

FORMS OF DIALECTIC

For a genuine understanding of dialectic, it is necessary to know its different types or forms. These forms are not interexclusive. In fact, these are technical terms or names given by historians and philosophers to clarify the differences in the dialectic of various dialecticians. The important forms can be serially arranged in the following manner.

1. The Negative Dialectic, and the Positive Dialectic

Sometimes the negative dialectic and the positive dialectic are called the destructive and constructive dialectic respectively. To understand this difference, it is necessary to distinguish between the process or method of dialectic and the aim of this method. The dialectic may be negative or positive only in respect of its process, not in respect of its aim, since the aim may be positive while its process being negative. The negative dialectic is that in which the dialectician refutes, negates or destroys the opponent's view or established theory for the realization of his end. Generally, the Greek dialectic comes under this class. For example, Zeno of Elea and Socrates adopted this type of dialectic. The aims of Zeno's dialectic and, of Socrates' dialectic were positive, but the ways or methods for achieving these aims were purely negative. The main aim of Zeno's dialectic was the conceptual defence of the conclusions of his master by exhibiting the contradictions in the conclusions of his opponents. This destructive form of dialectic was much used by the Sophists whose purpose and process both were destructive in nature. The aim of Socrates' dialectic was positive, i.e. midwifery or the clarification of ethical or political concepts, such as justice, knowledge etc. but we find there the negation or destruction of every proposed account of a "concept". According to Hegel also the ancient dialectic, especially the Platonic dialectic was negative. As he writes: "Formal philosophy cannot look at dialectic in any other way than as being the art of confusing ordinary conceptions or even notions, and demonstrating their nullity, thus making their result to be merely negative."¹ In Hegel's opinion, both the process and the aim of Platonic dialectic was negative. But such judgment is not wholly impartial. It is true that sometimes Plato's method was

certainly the method of refuting hypotheses, yet on the basis of these instances it is inadequate to make a generalisation. Kant's transcendental dialectic is also negative because it endeavours only to expose the illusion involved in attempting to use the categories of the understanding beyond the bounds of phenomena and possible experience.

Gottfried Martin² is of the opinion that these two forms are distinguished by the fact that the negative dialectic is satisfied to exhibit contradictions. Once the contradictions are exhibited the goal of this dialectic is reached, but the positive or affirmative dialectic has recognised that contradictions are necessary. I do not agree with these definitions because they are given from the point of view of goals, whereas method means process with the help of which we may achieve some desired end. Further, the aim of negative dialectic is not merely to show the contradictions. There may be some positive aim behind the visible destructive procedure.

Logically, Mādhyaṃika dialectic is purely negative because the Mādhyaṃika disproves the opponent's thesis without proving any thesis of his own. All the eminent Mādhyaṃika dialecticians like Nāgārjuna, Chandrakīrti and Śāntideva would not hesitate in adversely criticising even their own tenets. According to Mādhyaṃika dialectic all Judgments, all philosophical systems are *Vikalpa*, *Prapañca*, false-ascriptions or thought-constructions. Nevertheless it is constructive also since as the negation of thought it is the intuition of the Absolute. Indian dialectic is both constructive and destructive. It was destructive, since it is used as a weapon of criticism and refutation or elimination of opponent's doctrines. Simultaneously, it is constructive because of its use in expounding one's own constructive philosophy.

The opposite of Negative dialectic is positive dialectic. A dialectic is called positive when its process and aim are positive. We find this form of dialectic in Plato's middle and late dialogues. In these dialogues, dialectic is a method for attaining positive doctrine. "Dialectic as set forth in "Republic" is a method by which one can arrive at the ultimate truths of things through a process of pure rational argument."³ The Hegelian dialectic also comes under this class. For Hegel, dialectic was the method

by which contradictions could be progressively resolved and the absolute can be reached. His dialectic is constructive since it is a 'conjunctive' or 'integrating synthesis'. Marx's dialectic is negative-positive dialectic. Contemporary Soviet Philosopher M. A. Kammari writes that the Marxist method in its very essence is critical and revolutionary. Critique and self-critique lie at the base of the method of Marxism itself. In this sense it is negative because it excludes all negative cases. "Exclusion of negative cases" means all which is not Marxist-Leninist is simply rejected as erroneous. But at the same time, it is positive since it is the sole scientific method of knowing and transforming the world. Hegel use the phrase "the dialectic of external reflection" for negative dialectic.

II The Logical and the Dynamic Dialectic

Dialectic is supposed to be the law of becoming for Hegel and Marx, and becoming may mean a change or succession which is "temporal" or it may be merely a "logical" succession. Hegel, who regarded time as unreal, regarded dialectic as the law of becoming in a non-temporal sense. For Hegel, dialectic is a passage, a movement from concept to concept. His dialectic consists in the logical analysis of the concepts. He derives the opposite by conceptual analysis. Marx, on the other hand, regarded dialectic as the law of temporal becoming since nothing was real for him, if temporal change was not real. For the Marxists, dialectic is not an abstract system of logic.

