

Review

Dialectics and social transformation in modern political thought: A comparative study of Hegel and Marx

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Whereas Hegel and Marx subscribed to the central role of the dialectics in the historical development of society, they held different standpoints on certain fundamental issues. This study identifies and examines the critical issues and how they contribute to the development of the duo's respective ideas on social transformation. In doing this, the study relies on documentary instrument of data generation and the technique of constant comparative analysis to underline the underlying uniformities and differences on the dialectics and social transformational content of Hegel and Marx. The study reaffirms that despite identifiable shortcomings, on the balance, dialectics, particularly Marxian dialectics remains an option, indeed a useful tool in philosophical analysis of not only how the world works, but a means on how to change it.

Key words: Dialectics, materialism, idealism, social transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Georg W. F. Hegel, 1770 to 1831 and Karl Marx 1818 to 1883, are among the best known beneficiaries of dialectic method and easily the most influential German political theorists. A political thinker of the first half of the nineteenth century often periodized as the metaphysical stage of the modern period (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2013), Hegel was thrilled by the French revolution which occurred while he was in his teens in 1789. The event did not only make impressions on him, but constitute a logical fulcrum to Hegel's contention that "the history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom" (McClean, 2003). Karl Marx's writings belonged to the historical-comparative stage of the modern period. Understandably, Marx was profoundly

historical, analytical and comparative; this in turn provided him with veritable platform to put forward an outstanding political theory that sought to explain the law governing the development of human society. Marx and his friend Engels devoted their attention to the scientific analysis of capitalism. His method of analysis has had profound impact not only political theorization but also on the dialectics of social transformation.

This study is a comparative analysis of the place of dialectic method in the thought content of Hegel and Marx. In political analysis, comparative method involves rigorous examination of political phenomenon so as to establish similarities and differences (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2008). The method enables one to identify

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what is common and uncommon to the two or more phenomena in question. By and large, this paper identifies and examines the views associated with or canvassed by both Hegelian and Marxian dialectics and interrogates their social transformation narratives.

Contextual and conceptual discourses

A wide variety of literature on what constitutes thought in politics or political thought and its character has been accumulated. As pointed out in Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2014), a major character of political thought is that it focuses on the political ideas or thinking of the articulate section of a social formation or community over a certain period. Along this part, Thomson (1969) points out that political thought is better understood by relating it to the context of time, place and personality in which it occurred. The import of this is that political thought takes place within specific environment or what Johari (1987) refers to as the confines of a 'whole community'. Furthermore, though political thought is not detachable from the specific environment or community in which it germinates, it is important to note that the ultimate value or significance of political thought lies not only on its logical interpretation of events in relation to the specific community but really on the fact that those interpretations are also found applicable at other times and places (Thorson, 1969). Having said that, it is also important to point out that the ideas of a great thinker are not necessarily or even probably 'representative' of the thought of his time. Along the line argued in Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2014), this is typically the case with Niccolo Machiavelli and Karl Marx, and of course Hegel. The use of the dialectics or the dialectical method in philosophical analysis has been a central feature of philosophy since antiquity. As a method of argument, dialectics proved to be a useful tool for resolving disagreement. It worked by juxtaposing two contradictory standpoints that continue to cancel out each other through reasoned argument until they reach a meeting point where a new point of view develops, which is the 'truth' being sought. However, Hegel, the great German philosopher, took the dialectical method a step further by trying to locate its role in the historical development of society. After Hegel came, Marx did not only revise Hegelian dialectics but also gave philosophy a new and active role (Popkin and Stroll, 1981). For Marx "philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however is to change it" (Marx, 1977).

Dialectic (also dialectics or the dialectical method) is 'traditionally' a method of argument for resolving disagreement.

