DIALECTIC: A VISIONARY CONCEPT

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Abstract

Study of Dialectic Doctrine is as old as ancient time of Socrates. It is a term used for reaching the truth or realty through a process of contradiction, through negation to negation towards progress to reach reality with the use of Reason. This study throws light on its historical development by analysing the doctrine through passage of time and its clarification by using several theories presented. In short, it is historical analysis of dialectic doctrine based on political theories of ancient and modern ages.

Keywords: Dialectics, Reason, Virtue, Knowledge, Thesis, Anti-thesis, Synthesis, Dialectical Materialism

Dialectic is a process of interaction between two competing forces which ultimately give rise to a new stage of change. It is a continued process because this new stage in return becomes the first stage to compete with another stage of development and eventually reaches to the third higher stage. Thus dialectic process remains under a constant competitive change towards development. Therefore, study of dialectic thought is not only impressive and important but also directly relates to human cognation. God has created human beings with rational faculty which makes a person to know himself particularly with the environment he/she is surrounded with. Accordingly the human being moulds him or herself in a given community or society which is filled with philosophy, religion, physics, and many other elements. All these products of natural environment make a human being to understand him / her and the world he or she lives.

The world in which we live is a heterogeneous with several aspects among them most prominent are physical, biological, social, economic and political. All these aspects individually or collectively combining with each other influence the human being to think, and behave, accordingly. Thus there emerges a stage of two forces competing with each other to reach

the third stage which is temporary as this also has element of a newly created competing force to challenge. Among all these aspects the most significant are social science which relates to ethical value system. Human being reflects upon social environment that emerges because of all these social sciences effect the environment.

Right from the beginning of state system and its institutions remained important being affected by its social environment.[1] These environments affect and mould human lives upon which they reacted with demand individually and collectively. This led to political thinking. Hence, state is as old as recorded history so is political thinking which appeared in social science study as political thought. Dialectics is an important aspect of political thought which emerged thousands years ago with the philosophy of Socrates. Socrates devoted himself to social problem and morality as the essence of society. He emphasised upon validity of social laws and customs which influence human mind. He strongly believed that virtue is knowledge and vice is ignorance.[2] To him, it was not for a person what to know but the way how to know. Thus he made a fundamental distinction between ordinary knowledge and real knowledge.[3] Moreover, Socrates was concerned with teleological explanation of things that is inquiring into the purpose or final cause of any act. He further held that knowledge is ultimate reality which emerges through dialectics.

Socrates became the pioneer of dialectical method. As mentioned above dialectic emerges through two competing forces to come to a synthesis that is a concluding compromise between the two competing forces. Socrates being fully conscious of value of knowledge calling "Knowledge is Virtue", he had vision of universal truth through this concept.[4] To discover this knowledge or truth he made use of dialectical method. Although he was pioneer and used dialectics, he could not give a systematic description of this method. His course of action in his philosophical ideas did not appear in writing rather he used it in unique idea of dialogue and

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[1] Weston La Barre, *The Ghost Dance* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co, 1970); Cited in George Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1973), 3.

[2] Judd Harmon, *Political thought from Plato to the Present* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994), 27.

[3] George Sabine, *A History of Political Theory,* 24.

[4] Ibid, 25.

discussion. This method became dialectical as in all proposed meanings and definitions of concepts during dialogues and discussions; Socrates would bring out defects in them and pursue his own ideas of modification with his own definition rectifying the defects he found in discussions with a group of people he used to sit. Ultimately this procedure of Socrates point and counter point will lead to a real satisfactory definition. Hence, Socrates dialectic became a means of discovery of objective and valid definitions and explanation of concepts used in daily life.

