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# UNIT 1 DIALECTICAL METHOD

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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Objective of this Unit is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Dialectical Method (also known as Dialectics and Dialectic), which is one of the most influential philosophical ideas in the history of mankind. The Unit attempts to demystify the seemingly complex idea of Dialectics by providing a lucid account of it as well as the use of the method in different ages in history. The Unit discusses the methods of Dialectics in important classical and modern philosophers - Heraclitus, Gautama Buddha, Socrates, Aristotle, Hegel, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and the applications of these methods. In addition, an attempt is made to discuss the intellectual and historical impact created by the application of Dialectics and Dialectical Method in order to keep students informed about the power of the idea of Dialectic in particular and philosophical ideas in general. It would be difficult to appreciate the power of ideas in Philosophy without being aware of their real-time historical implications. This Unit would give us a fair idea of , forms of dialectics, major philosophers of dialectics, important variants of dialectical method, and the impact of dialectical thought.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION AND A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE METHOD

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The term Dialectic is derived from the Greek terms '*dia*' and '*logos*' which mean dialogue or a conversation between two persons. Dialectics can be traced back to pre-Socratic philosophy and has been used by different philosophers in different eras of philosophy with different meanings. As a result, the term 'Dialectics' doesn't have a single meaning or connotation. This is the first important thing to be taken note of in understanding the dialectical method. The point becomes more obvious in the following brief survey of various thinkers of Dialectics. The initial strands of dialectics were associated with the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. Plato first used the term for the art of discussion,

in which participants try to arrive at truth by exchanging logical arguments. His work *Republic* provides a wonderful demonstration of this discussion method.

Aristotle considered Dialectics as a method of examining the commonly held beliefs by the people. (Aristotle, Topics X) According to Aristotle, Zeno of Elea, an ancient Greek philosopher was the founder of dialectical thought. Zeno produced quite a lot of paradoxes to prove motion is impossible. For example, he argued that an arrow shot from the bow doesn't move because at a given point in time, it would be in rest at some space. Zeno examined the popular beliefs and refuted them based on his logic, hence, according to Aristotle, he was the founder of dialectical thought. Here, Dialectics was meant to deal with the art of argument or discussion.

Apart from these Greek philosophers, German idealist thinkers Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel made use of this method, particularly Hegel. Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, criticizing speculative metaphysics said that it is not possible for human reason to grasp things such as God, which do not fall under phenomena, which are appearances and can be grasped by human intellect. He distinguished phenomena from *noumena*, which consists of things-in-themselves and beyond the grasp of human intellect. Showing the futility of *noumenal* arguments such as the World has a beginning in time and is limited in space, Kant puts forth an equally forceful counter argument like - the world has no beginning and no limitations in space, it is infinite in time and space; and no argument can be proved at the end. Kant called the first argument as Thesis and the second argument Anti-thesis, where the latter proves the futility of the former. He termed this mode of criticism as 'Transcendental Dialectic'. Here Dialectic is a method of refutation.

Fichte, in his theory of consciousness, held that evolution of ego, which is the only reality and source of self-consciousness, takes place in three moments. They are (1) the ego, (2) the non-ego and (3) setting both of them in opposition. He calls the first, the thesis, the second antithesis and the third synthesis. While the ego is the principle of knowledge, the non-ego, is equally independent of the ego and unlimited and a negation of the former. The antithesis is assertion of a non-ego in opposition to the ego. The synthesis is the determination of the first two through one another, in such a way that the ego and the non-ego mutually limit each other. Here for the first time, the dialectics got the triadic method and entered into a speculative plane.

Schelling has attempted to construct nature or the world a priori. His main aim was to reason out the necessary stages in the evolution of nature where he found a dialectical process working through the world. He has comprehended the two opposing activities viz., thesis, and antithesis, which get united in a synthesis. He called this process the law of triplicity, wherein the thesis is action, antithesis is reaction and synthesis is the harmony between the two. Schelling applies the triadic dialectic to every phase of organic and inorganic realms, to individual and social life, to history, science and art. Thus it is evident that Schelling regarded nature as a dynamic evolutionary process of reason moving towards the self-conscious reason of man. He has equated the necessary forms of thought with the necessary forms of being.