According to Engels, dialectics has its origin in early Greek philosophy, in the ideas of Heraclitus of Ephesus (540 to 480 BC) who held that "everything is and is not, for everything is fluid, is constantly changing, coming into

being and passing away. All is flux and nothing stays still. Nothing endures but change" (Mukkerjee and Ramaswamy, 2007) In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant, argues that the word "dialectic" to the ancient Greeks was nothing but "the logic of illusion," by which he meant that "the ancient Greeks used the word 'dialectic' to signify the logic of false appearance or semblance" ("Dialectic," 2014, "Western dialectical forms," para.1). According to him, it was "...a sophistical art for giving ignorance, nay, even intentional sophistries, the colouring of truth, in which the thoroughness of procedure which logic requires was imitated, and their topic employed to cloak the empty pretensions"(Kant, 2010).

In Western scholarship, the acclaimed originator of dialectic orientation and method is Socrates, 469 to 399 B.C. Undeniably, one of the greatest thinkers of ancient Greece, Socrates is also the intellectual father and grandfather of Plato and Aristotle respectively. As argued by Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2005, 2007), Socrates was also one of the best known beneficiaries of Ethio-Egyptian Mystery School System. Socrates' dialectics is unique in its logical system and orientation. Also known as Socratic Method, the doctrine of opposites or thesis and anti-thesis; Socrates' dialectics enabled Socrates to arrive at the basic truths of his inquiry. A major characteristic of Socrates' dialectic according to Popkin and Stroll (1981), Igwe (2005), is that it usually began by proposing a thesis in an argument, opposed by a case contrary – that is, antithetical to the thesis – with both the contrary arguments (thesis and antithesis) being reconciled in a synthesis. This, in turn reconstitutes into yet other thesis in a higher order of argument, and continues infinitely until total and perfect knowledge, truth or solution is arrived at.

The aim of Socratic dialectics is usually to elicit information from the unconscious possessor of information using his dialectic style. As an orientation in political analysis, the onus of proof or falsification lay with the other interlocutor through the contradiction which, he himself confirmed in his argument (Igwe, 2005). In this way, Socrates' method discusses and goes beyond sophistry and its deliberate application of superficial plausible and spacious arguments in disputes and reasoning generally.

The credit for popularizing the dialectics in the classical period goes to Plato who used his dialogues in bringing the idea into the sphere of logical reasoning ("Dialectic," 2014). Although Aristotle argued that it was the pre-Socratic philosopher, Zeno of Elea (490 to 430 BC) who invented it and laid the foundation thereby for its adoption by subsequent philosophers, the purpose of the dialectic method in the classical period did move a step away from its worth as a tool employed by the Sophists of ancient Greece in teaching and demonstrating oratorical skills, to becoming a method of reasoning for resolving disagreement through rational discussion, leading to the discovery of some form of truth' (*Dialectic*, 2014).

This way of looking at the dialectics lingered throughout the medieval era during which philosophers mainly sought to unite religion with classical philosophy, until Hegel and, much later, Marx, both writing in modern times, revisited the idea, but this time in relation to society as a whole. It is interesting to note that dialectic thought system and orientation of Socrates is manifest in latter works of notable political thinkers and analysts in Western scholarship ... Hegel's metaphysical dialectics and Marxian dialectical materialism constitute *ne plus ultra* or typical examples of the influence.

Over the years, attempts such as those of Sabine and Thorson (1973), Ejembi (1983) and Obasi (1999) have been made to classify them into period groups the growth of human thought. For us however, the growth or development of political thought is an evolutionary process encapsulating four broad periods, namely, classical, medieval, modern and contemporary periods. In specific terms, "the modern period span from the end of the fifteen century to about the end of the nineteen century" (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2013). From 1500 to 1800, termed the metaphysical stage of the modern period, political thinkers notably Machiavelli, social contract writers and Hegel, relied heavily on metaphysical, secular, deductive and abstract devices to explain the nature and need for state. The second leg and last stage in the period of modern political thought is the historical comparative stage. As the name suggests, it is essentially historical, analytical and comparative. Within this stage Marx, in company of his friend Engels devoted their attention to the scientific analysis of capitalism much as they sought to explain the law governing the development of human society.

