectical model is often credited to Hegel but he credits the model to Immanuel Kant whose work was greatly popularized by Hegel (Hegel, 1874 cited in mohammed 2021).

However, Hegel used the Abstract-Negative-Concrete model which is a three-value Logical model that shares similarities with the Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis model. He used the Abstract-Negative-Concrete as a strong foundation in his work because he saw a shortcoming in the Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis model which, according to him, does not show why there is a need for an Antithesis in the first place. His Abstract-Negative-Concrete model clearly shows a state of incompleteness in the thesis, which is expected to pass through the Negative stage to become Concrete, Absolute or a synthesis.

Hegel's work is based on the idealistic concept of a universal mind that through the process of evolution, seeks to arrive at the highest level of self-awareness and freedom (truth). The Negative stage is where the idea passes through the rigors of trial, errors and experience in the journey to completeness to become 'Absolute Idea'. Hegel's philosophy states that although there was repetition of movement in objective and stages or forms of development, none of these ever completely repeated. There was no form in the world that eternally repeats itself or that was changeless, but everything was in constant motion. This agrees with what Boguslavsky et al(1978) stated that

"All things are contradictory in themselves and in vitality. It is only in so far as something embodies a contradiction that it moves"

This constant movement is what is responsible for the constant replacement of phenomena or ideas. Hegel's work is idealistic because they were deduced from consciousness and not from nature. So, he postulated that everything happening in nature and society was merely a



reflection of consciousness which reflects men's idea in what is known as 'Absolute Idea'.

The Premise of Hegelian Dialectics

1. The Heraclites premise of the Hegelian dialectics perceives the world as a self-made everlasting phenomenon that kindles and goes out with regularity, a flux involving external struggles, with the coming into being and passing away of all things.
2. Zeno's method of refutation of his opponents' views by deriving contradictory conclusions from them.
3. Utilizing a method of classification, and definition of general concepts consisting in laying down some general forms of that which is the objects of inquiry and then building up the concepts.
4. The art of arguing and reaching the truth through the critical examination of reason put forward opposite views.
5. The principle of 'Coincidental Oppositorum' (i.e. unity of opposites) in philosophy.
6. The insight that something may be known only through contrast with the opposite.
7. Idea of a substance which is 'caus a sui' (i.e. self-determined);
8. Method of building up a whole philosophy starting from one postulated principle, consciousness of a self, and then proceeding in trials of a thesis, antithesis and synthesis (i.e. a simple assertion and its abstract negation building up a whole in which the two are mediated).

These are the various ideas of dialectics, which Hegel originally worked on to produce a universal, self-developed knowledge of World's process.

AN OVERVIEW OF KARL MARX'S DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

Karl Marx (1818 -1883) was a German Philosopher who obtained a Doctorate degree in philosophy from the University of Berlin in 1841. He became a writer and combined Hegelianism, socialism and political economy as his intellectual orientation. The Marxian theory of historical, and dialectical materialism has Its origin in Hegel's philosophy of dialectics. The work on dialectical

materialism was done by Karl Marx in collaboration with Friedrich Engels. They saw the flaw in the Hegelian dialectics and stated that Hegel stood the laws of dialectics on its head. Their work was hinged on the inversion of Hegel's dialectics through the materialist perspective. Dialectical materialism is a philosophical approach to reality which denotes that materialism means that the material world, perceptible to the senses, has objective reality -independent of mind or spirit (Britannica Online Encyclopedia Inc, 2013). Dialectic materialism holds that every natural, social and intellectual formation is transitory product of material conditions. That all phenomena come into being, develop and eventually perish because of the action of contradictions within them.

Marx and Engels located the laws of dialectics in nature and evolved the laws from it to social existence. Marx materialist' approach to dialectics states that dialectic laws govern the development of the real world, nature and society. According to him, the system of thought is based on the reflections of dialectical laws in nature and society in men's head.