The next major thinker in this series is Hegel. Modeled on Schelling's philosophy, presenting his grand philosophical system of the world, Hegel attempts to explain the progress of history through the march of the Absolute or Spirit. According

to Hegel, the Spirit realizes itself in the movement of history. At first, the Spirit was a pure idea. The very affirmation of the Spirit faces its negation i.e. the non-Spirit. The being of spirit negated by non-being of Spirit doesn't result in nothingness but in becoming, the physical manifestation of the Spirit as the World. In Hegel, dialectical theory entered into a speculative explanation of the Nature.

Bringing the Hegelian dialectics down from speculative plane to reality, Karl Marx applied them in history and showed how the human societies were always in a state of change due to clashing interests of different economic classes. Marx's economic interpretation of history postulates that society had progressed from one mode of production to another due to the struggle between the classes. In Marxian theory, Dialectics explain different contradictions in the human societies and a conflictual movement of them would lead to further progress.

Thus, the term Dialectics is used differently in different epochs of philosophy. However, in the history of philosophy, two fundamental tendencies – Dialectics as a theory of knowledge that explains natural/social phenomena and Dialectics as a method of discourse – were identified as the major types of Dialectics. However, often, at least in popular writings, Dialectics is being identified with either of these varieties, particularly with the methods developed by Plato or Hegel.

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## 1.2 TYPES OF DIALECTICS

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According to the first type, Dialectics is theory of knowledge or a method of understanding that explains any given phenomenon/process/object as a unity of opposites. This variant can be called as Phenomenal Dialectics, phenomenal in the sense that - of, relating to, or constituting phenomena or a phenomenon. The second one explains dialectics as a method of logical discourse which tries to derive truth and this variant can be called as Discourse Dialectics, discourse in the sense that a formal, lengthy discussion of a subject, either written or spoken.

**Phenomenal Dialectics:** According to Phenomenal Dialectics, any given phenomenon / object/process would always be in a state of motion and it is a unity of opposites. And the development or change of the phenomenon/object/process essentially happens through a constant and often conflictual movement of the two latent opposites.

The variant of Dialectics owes its beginning to Heraclitus, a great natural philosopher from ancient Greece. He explained that all the objects in nature are always in a state of flux and existence of those objects are possible due to tension between the opposites and unity of them. His famous quote, “You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others go ever flowing on” (William Harris, *Heraclitus - The Complete Fragments*, 20) indicates not just the ever-changing nature of the river but all the phenomena of the Nature. He said, “Everything is and is not, for everything is in flux, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away”. (Rob Swell, *Introduction to The ABC of Materialist Dialectics*) Emphasizing the conflictual nature - i.e. unity of opposites - of the aspects of objects and process, he stated that, “It should be understood that war is the common condition, that strife is justice, and that all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife.” (William Harris, *Heraclitus - The Complete Fragments*, 26)

Friedrich Engels, cofounder of communism along with Karl Marx, wonderfully puts it as “Dialectics is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought.” (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*). He described Dialectics as “The great basic thought that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready made things, but as a complex of processes, in which things apparently stable, no less than their mental images in our heads, concepts go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away.” (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*)

For example, Karl Marx, using the Dialectical Method, theorised that human history was nothing but a chronicle of constant struggle between the divided economic interests of two classes. Analyzing his contemporary times, he opined that capitalism had emerged as the order of the day by defeating feudalism. However, Marx said, its demise was inevitable as it was creating its potential opponent i.e. the working class. The working class would defeat capitalism and progress to the next level in the history i.e. to socialism. In Marxian theory of history, one can see constant change and continuous or conflictual movement of the opposites, two defining traits of phenomenal dialectics. Heraclitus, Gautama Buddha, Hegel, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are major thinkers who developed the phenomenal dialectic method.

