**dialectics/阴阳(Yīn Yáng)**

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| European Perspective | Jana S. Rošker | 15 Mar 2022 |

In the history of Western ideas, "dialectic" is a term used to describe a philosophical method of reasoning that involves a kind of adversarial process between opposing sides. The word goes back to ancient Greek and means to speak across the space that separates the interlocutors, that is, to engage in dialogue. In general, dialectics is considered an effective method for shaping thought because it makes adversarial debate fruitful. Plato created the model of the so-called classical dialectic. He presented his philosophical arguments in the form of a back-and-forth dialogue or debate, which became Plato's way of arguing against the earlier, less sophisticated views or positions and for the later, more sophisticated ones.

Since the 18th century, another use of the word has prevailed: the study of opposites in things and concepts and of the mutual interaction of these opposites.

In Hegel, dialectics is the method of knowledge opposed to metaphysics, and at the same time the inner law of the self-movement of thought and the self-movement of history and social reality.

Such a dialectical process has often been described in a purely schematic sense, representing three stages: Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis. Although Hegel, undoubtedly one of the most important and well-known philosophers of dialectics, never mentioned or named these three stages, for these terms were used by Fichte and Schelling, modern dialectics is often described in terms of these categories. In this schematic sense, modern dialectics can be described as a discourse in which we have a thesis, as an existing idea that is opposed or contradicted by an antithesis, which points to problems and contradictions inherent in that thesis. The tension between thesis and antithesis leads to a new stage of development called synthesis. The synthesis can then constitute a new thesis.

But how does the dialectical process arrive at synthesis? The contradiction between thesis and antithesis leads to a tension in which and through which this contradiction is sublated. This sublation process is a shift that leads to a solution or new understanding in the form of a synthesis.

This meaning is taken up again by Marx, who placed it on a materialist basis and developed his own theory of dialectical materialism. The concept of dialectics was further developed later in the 20th century by members of the Frankfurt School. Their most important collection of essays on the subject is entitled Dialectic of Enlightenment and was written by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. This work conceives the historical process of the Enlightenment as dialectical and diagnoses that instead of its supposed conclusion in modernity, it becomes the solidified basis of a new barbarism, which manifested itself in the fascism of the first half of the 20th century.

Adorno describes his understanding of knowledge about social reality as negative dialectics in the book of the same name. For Adorno, a method based on the concept of dialectics is the prerequisite for a theory that remains open to what has not yet been conceptualised: He points out that thought itself is something that leads us to the identification of concept and observed object. However, we rarely think about the fact that this identity is an illusion. This implies that when we are confronted with other concepts of the same reality, we inevitably understand them as contradicting our original conception. He formulates this in the following way:

“Contradiction is not what Hegel's absolute idealism inevitably had to transfigure it into: nothing Heraclitean in its essence. It is an index of the falsity of identity, of the fusion of what is understood in the concept. However, the semblance of identity is inherent in thinking itself in its pure form. To think is to identify. Nothing is open to the awareness of the illusory nature of conceptual totality than the immanent breaking through of the appearance of total identity: according to its own measure. But since this totality is constructed according to a logic whose core is the principle of the excluded third, everything that does not fit into this logic, everything that is qualitatively different, takes on the signature of contradiction”. (Theodor W. Adorno: *Negative Dialektik,* Frankfurt am Main 1966, p. 15)

So Hegelian dialectics can hardly lead us to new insights.

I think this shift is of utmost importance, not only in terms of contemporary Western philosophy, but also in terms of global philosophy, which encompasses philosophy developed in other cultures and its possible contribution to our world today. We now live in a globalized world, and the crises we face are also globalized. Therefore, the philosophies of the different cultures must enter into a dialog with each other, that is, they must establish a dialectical relationship with each other, if we want to find a new, global and pluralistic knowledge, which is the only knowledge that can help us to solve today's globalized crises.

But if we conduct our dialogues according to the scheme of traditional European dialectics, we will hardly arrive at a truly globalised knowledge. The static view of being that prevailed in ancient Greek philosophy led to the emergence and subsequent dominance of traditional European formal logic, based on the three elementary laws of identity, contradiction, and the excluded third. In my view, Hegel's effort was to break through this static worldview and, taking Heraclitus as a starting point, to develop a theoretical model that could incorporate processual thinking, a model that took into account what he called the "fluid nature" (Hegel, Phänomenologie des Geistes, 1998: 5) of things. Yet despite his efforts to create a philosophy of movement and development, his dialectic remained trapped in a discourse of discrete (albeit linear proceeding ) stages of development, each still static and strictly separate from the other. Their interaction still proceeds from the basic laws of formal logic, in which a conceptualization is negated by its contradiction and necessarily leads to a synthesis. Although dialectics as such is regarded as a flow, its essential and constitutive parts, namely thesis, antithesis and synthesis, are still fixed and invariable phases in this supposedly processual philosophy. In this formal scheme, any new antithesis to an existing thesis is its contradiction. As long as we remain trapped in such a scheme, all other ideas that do not belong to the referential framework of European philosophy are excluded as entities that contradict it.

Therefore, if we want to expand and develop European dialectics, we must focus on its concept of sublation, which I believe is the only way to establish a dialectical process of genuine mutual exchange, because it is the true engine of any productive dialectical process. This term is the most common English translation of the German Hegelian term "Aufhebung," which contains three seemingly contradictory notions, namely "abolish," "preserve," and "transcend." The translation is a neologism that borrows its morphology from the Latin origin "sublatio," a word that also contains all three of the above connotations. In a sublation-based dialectical interaction between different philosophies or cultural traditions, they are still different, but cannot be mutually exclusive, since they are not considered as substantial, essence bearing static entities.

Rather, in such a dynamic scheme, their mutual differences create a productive tension in which certain elements or aspects are preserved and others are eliminated. In this way, interaction as such can continually offer us new inspirations that lift our ideas to new, higher levels and provide us with new insights that can always be developed and deepened according to the changing circumstances of social development. Such insights are needed today more than ever before.