The post-Hegelians also take time as real. Thus they oppose the Hegelian concept of dialectic as logical dialectic. The synonymous term for logical dialectic is non-temporal dialectic and we may call temporal dialectic by the name of Dynamic dialectic too. G. Martin interprets the terms logical dialectic and dynamic dialectic in another way. In his opinion, by a logical dialectic, we understand the theory of contradictions as they can appear in logic and in certain problems of mathematics. The first antinomy of Zeno, i. e. Likeness—unlikeness, and many of the antinomies of the "Parmenides" belong to this type. "According to Martin, dynamic dialectic includes dynamic antinomies and dynamic antinomies are those which emerge in the

conceptual interpretation of becoming and change. To this class belong most of Zeno's antinomies."⁴

III The subjective Dialectic and the Objective Dialectic

In Hegel's opinion the Socratic irony, which in his case was a particular mode of carrying an intercourse between one person and another, is generally a subjective form of dialectic. Hegel writes that the real or objective dialectic deals with the reasons for things.

Plato's dialectic is subjective when he says that dialectic means something concerning speech or thought. But at other places, as it is applied in his theory of ideas, his dialectic is of objective kind because here it deals with the reasons for things. Kant's dialectic is objective because he used the word 'dialectic' to express the limitations of Pure reason and he took 'Pure Reason' as the Universal, objective structure of human beings. Fichte's dialectic is also objective because it is much more than any purely arbitrary use of the constructive imagination. Dialectic for Schelling is not only the dialectic of the self, but, at the same time, the dialectic of the not-self. Thus he also advocated objective dialectic. Hegel's dialectic may be called subjective-objective dialectic, because according to him, the dialectic movement of thought corresponds to the dialectic movement of reality. Logic and metaphysics are one. The Marxist dialectic is generally considered to be objective. But this view is not supported by contemporary Soviet dialecticians who are his real followers. Engel's distinction between these two types of dialectic is expressed in his statement that "the so-called objective dialectic reigns throughout nature and the so-called subjective dialectic, dialectical thought, is only a reflection of the omnipresent motion which reigns in nature."⁵ For Lenin, Marx's dialectic is both subjective and objective, because according to Marx, it is the Science of the general laws of development as well of the external world, as of human thought. We may also include the implicit dialectic of Heraclitus in the class of objective dialectic since in his philosophy we find "rudimentary formulations of the laws of dialectic." Dialectics of Bradley and McTaggart are also objective.

Jaina dialectic or "Syādvāda" can be interpreted as subjective.

objective dialectic since Jaina accepts that distinctions in thought are not merely in thought, i. e. subjective, but they are truly indicative of the "real" i.e. objective. Dialectics of Śāṅkar and Nāgārjuna (Buddhists) may be classified as objective dialectics. We may say that Indian dialectic is objective, because as nonconceptual intuitional knowledge it takes us beyond the subjectivity of thought.

IV The Speculative or Absolute Dialectic

These two words, viz., Speculative and Absolute dialectic represent the peculiar terminology of Hegel. In his 'Lectures' Hegel tells that only his dialectic is the true or speculative dialectic. He named his dialectic as Absolute dialectic. Thus for him, the words "Speculative dialectic", "Absolute dialectic", "true or real dialectic" are synonymous. The Absolute dialectic has recognized that contradictions are necessary and only in them is the movement of thought and of History completed. We may define Absolute dialectic as that which presupposes contradictions as the necessary steps in the movement and realization of thought and reality. From this restricted point of view, Indian dialectic can not be honoured as Absolute dialectic since every Indian dialectician condemns contradiction as a serious fallacy.

V The Ontological, Epistemological and Cosmological Dialectic

Following the main division of Philosophy sometimes dialectic is divided into Ontological, Epistemological and Cosmological dialectic. We may define Ontological dialectic as that which deals with the pure Ontological and metaphysical problems. Ontological dialectic is that which appears in assertions about being. Epistemological dialectic deals with knowledge problems. Cosmological dialectic is based on the concept of the totality of the world and the attempt to apply determinations to this totality. Hegel's dialectic is both epistemological and ontological, because for him real is rational and rational is real. In Plato's philosophy the Ontological dialectic is presented in the first part of "Parmenides" and in the 'Sophist', where he discusses the distinction between the 'Ideas' and 'Sensible things' and the being of Ideas as such. In Kant, this dialectic is found where he

distiguishes phenomena from noumena. The examples of cosmological dialectic are "Antinomies" as they are discussed by Kant in 'Transcendental cosmology'. We may say that "Paralogisms" which are found in Transcendental Psychology and 'Contradictions' which are found in 'Rational Theology' are examples of Ontological dialectic in Kant because they are concerned with metaphysical ideas of soul and God respectively. However, all types of dialectic ultimately are epistemological dialectic, since dialectic consists in the conflict of our reason.

VI The Dialectic of Philosophical Standpoints

Indian dialectic, in general, can be classified as the dialectic of standpoints, which includes four important philosophical standpoints. First is the Ātmavāda, especially represented by Vedānta. Buddhist view represents the negative standpoint, that of Nairātmyavāda. The third standpoint is represented by Synthetic view which is advocated by Jaina. The agnostic or the sceptic can be cited as the examples of the fourth standpoint. Dialectic of standpoint is present in Western philosophy too. The distinction between rationalism and empiricism, between idealism and materialism, between monism and pluralism is of this kind. We may say that the history of Philosophy in itself is an example of such dialectic, because it asserts the mutually contradictory standpoints.

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NOTES

1. Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 51.
2. G. Martin, "General Metaphysics, its problem and its method", pp. 314-315.
3. *The Encyclopedia Americana*, Vol. IX, p. 58.
4. G. Martin, *General Metaphysics : Its problem and its method*, p. 324.
5. Blakeley T. J., *Soviet Scholasticism*, p. 5.