**Discourse Dialectics**

Discourse Dialectics is rooted in the philosophy of Plato, who defined the method and used it extensively in his writings. Indeed the word ‘Dialectic’ was first used by Heraclitus who developed Dialectics as a method of argument for arriving at the truth by the exchange of logical arguments. Platonic Dialectic is based on a dialogue between two or more people who may hold differing views, yet wish to pursue truth by seeking agreement with one another. Two major discourse dialecticians, Plato and Aristotle, are discussed in this Unit.

**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

1. Who are the major thinkers of Dialectical Method?

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2) Differentiate between two types of Dialectics.

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### 1.3 DIALECTICS IN CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY

In this section, we shall discuss Phenomenal Dialectics of Heraclitus and Gautama Buddha and Discourse Dialectics of Plato and Aristotle. Heraclitus was a fascinating Greek natural philosopher who predicted quite a few of scientific discoveries made in modern days such as the Law of Conservation of Energy and Law of Conservation of Matter. Heraclitus was deeply concerned about the knowledge levels of his fellow human beings and went on to explain Nature in his cryptic propositions. According to Hegel, Heraclitus was the founder of Dialectic method. His method of Dialectics can be explained by way of two theories - theory of flux and theory of unity of opposites. He famously said – one cannot step into the same river twice and the one exists and does not exist. According to Heraclitus, everything is and is not; everything is in flux, is constantly changing and constantly coming into being and passing away. By saying this, he meant that the river exists since it is there and it is not there since there is nothing but the flowing waters; the human being who steps into the river also exists since he is and he doesn't exist since he undergoes change every second. These notions explain how change is the only permanent law of nature.

#### Theory of Unity of Opposites

Heraclitus maintained that all the phenomena of Nature were possible due to the conflict and unity between the opposite features/aspects that are latent in those phenomena. When he said, “You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others go ever flowing on.” The ‘same river’ and ‘other waters’ are exact opposites. It means, though the waters are always changing, the river stays the same. Indeed, it must be precisely because the waters are always changing that there is a river at all, rather than lake or pond. The message is that river can stay the same over time even though, or indeed because, the waters change. The point, then, is not that everything is changing, but that the fact that some things change makes possible the continued existence of other things. Perhaps more generally, the change in elements or constituents supports the constancy of higher-level structures.

Another insight of Heraclitus, “It throws apart and then brings together again; it advances and retires.” (William Harris, *Heraclitus - The Complete Fragments*, 31) explains elements coming together in a combinatory process, and then dissociating in Nature. This notion is quite important in understanding the phenomena of Nature in its being, becoming and diminution stages. These stages are exclusive and identical at the same time. Thus unity of the opposite aspects of the same object/process/phenomenon makes the change/development possible. Heraclitus' theories of flux and unity of opposites, formed the basis for what was later called as Dialectics, had iconoclastic effect in ancient Greek natural philosophy. He openly opposed the permanence of soul and dogmatic practices of erstwhile religion, thus created foundations for materialism in Western thought. Heraclitus' thought had direct influence on Hegel, who further influenced Karl Marx, which is a clear demonstration of his powerful legacy.

#### Dialectic Method of Buddha

Gautama Buddha, a light dawn on the Indian subcontinent around 563 B.C., infused peace into a disheartened nation with his profound teachings. He



condemned all the dogma associated with erstwhile orthodox Vedic religion. His doctrine of momentariness or *Ksanika Vada*, which was part of his rational teachings, can be considered as Buddhist theory of Phenomenal Dialectic. With this doctrine, Buddha ruled out the eternality of the soul and all the logics that were related to the permanency in the Vedic religion. Buddha emphatically said all the things that have origination must perish and the world is a becoming, it is *Bhavarup*. Everything in this world is merely a conglomeration of perishable qualities. Everything is momentary. This world is determined by the principle of dependent origination and animals, Gods, plants, things, bodies, forms, substances...all are perishable. Everything has a beginning, existence and extinction. This was the middle path posited by Buddha, a way between the views of absolute existence and absolute nihilism. This teaching of Buddha had helped the restoration of rational thinking in the erstwhile dispirited nation. Buddha and Heraclitus, both of them didn't use the term Dialectics. However, this doesn't stop their theories to be qualified as foundations of dialectical method in the East and the West respectively.