The relevance and uniqueness of the Hegelian and Marxist dialectics when compared with other forms stem from the fact that they make the whole society their object of study, and try to interpret its historical development, albeit differently. This study takes a look at Hegel and Marx on dialectics and social transformation with view to finding out what they have in common and what they see differently.

Hegelian dialectics and social transformation

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a German idealist philosopher, often referred as "one of the most influential thinkers of the 19th century (Baird, 2009) was schooled in Greek and Roman classics at the Stuttgart gymnasium (preparatory school). He completed a course of study in philosophy and theology at the University of Tubingen in 1788. In 1818, after having held other teaching appointments, he was invited to lecture at the University of Berlin where he remained until his demise. Among his most important works are: *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807), *the Science of Logic* (1812 to 16), *the Philosophy of Right* (1821) and a host of others (Hampshire-Monk,

1992; Fraser in Mclean, 2003; Igwe, 2005).

Hegel's most important achievement in the realm of philosophical thought is perhaps his reviving of the concept of dialectics as a tool for cognizing the world and its historical processes. According to Mukherjee and Ramaswamy (2007) "it was Hegel who offered a systematic exposition of the concept." As a historicist, he believed that the world is a continuous unfolding of history and, therefore, in constant motion. This view drove him to further explore the nature of this 'motion' and what might be responsible for it. It is at this point that the concept of dialectics, though retaining something of the old, came in handy. It has been noted at the outset of this paper that the dialectics was originally a method of resolving disagreement through a process of rational discussion. It worked by countering a standpoint by introducing its opposite or contradictory standpoint such that in the end, the new standpoint that evolves retains something of the two opposing standpoints while at the same time resolving the disagreement. It resolves the disagreement because it does not entirely discard the initial standpoints of opposing parties, but creates something new which is superior and satisfying.

Hegel adopted, re-tooled and applied this principle in the process of explaining how social transformation or changes take place. He did this by extending the scope of consideration of the dialectical method to cover human society as a whole, while retaining its key principle of "the conflict of opposites." Hence, just like in a dialectical conversation with opposing ideas that are eventually reconciled at a higher level of 'truth', what we call history, for Hegel, is nothing but a product of the conflict of opposites in society. As Afanasyev (1980) points out.

Hegel evolved the basic laws of dialectics governing the development of ideas and thoughts. He showed that the development of ideas did not follow a closed circuit, but rose from lower to higher forms, that quantitative changes turned into qualitative ones in this process and that contradictions were the source of development.

Next, Hegel tried to establish the source of this conflict. At this point he turned to the cultures of different societies and the ideas they espoused, (as we shall see later, a major point of divergence between him and Marx who would rather substitute 'national cultures' for 'the system of productive forces' and "ideas" for "social classes"), noting that the conflict of ideas in historic cultures is the real driver of social change or transformation, hence shaping history (Sabine and Thorson, 1973). As Schumaker (2008) observes "In very general terms, Hegel proposed that historical progress occurred as societies acquired ever better understandings of such values as freedom and equality through the conflict of old ideas (called theses) with their opposites (antitheses)". Hegel supported his claims by showing how:

The ideas that supported the highly un-free and unequal

conditions of slaveholding societies were opposed by antithetical ideas of freedom and equality, and the first synthesis of these contrasting ideas occurred in feudal society where serfs remained bound to their masters (the nobility) but the domination of nobles over serfs was less complete than that of slaveholders over slaves and the inequalities among these classes were attenuated by the greater obligations that nobles owed serfs (Schumaker: 114).