Particularly, in his political philosophy the main source of Plato's inspiration became the idea of Socrates. Plato highly contingent on Socrates concept of dialectics in search of truth. To him also, virtue was knowledge which he described in giving examples of allegory of cave arguing on contradiction to contradiction. Guess or opinion gives half knowledge which ultimately becomes virtue or complete knowledge through a process of using wisdom or reason. Hence, Plato used his own method of conversation and dialogue following Socrates. The difference between the two was Socrates just discussed and Plato wrote it down in shape of his famous book *The Republic*. In these dialogues Plato continuously searched for the truth which to him was "good". In his *Republic* he asked fundamental questions, "What is it that constitutes a state?" And he answered "Knowledge" and "justice." Both related to his theory of dialectic in one way or the other. Through knowledge he found good is only known by rational and legal investigation rather than by intuition. Justice is achieved through a systemic process of finding the correct form of morality reaching the competing forces of natural aptitude, communism of family and property, and state regulated system of education.[5] Both concept of virtue is knowledge and justice implied contradiction to contradiction in form of dialectic which Plato inherited from Socrates.

Socrates desired to awaken thought through discussion and argument to know the own mind of man through his intelligence. Plato's thought, influenced from Socrates in three different forms which may be referred as the competing forces i.e.: theory of knowledge, theory of reality, theory of virtue (knowledge). Theory of knowledge indicates two types of knowledge: Knowledge based upon opinion: real knowledge based on solid

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[5] Arshad Syed Karim, *A Concise History of Western and Islamic Political Thought* (Islamabad: Higher Education Commission, Government of Pakistan, 2015), 4.

foundation which later described specialization.[6] Theory of reality was idealism to Socrates which to him indicated ideas of thing and not in the thing's itself. To him, idea of thing was perfect, supreme and permanent whereas the thing in itself was temporary. Plato called this even half knowledge as it lacked training and teaching to search reality.[7] Theory of virtue is knowledge to Plato sounded perfect because here a person with training and teaching comes to learn the diagnosis of the disease and also knows its remedy. Thus with virtue he has complete or highest knowledge to reach the truth. Hence, Plato developed controlling thought of Socrates philosophy which ended with Virtue is knowledge in his dialectic.[8]

Aristotle studied politics with pragmatic approach.[9] He disagreed with Platonic Utopia criticising his doctrine of deductive method which implied that if the ruler is good the state will be good and so ruler must have Reason and Virtue to rule. Aristotle took opposite view and supported inductive method arguing that state is created by men and so he believed if men are good state will be good. Thus he first studied man and his household which ultimately makes a city state. Aristotle thus rejected Platonic Ideal State being Utopian and gave his concept of Ideal State based on pragmatism.

In the modern times the emerging philosophy of utilitarianism developed a newer concept of contradiction to contradiction. During nineteenth century a new theory, Utilitarianism emerged with Jermy Bentham. In his theory of Utilitarianism which he defined as "the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the soul end of public utility" Bentham developed his doctrine of hedonistic calculus.[10] According to this principle of Utility, Bentham tried to bring out accurate limits of pleasure and pain. His theory of utilitarianism developed antithesis given by J. S. Mill who criticised utilitarian thought in non-hedonistic manner which took Bentham's theory far away from its original thought.[11] Mill rejected Bentham's theory of quality of pleasure as it was not possible to measure it saying that one pleasure could be superior to other pleasure. Debating on that Mill

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[6] Earnest Barker, *Plato and Aristotle* (London: Oxford University Press), 87.

[7] Arshad Syed Karim, *A Concise History of Western and Islamic Political Thought,* 9.

[8] Foster, *Masters of Political Thought* (London, Macmillon & Co.), 15.

[9] George Sabine, *A History of Political Theory,* 97.

[10] Judd Harmon, *Political thought from Plato to the Present,* 737.

[11] Arshad Syed Karim, *A Concise History of Western and Islamic Political Thought*, 68.

criticised Bentham that pleasure is not only in the absence of pain. To him, moral standard requires different things considering pain and pleasure which Bentham could not answer. Mill believed that man desired pleasure and freedom from pain as supreme end of life. For this he believed that a source of quality of pleasure is necessary. And this quality is important because it may be superior to another quality. Hence, he came to new doctrine giving the concept of Liberty. To him, liberty is that where a person is free to enjoy his freedom until he does not harm freedom of others. Therefore, he synthesised that happiness is not self-regarding but others-regarding contradicting with Bentham in his theory of Utilitarianism.[12]