### Dialectics of Plato

The term has been connected with Plato in the history of philosophy as a method of discussion. Before going into the details of Plato's Dialectic Method, it is important to know how the concept of natural philosophy, during the time of Heraclitus, had transformed into a method of discussion. August Thalheimer, a German Marxist thinker, theorised that development of a slave labour system had dragged the Greek city state into wars for a perennial supply of slaves, hindered technical progress and also gave rise to parasitic behaviour among its free citizens. (August Thalheimer, *Introduction to Dialectical Materialism - The Marxist World-View, Greek Idealism*) As a result, scientific growth had stopped and questions of natural philosophy had lost relevance, instead questions related to human conduct gained prominence.

Plato developed Dialectic Method as an art of discussion, through which participants try to arrive at truth, by exchange of logical arguments. British philosopher Simon Blackburn defined Plato's Dialectic Method as "The process of eliciting the truth by means of questions aimed at opening out what is already implicitly known, or at exposing the contradictions and muddles of an opponent's position" (Simon Blackburn, *Plato's Republic – A Biography*, p. 104). Plato had popularized this method by making extensive use of this method in his works. The dialectic dialogue is also known as the Socratic Method or Socratic Irony, in which Socrates attempts to examine someone's beliefs and argues by cross-examining his opponent's claims and premises in order to point out inconsistency among them in order to take them nearer to the truth.

According to Ryan Patrick Canney, Plato's dialectical method requires the following: 1) Participation and the appearance of equal status among those involved, 2) Starting the dialogue with commonly held views and ideas, 3) Dialogue that leads to critical reflection amongst the participants, and 4) Connection of ideas brought up in discussion. (Ryan Patrick Canney, *The Dialectic Today: Critically Interrogating the Socratic Method for Contemporary Use*). Plato's method of discussion is different from debate, in which two people try to disprove each other and also rhetoric, which aims at winning over others in an argument by mastering argumentation techniques but not the facts about the subject matter. In his *Gorgias*, Socrates gets Gorgias, a rhetorician, to agree that a rhetorician is actually more convincing in front

of an ignorant audience than an expert, because mastery of the tools of persuasion gives a man more convincingness than knowledge of subject matter. Gorgias concedes this criticism and asserts that it is an advantage of rhetoric that a man can be considered above specialists without having to learn anything of substance. Socrates calls rhetoric a form of flattery and compares it to pastry baking and cosmetic beautification. He says that rhetoric is to politics what pastry baking is to medicine, and what cosmetics are to gymnastics. All of these activities are aimed at surface adornment, an imitation of what is really good. (Plato, Gorgias) Plato had provided solid foundations for quite a lot of philosophical ideas with his irrefutable arguments that formed the basis for Western philosophy. Indeed, he had outlined the important questions that formed the subject matter for philosophers for the next 1500 years.

### Dialectical Method of Aristotle

Aristotle worked on Dialectics at length in his *Topics*. He divided the possible kinds of reasonings in an argument or discussion into four kinds, of which dialectical proposition is the second one: Demonstrations, which are based on premises that are primary and true; Dialectical propositions, which have commonly held opinions as their premises; Contentious, which have premises those seem to be commonly held, but are really not; Mis-reasonings, which are based on the premises that are neither true nor primary. He further defined dialectical proposition as some thing that examines the *endoxos* i.e. commonly held beliefs. However, every proposition and every problem cannot be set down as dialectical. The *endoxos* must not be the view which no one holds or which is obvious to everyone. If nobody holds a particular view, any reasoning would not be possible and if it is obvious to everyone, then there is no place for doubt. The dialectical propositions are a kind of assertion and not demonstrations.