It has been argued elsewhere though that Hegel never used the triadic formulation of 'thesis, antithesis and synthesis' in his exposition on the dialectics. This usage has been attributed to Heinrich Moritz Chalybaus, the 19th century German philosopher and exegetist (*Dialectic*, 2014). According to this source, "Hegel did use a three-valued logical model" that were "very similar to the antithesis model," but his "most usual terms were: Abstract-Negative-Concrete," which appear "in many of his works." (*Hegelian Dialectic*, para.2). Another triad attributed to Hegel from which he derived his dialectics is: Immediate-Mediate-Concrete (The Phenomenology of Spirit, 2014). In the foregoing triads, as in the numerous triadic arrangements that appear in his writings, Hegel was probably trying to show how an idea that immediately occur to our senses appear vague or too intangible to be comprehended, (which is 'the negative' or its own contradiction), hence, requiring some form of concretisation, which come through the mediative function of the rational processes of the mind. Thus for Hegel, "The process of development is from immediate to mediate, from what it is implicitly to what it is explicitly" (Hegel, 2001). Schumaker (2008) sums up the crux of Hegelian dialectics in relation to social transformation as follows:

In short, Hegel thought that better social and political ideas emerged when deficient understandings (theses) encountered their opposite understandings (antitheses) and were resolved by better understandings (syntheses). The dialectical process of ever improving world, according to Hegel, result in a post-historical stage- an "end of history" - where all deficient ideas would have been overcome and humans would be governed by absolutely correct ideas, by pure rationality.

This brings us to another important aspect of Hegelian dialectics in which again he differs significantly from Marx. And this has to do with how ideas which eventually grow into noticeable conflicting elements come to be in the first place. It is here that we are introduced to Hegel's idea of the Absolute or Absolute Spirit. Quite reminiscent of the ideas of Plato on 'the Good', the idea of the Absolute, or Absolute Spirit as conceived by Hegel represents "...reality, or the total developmental process of everything that is...." (Baird, 2009). In other words, Hegel perceived the Absolute as pure 'Thought' or

'Consciousness', which, however, can and does manifest itself both in nature and in human history. He averred, therefore, that "Nature is Absolute Thought or Being objectifying itself in material form. Finite minds and human history are the process of the Absolute manifesting itself in that which is most kin to itself, namely, spirit or consciousness" (*Dialectic*, para.2).

Hegel's foregoing analysis on the nature of the absolute brings us face to face with three important postulations of his which formed the basis of a counter theory enunciated by Karl Marx years later:

Firstly, that human history is a continuous evolution of conflicting ideas emanating from different cultures; secondly, that the process of history is initiated by an 'Objective Consciousness' (which presupposes God, or a superhuman or, in Hegelian terms, 'the Absolute Idea and World Spirit'), manifesting itself in the human 'spirit', or mind; and, finally that consciousness, or 'spirit' existed prior to matter, in other words, the material world is a product of the former (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007). By these postulations, Hegel has been described as a dialectician and an idealist (Afanasyev, 1980). These terms will become clearer to us as we deal with Marx.

It is important to acknowledge that even before Marx, Hegel and his ideas have received stern criticisms from many quarters. Many who admire Kant for his defence of liberal conception of the state and for championing a league of nations to maintain perpetual peace on earth are very critical of Hegel. To such admirers of Kant then, "Hegel with his metaphysical vapourings, his worship of the state, and his idealization of war, represents the arch-priest of Romanticism who presided over the decline of German philosophy" (Thomson, 1969). In a sterner critic of Hegel, Schopenhauer who knew Hegel well and who respected Kant without following him, chastised Hegel when he said:

Hegel, a certified great philosopher was a flat-headed, insipid, nauseating, illiterate charlatan who reached the pinnacle of audacity in scribbling together and dishing up the craziest mystifying nonsense. This nonsense has been noisily proclaimed as immortal wisdom by mercenary followers and readily accepted as such by all fools who thus joined into as perfect a chorus of admiration as had ever been heard before. The extensive field of spiritual influence with which Hegel was furnished by those in power has enabled him to achieve the intellectual corruption of a whole generation (Thomson, 1969).