It was Hegel who for the first time took up a concrete step to describe dialectical idealism in thought and action. As mentioned above, Socrates was first to introduce dialectic however, Hegel received dialectic method from ancient Greece he applied in his own way which was much different to that of old Greek idealism. Hegel was influenced by Aristotle as far as Greek idealism is concerned. In modern times influence on him was of modern thinkers such as; Rousseau, Kant and Fichte. Hegel studied dialectical thought with a methodological answer because the dialectic questions were old and they needed new meanings to understand it clearly other than the old Greek thought. In sort, Hegel used the term dialectic related it to the movement of reason as technical process to reach truth in human affairs.[13]

The developed modern society had created progress of science and technology. It developed a conflict with religious and metaphysics thoughts making it secondary factor into human development of mind. The modern world believed in conceiving of scientific purposes in place of a religious traditional Christianity. Before Hegel, Rousseau had already come out with his thought of "the reasons of the heart against the reason of the heads."[14] Therefore, Rousseau considered religion and morals which developed through sentiments. On the other hand, Kant took a different approach. He believed in preserving the autonomy of both science and moral together under its own sphere. He emphasised a contrast between theoretical and practical reason. From both, a new philosophy developed as an

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[12] Ibid, 69.
[13] Suda, (1967), 97-99.
[14] George Sabine, *A History of Political Theory,* 57.

enlightenment which conquered Hegel's mind. He developed a new principle of synthesis. He held that there could be logical justification of morals and religion; but more logical synthesis could be discovered through realising logic of science. In other words Hegel developed a larger concept of reason based on analysing the philosophies of Rousseau and Kant with intellectual mind. This concept developed a new philosophy which he called it dialectic which was virtue based on logical relationship between fact and value. Hegel's philosophy gave a new idealism for understanding the problem of society related to morality and religion. It was considered as a rational with a new definition replacing the law of nature and weakness of philosophy. Hence, Hegel received a special status in the arena of philosophy with the development of dialectic thought with a new vision of examining element of socio moral and religious value called thesis, antithesis and synthesis that became foundation of his political thought of dialectic idealism.

Hegel believed that historically the idea of reason could be unfolded with the result of operating the dialectic.[15] Dialectic is a force which moves the idea and the idea is applied by God. This force is in the process of progress of history which is inevitable. It can't be controlled by human being it is controlled by itself. Hence, the force stemming from dialectic is under invariable progress. Consequently, human beings are always in the realisation of ultimate freedom. This progress works as a movement from one stage to another reaching the higher stage with advance result based on contradiction and conflict.

Hegel from here develops a revolutionary idea in philosophical thoughts under the influence of dialectic philosophy. He begins with the concept that any idea is represented by a thesis which to him not complete in totality because it does not take us to the ultimate truth. With the passage of time this thesis gives rise to another conflicting idea which he called antithesis. He argues thesis and antithesis may go together to an extent but they are in contradiction to one another and therefore, they have conflicting nature with each other. To Hegel, both neither destroy nor goes to different ways. Rather, they merge together with higher elements forming another stage called synthesis which is an improvement out of the conflicting result of the two, thesis and antithesis. Synthesis comes out

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[15] Judd Harmon, *Political thought from Plato to the Present,* 346.

with a new thesis where again a new anti-thesis appears and the cycle continues. According to Hegel, "each cycle produces a higher stage in the historical advance of reason. Each synthesis is a victory for the world spirit, a moment reason towards the ultimate historical goal."[16]