Given the picture of dialectical proposition, the dialectical art comprises of two elements: a method for discovering premises from which a given conclusion follows, a method for determining which premises a given participator will be likely to concede. A dialectical problem is a subject of inquiry that contributes either to choice and avoidance, or to truth and knowledge, and that either by itself or in tandem with some other fact helps in the solution of some other such problem. Dialectical reasoning, according to Aristotle, is useful in a). intellectual training, b). casual encounters and c). the philosophical sciences. He said, "It (dialectical reasoning) is useful as training is obvious on the face of it. The possession of a plan of inquiry will enable us more easily to argue about the subject proposed. For purposes of casual encounters, it is useful because when we have counted the opinions held by most people, we shall meet them on the ground not of other people's convictions but of their own, while we shift the ground of any argument that they appear to us to state unsoundly." (Aristotle, *Topics*, X)

"For the study of the philosophical sciences it is useful, because the ability to raise searching difficulties on both sides of a subject will make us detect more easily the truth and error about the several points that arise. It has a further use in relation to the ultimate bases of the principles used in the several sciences. For it is impossible to discuss them at all from the principles proper to the particular science in hand, seeing that the principles are the prius of everything else: it is through the opinions generally held on the particular points that these have to be discussed, and this task belongs properly, or most appropriately,

to dialectic: for dialectic is a process of criticism wherein lies the path to the principles of all inquiries.” (*Ibid.*) Aristotle’s analysis of Dialectics, as part of his exploration of Logic, provided a beginning for analytical examination of the method.

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## 1.4 DIALECTICS IN MODERN PHILOSOPHY

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### Hegelian Dialectics

After Greek philosophers, it was German idealist thinkers who worked on Dialectic method in an apperceptive fashion. While Kant used dialectics as a principle of self-contradiction, Fichte made use of it to explain his evolution of self-consciousness and for the first time used the thesis-antithesis-synthesis triode. Schelling fully developed dialectics as a method that explains the phenomenon of nature and utilised the triadic method. Based on Schelling, it was Hegel who worked out a complete system of the world through speculative reasoning. He wanted to have the fullest knowledge of past, present and future through this system. Hegel’s system has many similarities with that of Adi Sankara, whose doctrine of Brahman also captures the eternal knowledge.

Hegel argues that “what is rational is real and what is real is rational.” This must be understood in terms of Hegel’s further claim that the Absolute must ultimately be regarded as pure Thought, or Spirit, or Mind, in the process of self-development. According to Hegel’s system, beginning of history happens with the beginning of the primitive Spirit or Absolute Being. This Spirit was so poor and simple that when it had faced its anti-thesis i.e. nothingness and in a perennial and conflictual movement, the synthesis is produced i.e. Becoming. In an unlimited series of phenomena, the Being constructs itself continuously and becomes more conscious about itself. The perennial movement between the opposites i.e. the Being and non-Being make self-construction and self-revelation possible. This reality, or the total developmental process of everything that is, he referred to as Absolute Spirit. According to Hegel, the task of philosophy is to chart the development of Absolute Spirit. This involves (1) making clear the internal rational structure of the Absolute; (2) demonstrating the manner in which the Absolute manifests itself in nature and human history; and (3) explicating the teleological nature of the Absolute, that is, showing the end or purpose toward which the Absolute is directed. Being, in other words, is characterized in its development by three stages: being (thesis), non-being (antithesis), becoming (synthesis). It is in this that Hegel’s system of triads consists. This higher entity, at the same time it becomes being, is lacerated, so to speak, by its opposite (i.e., by non-being), and tends to affirm itself in a still higher entity, and so on *ad infinitum*. This activity of building and of tearing itself apart, with the intention of rebuilding itself *ad infinitum*, is the life of Being.