Incidentally, it is also needful to note, albeit in passing, that Hegel has also been rubbished for being an ideologue in ahistorical "denial and suppression of the Ethio-Egyptian origin of Greek philosophy and civilization" (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2005: 2). In one of his theses in

Philosophy of History and Lecture on the History of Philosophy, Hegel appeared to have asserted that Africans were of no self control and to this extent they were incapable of any development and culture (Onyewuenyi, 1993). Having said this, let us now examine Marxian dialectics and social transformation.

Marxist dialectics and social transformation

Karl Heinrich Marx (1818 to 1883) was a German political philosopher of Jewish descent. He has been described as the most important of all socialist thinkers and one of the most influential thinkers of all time (Karl Marx, 2009). He was born into a comfortably middle-class family in the city of Trier, Germany and was educated at the universities of Bonn, Berlin, and Jena (Hampshire-Monk, 1992; Fraser in Mclean, 2003).

Although not a student of Hegel as the latter was already dead before Marx came to Berlin, he soon came under the influence of Hegelian philosophy which found new expression in the activities of the Young Hegelians, an intellectual group which had great fascination for Hegel's philosophy and sought to apply it in new and varied ways (McLellan, 1972). Marx became a member of this group, together with his friend and associate, Friedrich Engels (1820 to 1895), with whom he would later develop a system of thought that would captivate the world for most part of the 20th century. His ideas and theories came to be known as Marxism, or scientific socialism, and were predicated on a materialist interpretation of history.

As noted earlier at the onset of this study, the concept of dialectics originated long before Marx or even Hegel. But the duo adopted the principle and made it central to their respective philosophies. While the latter looked at it from an idealistic point of view, in other words, as involving a conflict of ideas in society which eventually result in social change or transformation, the former perceived it in a materialistic sense, substituting 'ideas' for 'social classes' and arguing that it is not ideas emanating from different cultures, but the prevailing material or economic condition of society that gives rise to contending social classes whose contentions eventually lead to social change or transformation.

Marx arrived at his own system of thought after a careful study of Hegel's. The study has already noted in this discourse, how Hegelianism - the entire gamut of Hegel's philosophy - held a great deal of fascination for young Marx and a host of other bright intellectual minds that constituted the Young Hegelians in Berlin. Such was the dominant influence of Hegel at the time that Engels acknowledged it in the following words:

...the Hegelian system covered an incomparably greater domain than any earlier system and developed in this domain a wealth of thought which is astounding even

today... One can imagine what a tremendous effect this Hegelian system must have produced in the philosophy-tinged atmosphere of Germany. It was a triumphal procession which lasted for decades and which by no means came to a standstill on the death of Hegel. On the contrary, it was precisely from 1830 to 1840 that "Hegelianism" reigned most exclusively, and to a greater or lesser extent infected even its opponents (Ramaswamy, 2007).

However, for Marx there was still something lacking and he thought it his responsibility to find out what. As McLellan (1972: xii) observes Marx felt:

An initial repugnance for the 'grotesque and rocky melodies' of Hegel's philosophy, but he found himself forced to accept Hegel's conclusion. He had read Hegel from end to end while recovering from the strain of overwork and resolved thereafter to 'seek the idea in the real itself.

Marx came to the conclusion that Hegel was wrong by attributing the source of conflict in society to the warfare between cultures and the ideas they espoused, even though he (Marx) retained the principle of dialectics as the means by which conflicts take place. For Marx, Hegel's deductions does not take cognizance of the real dynamics that force change in society since cultures and ideas are also a product of something more real and determinative like the material base or condition of society.

Of course, there are areas in which Marx agree with Hegel, such as; that human history is to be seen "...as a process, as constant motion, change, movement, transformation and development..." (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007), and that these motions are as a result of dialectical processes. But as far as what engender the transformation is concerned, Marx and Hegel are worlds apart. It is actually on this point that Marx thought Hegel had the 'dialectic' standing on its head for which he had the duty to set aright through his own materialist method (Sabine and Thorson, 1973).