It was Marx who first realised and used a Hegelian dialectic process of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis in his concept of scientific socialism.[17] He dealt with this combined philosophy in four different forms as dialectical materialism; materialistic (economic) interpretation of history; theory of class struggle to understand human history : and theory of value . Marxian thought basically dealt with Dialectical Materialism through which he developed his theory of economic interpretation of history applying on it his theory of class struggle. Hence, Marxian thought basically constituted the foundation which he based on dialectical materialism which developed in the name of scientific socialism and led to the theory of communism. It was used as a practical approach in the Soviet Union by the Communist Party. Through dialectic the CPSU believed that it was dialectic which gave right direction to understand the existing situation of Russia and it made to understand what force of action to be taken for the future development of the existing soviet society.[18] Marx being influenced by Hegel believed that Reason or spirit tough emerges from nature; it is itself not absolute idea. To Marx, human civilization remains incomplete in its different phases and hence gives inadequate expression of Reason. Thus there appears opposite inner necessity due to contradiction in expression and logical reconciliation for a higher level. Therefore, human history develops through concept and negation to negation until it reaches to absolute idea where contradictions are resolved. Hence, there is always present law of negation of negation which takes back to the Hegelian concept of thesis, antithesis and synthesis as stages of development. Marx explains it saying that thesis collapsed because of eternal contradiction giving rise to anti thesis. The antithesis tries to remove the contradiction of the thesis also breaks down for the same reason which is then is replaced by the synthesis which ultimately has valid elements of both thesis and anti-thesis. However, the synthesis may again develop negation of negation and becomes a thesis giving rise to anti-thesis developing into thesis and the process goes on.

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid, 392.

[18] Crew Hunt, *Theory & Practice of Communism* (London: Oxford University Press), 28.

We find difference between Hegel and Marx with reference to their dialectical theories. To Hegel the evolving reality is spirit or reason where for Marx matter and motion. Hegel supported his view considering succession of national cultures where nation brings its peculiar contribution to the human achievement. Therefore, there is a conflict between nations with the passage of history and its moving forces are an idea which is progressing with realisation of idea of freedom. On the other hand, Marx believed those human beings are organized in the course of historical development on the basis of economic class and not nations. Hence, he believed that history moves under the pressure of materialism (economic) rather than ideal forces which results into the conflicting struggle between economic classes rather than nations. Therefore, for Marx the thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis of Dialectical Materialism are economic class and not ideas. This led Marx to believe in Dialectical Materialism giving his theory the title of Historical Materialism of economic interpretation in which he debated the movement of society is based on production which should have no class distinction and no exploitation. Interestingly this Marxian concept represented final synthesis which would not give raise to anti-thesis and with the establishment of classless society the dialectical process of class conflict would stop.

The study of dialectic thought as a visionary concept gives us its interpretation through historical perspective. The term itself appears to be a core concept in the western political thought right from the ancient Greek period of Socrates. Dialectic thought began with a kind of concept but with the passage of time it covert into mechanism with universal kind of awareness relating to negation to negation or contradiction to contradiction. It became part of history of political thought revealing alternative characterisation of truth with competitive theories ending controversy. The doctrine of Dialectic opened a new door to understand self-consciousness of philosophical awareness because it was contradiction or negation which developed a strong source of argument through dialectic doctrine to reach the truth debating with opposite system of discourses. It logical series of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis process created a remarkable element in judging the truth and reality. The method did not take us back to the basic argument of Plato and Aristotle to study philosophy with reference to inductive and deductive methods because the dialectical method is neither of the two. Rather it gives a procedural element based on negation to negation over passing religious or

metaphysics thoughts and emphasising upon human mind differentiating from human heart.

While concluding dialectic thought in clear and correct manner viewing some important philosophers of ancient times. For example, Xenophanes, Parmenides and Zeno were those who use dialectic with logical manner. Then Sophists used it as a technique. Plato influenced by Socrates used it in a true form which was taken up by Hegel in the form of negation to negation. Aristotle gave it higher value as technique based on argumentation. In the modern times Bentham, Mill, Kant, Fichte and Rousseau described it related to human mind and human reason. Ultimately it was Hegel who gave a proper form of the doctrine describing it in a proper method of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. To him it remains on-going process of contradiction to contradiction or negation to negation where it always becomes a challenge to reach the reality. But, Marx brings a stop over on Hegelian thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis, using it in his Dialectical Materialism. He disagrees with Hegel on the question of characterisation of nations and supports his idea of exploitation of materialism. Believing on Historical Materialism of Economic Interpretation, Marx concluded the inevitability of class struggle where the Proletariat will win being majority over the Bourgeoisie and concluded that the synthesis will stop here and there will be no contradiction to contradiction under the Proletariat.