Another important feature of the primordial Being is rationality. It was essentially a perfect, rational thought that confirms the development of being in the dialectic process that confirms the series of phenomena. This thesis of the World as nothing but ‘Becoming’ helped Hegel to challenge the Aristotelian logic. According to Aristotle, the principle of identity could be formulated because the concept of being is always the same — A is equal to A, and A cannot be its negation (non-A) at the same time and in the same respect. For Hegel, this logic is faulty because it misinterprets reality. For him reality is never identical with itself,



but at every moment changes, passing from what it is to what it is not. Contradiction, therefore, is the life of concrete being. The progress of history happened through a logical process of developing in accordance with the law of coincidence of opposites. This process depends upon a fundamental triad: Idea (Logos), Nature, Spirit. This triad indicates a logical rather than a chronological succession, for the entire process is actuated within the primordial Spirit, in which all is immanent.

Idea or Logos is the system of the pure concept which lay at the foundation of all reality. Nature is the objectivation of the Idea. It is the Idea's becoming other than itself, or its self-extension in time and space. But it is the Universal Spirit which establishes itself in the series of phenomena extended in space and time, with the purpose of developing itself and of gaining consciousness of self. Nature reaches the height of perfection in the human organism, and the human organism attains the peak of perfection in individual consciousness or Subjective Spirit. With the attainment of this supreme stage of perfection there begins the return of nature to the Universal Spirit. Indeed, the Subjective Spirit is the first appearance of the Universal Spirit as rationality and freedom. But in the narrow limits of individuality, the Subjective Spirit can never reach the fullness of rationality and freedom, which is the consummation of the entire process of the Spirit. To realize this ultimate end (the fullness of rationality and freedom), the Subjective Spirit objectivates itself in many super individual forms; i.e., it constructs the ethical world.

The first objectivation is the juridical order or right, which guarantees freedom to all in a measure compatible with the freedom of others. Right can regulate only external conduct. The spirit which aspires to regulate the interior world also, objectivates itself in a higher form, i.e., in morality. Morality concretizes itself:

1. In the family, in which the spirit reveals itself as a union of souls;
2. In civil society, which is a larger and higher community of souls; and, lastly,
3. In the state, the highest revelation that the spirit gives to itself.

The Objective Spirit of the people manifests itself in the State, which is the living God. The living God incarnates Himself now in this, now in that nation, according as the nation realizes more perfectly than any other ideal of civilization. As the Spirit passes from one nation to another, the chosen people by the Spirit conquers and dominates the others. Although the state is the highest objectivation and manifestation of the Spirit,

Hegel places the Universal or Absolute Spirit over the objective spirit. The Absolute Spirit – which expresses itself through art, religion and philosophy — fully actuates the consciousness of its divine nature in a reckoning with itself. In art the Spirit apprehends its absolute essence as an idea expressing a sensible object: the beautiful is an idea sensibly concretized, in which the infinite is seen as finite. In religion, on the other hand, there is the unity of the finite with the infinite. The infinite is immanent in the finite, but in a sentimental, imaginative, mythical form. The Hegelian concept, in which the state is the living God and individuals but passing shadows, and in which, moreover, conflict and war are affirmations of the vitality of the state, has been put to the test in the German nation. Needless to say, Hegel's concept of reality is immanentist, pantheistic and atheistic.

## Dialectics in Karl Marx

While Hegel talks of resolving contradictions removed from Kant's pursuit of objective truth, his understanding of dialectic thought remained rooted in the notion of an ideal distinct from reality. Marx in a significant departure from the idealistic dialectics of Hegel embedded the Hegelian triad of affirmation, negation and the negation of negation in a more discrete zone of the socially apparent and the materially manifest. The idea or the concept for Marx was not something that existed beyond social realities, as was Hegel's wont, but was the direct result of the forces shaping the concepts that underlay social reality. A more direct application of this idea translated into the field of historical materialism, whereby history became a result achieved through the resolution of the contradiction inherent in the hierarchy of social and specifically class, i.e. economic divisions. So for Marx history was a byproduct of the class struggle the attempt of the proletariat, or the economically marginalized, to correct the prevailing contradiction of their own subordinated existence. This was a direct application of the discourse of dialectics into the tangible or the real. A thought process that did not make such a move into the realm of pragmatic action would, for Marx, remain an empty ideology. Something that would be philosophising shallowly, akin to mysticism or spirituality, rather than a concrete imperative to action.