He also postulated that the recognition that matter exists independently and apart from consciousness in the external world is the foundation of materialism. In the past, primitive man could not explain his surroundings and was forced to believe in the existence of natural forces. At this point in man's historical development, he was only able to use simple tools and relied mostly on spirits such as religion and idealism for the understanding of human development/existence. According to Marx, through a period of long range of production, man started to have proximity to nature, acted on nature, transformed and created things for survival such as food, shelter and instruments. At this point in time, man began to perceive that matter has an objective existence (Marx & Engels, 1977).

Ake (1981) also made contributions to the Marxian concept of dialectical materialism and stated thus:

"Think of the world in terms of continuity which pervade existence arid relatedness and with keen awareness that this continuity is essentially very



complex and also problematic. Above all (the approach treats the world as something which is full of movement and dynamics, the dynamism being provided by the contradictions which pervade existence"

So, the approach emphasizes the primacy to material conditions in social analysis, the dynamic character of social reality and the relatedness of different elements of society (Ake, 1981). Practically, Dialectical Materialism is officially the philosophy of Communism. In theory, dialectical materialism is meant to provide both a general world view and a specific method for the investigation of scientific problems. The basic tenets are;

1. Everything is material and that change takes place through the struggle of opposites.

2. Because everything contains different elements that are in opposition, self-movement automatically occurs.

3. The conflict of opposing forces leads to growth, change and development according to definite laws.

The application of this concept to history and sociology is often referred to as historical materialism. Under this doctrine, the social, political and intellectual life of society reflect only economic structure, since human beings create forms of social life basically in response to economic needs. Men are divided into classes based on their relations to the means of production which are land and capital. The class that controls the means of production eventually exploits the other classes in society, and this leads to constant conflicts where the exploited (proletariat) struggles with the exploiter (bourgeoisie). This explains why Marx stated in the Communist Manifesto that "the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle",

(Marx and Engels, 1848). It is this class struggle that produces contradictions which create dynamism in history and the source of progress towards uniformity through the eventual overthrow of capitalism.

DIVERGENT VIEWS AND COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO DIALECTIC

PHILOSOPHIES

1. Hegelian dialectics is idealistic and deals with consciousness while Marx's is materialist and practical.

2. Marx postulated that history is a process of development through conflict, not the conflict of ideas (spirit) like Hegel stated, but real conflict between economic classes.

3. Hegel's philosophy could be likened to the German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth while that of Marx's dialectical materialism was said to come from earth to heaven to correct the mistake Hegel made by standing the philosophy of existence upside down.

4. Marx related his dialectics to the individual (particular) which seem to have priority over the universal idealism of Hegel. Moreover, using the individual 'particular' as the basis for analysis, basic empirical facts such as modes and relations of production and exchange were clearly historical and history is also the history of the development of division of labour.

5. Hegel's dialectics are philosophical speculations which are primarily part of a superstructure. However, Marx perceived the superstructure as being determined by the substructure of basic empirical facts.

6. Hegel postulated that contradictions are inherent in themselves and internal to things. He therefore stated that the purpose of dialectics is to study things in their own being and movement and thus to show the finitude of the partial categories of understanding. This implies that the process is a continuous one that seems not to have an end as a thesis produces an antithesis; a combination which produces a synthesis which equally becomes a thesis and so on. Unlike Hegel, Marx believes that dialectical process will end when the bourgeoisie and proletariat destroy each other and a classless society emerges; it cannot produce an antithesis after that. If all people operate at a level where they have the same relationship to the means/method of production, there can be no further evolution (Marx and Engels, 1848).

7. Hegel considers spirit (consciousness, concept, the subject) as the sources of all that exist on earth and matter (nature, society, the object) as secondary and subordinate. However, Marx's dialectical materialism



recognizes the independent existence of matter as detached from spirit and considers it as secondary and subordinate

8. Hegel's philosophy states that development is completed in the head which he referred to as the 'Absolute idea' and located development in consciousness. However, Marx and Engels (1859) stated that "it is not consciousness that determines existence but social existence that determines consciousness.

POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Many critics have a problem with Marxian theory of economic determinism, in other words known as dialectical materialism and sought to return to Hegelian dialectics. Their aim was to restore the dialectics which exist between the subjective and objective aspect of social life. This brought about a convergence or combination of Hegelian dialectics and Marx's dialectical materialism.

