Topic Covered: Paper: C - 8 (Modern Western Pol. Thought)

~~First year~~ Sem - IV	Unit - 4: Hegel - Dialectics and State.
~~Third year~~	
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DIALECTICS of Hegel

Hegel's dialectical method played a crucial role in his political philosophy. By applying the categories of a *thesis*, an *antithesis* and a *synthesis*, Hegel's

major thrust was to solve the problem of contradiction. It attempted to reconcile the many apparent contradictory positions and theories developed by earlier thought processes. As a method of interpretation, it attempted to reconcile the various different traits developed in the past. He never claimed to be its inventor, and even acknowledged that the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates used it.

Hegel's own use of the dialectical method originated with his identification of Kantian critical theory, which meant rejection of the Enlightenment philosophical method based on the scientific approach of studying nature. Crucial to this method was a belief that accuracy came out of a method of reduction, which meant that knowledge emerged out of the detailed study and analysis of parts. Descartes, for example, took recourse to mathematics in search of true knowledge. In Descartes' words, "to divide up each of the difficulties which I examined into as many parts as possible, and as seemed requisite in order that it might be resolved in the best manner possible" (Smith 1989: 165). Critical philosophy questioned the utility of this method in seeking answers to moral problems which arose out of free will and initiation. In this situation, the scientific method became inappropriate.

Hegel's dialectical method presupposed that ideas and beliefs were to be related to their institutions and social structures, i.e. the spheres of the subjective mind and the objective mind had to converge. The categories of subject and object were to go together, as did theory and practice. What apparently looked contradictory were actually dialectical terms, interdependent. This method was to be internally linked to the subject matter. It did not just record and observe, but attempted to build an edifice of a well-connected discourse, which one may accept or reject. It accepted dialogue and conversation, and as R.G. Collingwood pointed out, the very basis of the dialectical method is a "constant endeavour to convert every occasion of non-agreement into an occasion of agreement" (Smith ibid: 168).

For Hegel, dialectics was "the only true method" for comprehending pure thought. He described dialectics as

> ... the indwelling tendency outwards by which the one-sidedness and limitation of the predicates of understanding is seen in its true light ... the Dialectical principle constitutes the life and soul of scientific progress, the dynamic which alone gives immanent connect and necessity to the body of science (Hegel cited in Smith ibid: 203).

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel gave an example of its use in human consciousness, but a more comprehensive political use was found in the *Philosophy of Right*, in which the dialectical process reflected the evolution of world history from the Greek world to Hegel's time.

For Hegel, there was a dialectical pattern in history, with the state representing the ultimate body, highly complex, formed as a result of a synthesis of contradictory elements at different levels of social life. However, the relationship between contradiction and synthesis was within concepts shaped by human practices. Marx too discerned a dialectical pattern in history, but then understood contradictions between the means and relations of production at different stages of history.

Praising Hegel's method, Marx wrote to Engels:

In the *method* of treatment the fact that by mere accident I again glanced through Hegel's *Logic* has been of great service to me . . . . If there should ever be time for such work again, I would greatly like to make accessible to the ordinary human intelligence, in two or three printer's sheets, what is *rational* in the method which Hegel discovered but at the same time enveloped into mysticism (Marx cited in Singer 1983: 77).

However, like many other unfulfilled desires of Marx, namely writing a book on Hegel's political philosophy or a book on the theory of the state, he could never find time to provide for this rational explanation of the dialectical method.

Popper argued that it was possible that contradictions remained in our theoretical perception of reality, but it was impossible that such contradictions were a part of reality itself. Popper argued that our perceptions might be incorrect, but that was not true of reality itself. Scientific progress revealed elimination of contradictions from our perceptions till they reached the proper nature of reality itself. Unlike Hegel, Popper believed that the methods of the natural sciences and those of the social sciences were identical. In this observation, Popper was closer to Descartes than to Hegel.

State

For Hegel, the state represented universal altruism. It synthesized dialectically the elements within the family and civil society. As in the case of the family, the state functioned in a manner that the interests of everyone were furthered and enhanced. It represented the universal tendencies within civil society, thus giving rise to the notion of citizenship. The state had "its reality in the particular self-consciousness raised to the place of the universal". The state was "absolutely rational" and had "substantive will" for realizing itself through history, and was therefore eternal. "This substantive unity is its own motive and absolute end. In this end freedom attains its highest right. This end has the highest right over the individual, whose highest duty in turn is to be a member of the state" (Hegel cited in Bondurant 1958: 212–213).

Hegel perceived the state as an end in itself; it was Mind realizing itself through history. As an idealist, Hegel viewed the state as an organism having "the highest right over the individual, whose highest duty in turn is to be a member of the state" (Hegel cited in Bondurant ibid: 213). Hegel emphasized the public nature of the state, yet he did not distinguish between the private and the public spheres. Hegel examined the different components of the state like the rule of law, the bureaucracy, and the monarchy.