For Marx the demystification of Hegelian Dialectics was predicated upon the principle that the world was "knowable," the human mind in effect stood at the apex of a rational order which interpreted the dynamism of forces associated with social change and rendered that change with the possibility of interpretation: "To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e. the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the idea,' he even transforms into an independent subject, is the *demiurgos* of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the idea.' With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought." (*Capital*, Volume 1, p.29).

This line of thought is central to Marx's idea of control that can be exercised over a knowable and material world. In such a world oppositions of power and authority, divided amongst strata of society that have access to authority and are denied it, are instrumental in initiating moves that would eventually resolve social contradictions premised on class. To iterate an earlier argument, it is such moves working towards a resolution of ideas of control that create history. Anything that exists outside the purview of such a material movement would not classify as history in Marx's account.

The concept of the Being is an integral part of Hegel's speculation regarding the process of knowing. The being, which in other words is the thesis, in trying to know and position itself also privileges the non-being or absence or anti-thesis, eventually the union of such an opposition results in a more absolutist version of 'becoming' where the spirit of the discourse becomes the synthesis. But for Marx this version of dialectic thought privileging speculation remained at the level of dangerous metaphysics, dangerous because it made the individual in society impotent and incapable of action. Marx replaced the notion of unity within Hegelian dialectics with the idea of struggle. And to present it in a more reductive and perhaps vulgar fashion the struggle of a class of people over another with the ultimate aim of overthrowing one and gaining control over the means of production. It is at the height of an almost pre ordained logic that

Marx declares his methodology of Dialectics to be: “[A] scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension an affirmative recognition of the existing state of things. At the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.” (*Capital*)

Contradiction lies at the heart of the critique that Marx offers, so also does Hegel, but for Hegel it is the route towards understanding a transcendent notion of being and space of the real occupied by the being. For Marx the contradiction is in a way pejorative and something that needs to be reconciled keeping in mind the demands of a more equitable social order. And it is to satisfy this demand that ‘the critical’ and the platform it provides for conflict and struggle becomes significant.

### Friedrich Engels

Engels and Marx occupy the same range of the Dialectic spectrum. Engels determined three laws of dialectics from his reading of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*. He elaborated on these laws in his work *Dialectics of Nature*: The law of the unity and conflict of opposites, The law of the passage of quantitative changes into qualitative changes, The law of the negation of the negation. The law of unity and conflict emphasizes the idea of struggle central to Marxian dialectics. In such a space the apparent unities of coincidence, identity and equal action are transient and always subordinated to the struggle embodied by the conflict of opposites. The transition of states in the second law finds social resonance in the analysis of demographic changes and the resultant changes in social structure. The third law highlights the contradictory nature of a delimited being and the divisive tendencies innate to the phenomenon that translate into our understanding of the being.

While Marx believed that Hegel’s dialectic was disrupted by its idealism, and reversed Hegel’s idealistic dialectic from a material position, Engels addressed Marx far more directly. Engels held that Marx’s dialectic is “nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought,” where development of nature and society is the foundation on which the development of thought rests. For Engels all of nature itself was the summation of a continuing dialectical process. In *Anti-Duhring* he contended that a negation of negation is; “A very simple process which is taking place everywhere and everyday, which any child can understand as soon as it is stripped of the veil of mystery in which it was enveloped by the old idealist philosophy.”

In effect, Engels deviates from the far more direct and brutal rationalization of conflict in Marx by tempering the nature of that struggle in a more organic environment. For Engels the state of conflict was a natural phenomenon prevalent in the universe, the upturning of social orders also perhaps a consequence of the consistent impetus for change in the fabric of nature and society. All Nature, from the smallest thing to the biggest, from a grain of sand to the sun, from the *protista* to man, is in a constant state of coming into being and going out of being, in a constant flux, in a ceaseless state of movement and change. (*Dialectics of Nature*)

The building of such momentum manifested itself in the hierarchical inversions highlighted by Marx, but also in the words of Engels, created a natural state of expectancy that governed the change. In short, while the template of struggle is provided by Marx's position, according to Engels the change itself perhaps follows a natural pattern and in a way is anticipated. Thus a doctrine of development is encompassed by the idea of dialectics that is very different from a conventional approach towards a general concept of development. A doctrine that talks of progression in terms of the image of spirals rather than something compounded in a linear fashion.