Marx did not deny the existence of Hegel's notion of mental and spiritual processes but stated that ideas could arise only as product and reflection of material conditions. Thus, he perceived materialism as the opposition of idealism (Britannica Online Encyclopedia, 2013).

Raapana and Friedrich (2005) are researchers who have carried out some research on the realities and spreading dominance of Communitarians and its primary tool for change. They stated in their work "What is Hegelian Dialectics"?

"In 1847, the London Communist League (Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels) used Hegel's theory of dialectics to back up their economic theory of communism. Now in the 21 century, Hegelian-Marxist thinking affects our entire social and political structure. The Hegelian dialectics is the framework for guiding our thoughts and actions into conflicts that lead us to a predetermined solution. If we do not understand how the Hegelian dialectics shape our perceptions of the world, then we do not know how we are helping to implement the vision. When we remain locked into dialectical thinking, we cannot see out of the box. Hegel's dialectics is the tool which

manipulates us into a frenzied circular pattern of thoughts and actions. Every time we fight for or defend an ideology, we are playing a necessary role in Marx and Engel's grand design to advance humanity into a dictatorship of the proletariat".

They are of the opinion that Hegelian dialectics is the bedrock upon which the other concepts/philosophies of dialectics draw their strength, especially that of Mark.

Marx' theory of change also has an element of Hegelian dialectics. Both agree that change is the 'becoming and the transformative overcoming' of natural and socially emergent limitations. Lukacs (1922/1965) as stated by Ritzer (2008) did a work on history, class and false consciousness. He was concerned with the dialectical relationship between economic and idealist in a bid to project Hegelian dialectics into Marx's dialectical materialism. Lukacs was able to clearly show a link between objective economic position, class consciousness and the 'real' psychological thought of men about their lives. The concept of class consciousness donated that in capitalism, the prior state of false consciousness must exist, and this is a situation where classes are interested. According to Lukacs (ibid). class consciousness (economic basis) arrived at the stage where it could be said to be conscious (idealistic). At this point, society is transformed into an ideological battlefield, which engenders a situation where those who seek to conceal the class character of society fight against those whose interest are to expose it. Marx's notion of class struggle is manifested in this fight (Marx, 1938). However, for the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist, the class struggle must be raised beyond the level of economic basis and necessity to the level of consciousness (idealist), aim and strong class consciousness.

Hegel's attack on the liberal concepts of the individual is another point of agreement. Hegel argued that contrary to individualism, the source of motivation that guides individuals through the choices they make, and the structure of choices itself, are social productions external to individuals, penetrating the individuals through social interactions. This implies that



the needs and desires of people are determined by the character of social formation and historical system in which they are socialized. This is equally an important element of Marx's concept of dialectic materialism.

The Soviet Union Communists employed Hegelian dialectics to pull down law-based capitalistic, democratic societies that grant the right to private ownership of property and replace them with communist structures. Even though this was Marx's aim with his dialectical materialism, Hegelian model of Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis practically describes the process where the term thesis represents capitalism, the antithesis was the proletariat (the workers who are exploited by the capitalist system and who rise in resistance). This process of conflict and resolution continues until it produces the ultimate synthesis which is represented by pure communism, a new world order or communarians. The Soviets did not give up their Hegelian reasoning when they supposedly stopped being a communist State; rather they merely changed the dialectical language to match the modern version of Marxist concept of Communarians.

CONCLUSION

Generally, we live on dialectics which could be based on either the Hegelian concept of dialectics or Marx's dialectical materialism. For example, building block castles only for them to collapse; feeding a baby to satisfaction only for him/her to throw up or feel like defecating; going to school only to be unemployed or even being employed with a very good certificate only to earn peanuts; what about the unqualified who eventually gets the lucrative job and earns fat salaries; an elected leader who does not represent the interest of the electorates? Life is all about dialectics (contradictions) which we try to understand and which help us to solve problems we encounter in our daily lives.

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