At this juncture, it is important to further examine the materialist method, which forms the core of Marxist dialectics, and how it differs from Hegel's idealism. It may be useful if the study set out by giving the general idea behind the materialist method. 'Matter,' or material phenomena, according to Afanasyev (1980) explains embraces "everything that exists objectively, that is, outside of man's consciousness and independently of it" such as objects and processes on earth, the countless bodies of the universe, etc, that existed before the consciousness of man which "comprises the sphere of man's mental activity (thoughts, sensation, emotions, etc.)" and, therefore, is primary in understanding not just man, but the historical processes of the world as well. The import of the foregoing is that 'matter' gives rise to

'consciousness,' and not the other way round.

However, there are philosophers who think it should be the other way round, and these are called idealists. Hegel belonged to that school because he believed that the material world projected from the realm of (pure) thought. He imagined that there must have first been an 'Absolute Spirit,' a kind of 'Super Consciousness,' if you like, which actualized itself in the form of Nature (the physical world with all its forces and processes), and continued to develop through finite (that is, of the human) minds and human history in a dialectical fashion (Baird, 2009).

Marx, on the other hand, saw these things differently. He argued that Hegel was under an illusion to think that the 'material' (which is real) is a product of the 'imaginary' (which is ideal), whereas what we assume to be ideal, or imaginary (which form part of our consciousness), is merely a reflection of that which is real, namely; the material condition of society. Thus, for Marx, consciousness, therefore, can never be anything else than conscious existence, strictly speaking, the existence of men is their actual life-process, not what men think or imagine it to be. Marx made a case for his adoption of the materialist method, noting that:

In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from what men has narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process....Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life (Marx, 1977).

Another important attribute of the materialist method is that it was conceived mainly from an economic standpoint. For Marx believed that "All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism, find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice" (Marx, 1977). Hence, the nature of man and the historical periods through which he has lived and is still living is best understood by considering that which is most akin or basic to his survival, which is how he appropriates the material gifts of nature through work - the exertion of physical or mental effort. Thus, on the basis of the materialist method, which placed our material or physical existence above every other consideration, Marx proceeded to give his own interpretation of human society

and history.

Marx's construction of a materialist approach to human history has been attributed to a number of influences. The first is the legacy of German philosophy from which "...he borrowed the Hegelian method of dialectics and applied it to the material world" (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy 2007: 350). The second is said to be the French revolutionary tradition from which he recognized the lingering possibility of change in human society brought about by a sudden revolt in human nature. And the third, the writings of classical English economists which provided insight into the workings of capitalism and the forces that triggered off the Industrial Revolution. However, McLellan (1972) also adds that Marx's attention was drawn to the importance of economic influences in human activity by a reported case of theft which prompted the parliament of Rhineland, a state in western Germany, to consider passing a law to curb such offences in the future.

In addition to all this, we must include the profound influence the writings of Feuerbach left on Karl Marx. Ludwig Feuerbach (1804 to 1872) was a German philosopher and a contemporary of Marx who "...developed one of the first German materialistic philosophies. (Ludwig Feuerbach, 2009). He was a student of the renowned German philosopher, G. W. F. Hegel, "whose philosophical idealism he later rejected". In his seminal work on 'religious psychology', *The Essence of Christianity* (1843), he argued that the existence of religion is justifiable only in that it satisfies a psychological need; a person's essential preoccupation is with the self, and the worship of God is actually worship of an idealized self (Feuerbach, 2009). Therefore, for Feuerbach, the material needs of man and, not religion, deserved more attention in any analysis of human nature. The following lines capture some of his views:

"... people and their material needs should be the foundation of social and political thought. An individual and his or her mind...are products of their environment; the whole consciousness of a person is the result of the interaction of sensory organs and the external world" (Feuerbach, 2009).