Here progress is not incremental but abrupt, sudden and in many ways apocalyptic. Engels firmly believed along with Marx that qualitative changes that he spoke of in his writings were only possible through such disruptions. What interested Engels the most was the process of such instrumental change as evoked in his three conceptual laws/premises that he arrived at after a careful consideration of Hegel's idealistic dialectic. What is evident from the evaluation of such concept based cognitive mapping of the ideational being is the negation of the sacred. The emergent pattern then is a complete abjuring of unified terms such as the final or the absolute. This is done for the simple reason that totalizations such as the sacred would permit a social closure whereby the essential contradiction of social divides gain a completely natural sanction, and this is something that a materialistic dialectic espoused by Marx and Engels absolutely seeks to avoid.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

1) What is your understanding of Dialectics in Classical Philosophy?

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2) Differences between Hegel and Marxian Dialectics.

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## 1.5 CRITIQUE OF DIALECTICAL METHOD

Many philosophers have offered critiques of Dialectical Method. One of the general points made is that, in Dialectics, harmony and unity are not emphasized; only tensions, paradoxes and contradictions are highlighted. Critics of Hegel like Arthur Schopenhauer argue that the selection of any antithesis, other than the logical negation of the thesis, is subjective. Then, if the logical negation is used as the antithesis, there is no rigorous way to derive a synthesis. In practice,

when an antithesis is selected to suit the user's subjective purpose, the resulting "contradictions" are rhetorical, not logical, and the resulting synthesis not rigorously defensible against a multitude of other possible syntheses. Karl Popper unleashed a famous attack on Hegelian dialectics, in which he held Hegel's thought was to some degree responsible for facilitating the rise of fascism in Europe by encouraging and justifying irrationalism.

Some critics argue, while the dialectic in the sphere of ideas can be defended, the concept as applied to the movement of matter, in the manner of Marx, contradicts the ways of the natural world. Nature is full of examples where growth and development occurs through the dynamic movement of opposites, such as the positive and negative charges that make up an atom, or male and female animals that mate to produce offspring. However, in spite of the critics, it can be said that Dialectical Method retains a central position in philosophy as an important research methodology providing answers to some philosophical questions.

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## 1.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit we tried to have a general understanding of Dialectical Method tracing it from the Greek period to the Modern times. We have rather elaborately seen the various nuances associated with dialectical reasoning in its varied forms. The effort was to capture how Dialectical Method of argument was central to both Western and Indian philosophical traditions, though in a brief manner. The emphasis was to bring forth the uniqueness of Dialectics which is open, flexible, unassuming, critical, skeptical and holistic method taking into consideration all aspects of reality through rational dialogue in the pursuit of truth in its earnestness.

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## 1.7 KEY WORDS

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<b>Dialectic</b>	: Dialectic is a formal system of reasoning that arrives at the truth by the exchange of logical arguments.
<b>Negation</b>	: Negation involves the resolution of a dialectical contradiction which transforms or resolves a thing, situation or process in certain important respects, while also maintaining some similarity or continuity with the previous thing, situation or process in other respects. Example: Capitalism is the negation of feudalism.
<b>Thesis, Anti-Thesis and Synthesis</b>	: The thesis is an intellectual proposition; Anti thesis is a reaction to the proposition; the synthesis solves the conflict between the thesis and antithesis by reconciling their common truths, and forming a new proposition.
<b>Quantitative Change and Qualitative Change</b>	: It's part of the continuity-discontinuity issue. A quantitative change is a change in numbers. A qualitative change is a change in quality



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