For Marx and Engels, Feuerbach's emphasis on people and human needs was more or less a movement toward a materialistic interpretation of society, which they later formulated as the theory of historical materialism. Having established this background, we shall now return to the core of Marxist dialectics and social transformation. For Marx, human history began with man doing that which was most basic to his survival, namely; exploiting the material gifts of nature (land, wildlife, vegetation, water, etc.), in the bid to ensure his sustenance. In *A Critique of the German Ideology*, Marx and Engels wrote:

...we must begin by stating the first premise of all human

existence and, therefore, of all history, the premise, namely, that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to "make history". But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life (Marx and Engels, 2000).

Marx identified five epochs or stages in history to show how man progressed from one social formation to another as he struggled to provide for his sustenance. These stages are primitive communism (communalism), slavery, feudalism, capitalism and communism. Schumaker (2008) provides a narrower classification of the three stages as pre-historical (which corresponds to primitive communism), historical (which includes slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism) and post-historical (same as Communism). There may be other variations to this classification, but the point Marx tried to make is that in each epoch of human history, with the exception of the final one, there are forces of contradiction which make revolutions inevitable, leading to a reconstitution of society.

In primitive communism, for instance, life is relatively simple and production is at subsistence level. Individuals are mainly hunters and gatherers who work together in bands to provide for their means of sustenance and subdue the adverse conditions of their natural environment. Work has a social character and there is no private property, nor are there classes in society as things are shared in common. The only contradiction is that between the organised life of human society and the arbitrariness of nature. This simple way of living, however, cease to exist as men begin to develop new skills and ways of overcoming their environment. Innovation leads to domestication of nature's gifts. Men no longer need to go into the wild in search of food, but find nourishment by appropriating nature's goods. The advent of private property by this means inevitably gives rise to opposing social classes, as those who own property force those who have little or none to work for them as slaves. Thus begins the slave mode of production in which the discontent slave has to revolt against its owner to regain his freedom and usher in a new social system namely: feudalism. In the feudal social system, Marx identified the opposing classes as the landlords (the nobles and aristocrats who own lands) and the serfs who have to work on such lands for mere pittance. A revolt of the serfs and an emerging class of merchants and industrialists overthrows feudalism and ushers in capitalism.

In the capitalist system the opposing classes are identified as the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) and the proletariat who have nothing but their

labour and, have to work for the former for mere trifles. By appropriating the bulk of the profit which is commonly produced by the labour of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie triggers of a revolution which ends social system and brings about socialism. In the socialist system, the proletariat is in charge of government apparatus with which he will try to create a just society by ensuring that no individual gets more goods than is necessary for his sustenance. When this is achieved, social life gets to a point when government is no longer needed as people by then have learnt to be perfect. This state of perfection is what Marx refers to as the communist society.

Hence, just like Hegel, Marx adopted the principle of the conflict of opposites to show how a given epoch (thesis) with inherent contradictions (antithesis) results in a new social formation (synthesis). The dialectical process continues with the new synthesis becoming the thesis again until a perfect society is attained which will mark the post-historical stage or "the end of history" (Schumaker, 2008). In all, the ultimate goal of Marx's political thought is the replacement or "transformation of the existing society with his envisioned 'perfect order'" (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2013:204). Thus, Marx's major contribution to dialectics is that he envisioned human being in totality and went ahead to propound theories which he felt would explain and tackle all the observed problems of the organized social man once and for all.

Conclusion

Before Hegel and Marx, dialectics was employed merely as a method of enhancing rhetoric as seen in the tradition of the Sophists of ancient Greece, or as a method of investigating the nature of truth by critical analysis of concepts and hypotheses as seen in the era of classical Greek philosophy Dialectics (2009). What makes the Hegelian and Marxist dialectics exceptional is that they applied it to the process, evolution and development of history albeit differently. Dialectics in this sense remains a useful tool in philosophical analysis because it does not only tell us how the world works, but also provides us with the means of changing it. Accordingly, the method of analysis by Marx has had more profound impact not only on political thought but also on political practice, issues of social change and social sciences.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have not declared any conflicts of interest.

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