

# **DIALECTICS OF DEVELOPMENT: RE-EVALUATING HEGELIAN DIALECTICS IN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

Charles Kosolu Onebunne\*

## **ABSTRACT**

Hegel posited that history is driven by the movement of the Absolute Spirit in a bid to actualize itself. This movement takes place in a dialectical fashion starting from thesis to antithesis and finally to synthesis. For him, therefore, history subsists in the dialectics of spirit whereby it manifests itself in various stages of world history. However, Hegel spoke derogatively about Africa by insinuating that the Absolute Spirit has not manifested itself in Africa. In this way, Hegel excluded Africa from world developmental process. The implication is that Africa has no history, no civilization and no development. At this point, one question comes to mind-could Hegel be right? This paper is aptly an intervention in this regard. With methods of analysis and hermeneutics, this paper contends that Africa is part and parcel of the global system of dialectics of development as posited by Hegel. This paper, therefore, concludes that the whole gamut of African predicaments such as colonialism, slavery and identity crisis as well as the attendant efforts and rising consciousness of Africans to define themselves are all moments of the process of the dialectical process of development.

**Keywords:** Dialectics, Development.

## **Introduction**

Hegel focused his discourse of dialectics on the dialectics of the spirit. The dialectics of the spirit is Hegel's thought concerning the movement of history. It is the movement of the Absolute Spirit in a triadic fashion namely; the thesis, the antithesis and finally the synthesis. History therefore realizes itself in the spirit. For him, world history occurs in the realm of the spirit. The world comprises both physical and psychic nature. The physical nature affects world history but the spirit and the course of its development is its substance. The first thing therefore, which we must do is abstractly

Nnadiabube Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 2 (2), 2018  
to determine the spirit. The spirit is consciousness; Hegel's "Spirit"  
"Geist" is nothing but consciousness, a self aware form of being in  
its progression or evolution into ultimate as in absolute.

The dialectics is the internal logic of the development of the spirit  
through World History, the spirit according to Hegel is:

That which has World History as its stage, its  
property, and its field of actualization is not such  
as would move aimlessly about in a game of  
external accidents, but is instead the absolute  
determining factor. It can be likened to the  
evolutionary system of Darwin in which the fittest  
is the only one that survived. It is direct  
unhindered and free from contradiction. But it is  
more than this. For it is the spirit that even  
determines its (dialectics) method of development.  
(Siebree: 1991:9)

In the Hegelian model of dialectics of the spirit, there is an intrinsic  
conflict and/or contradiction of which the spirit itself serves as its  
principle such that a prior alteration or negation of itself is part of its  
process of self development. Omeregbe while concurring that there  
is an inherent conflict or contradiction in the dialectics holds that:

Hegel's Philosophy is based on his logic of  
dialectics in which a thesis is negated by  
antithesis and both the thesis and antithesis are  
taken up in a synthesis. The synthesis thus  
reached becomes a new thesis which is in turn  
negated by an antithesis and from this conflict  
or contradiction a new synthesis develops.  
(Omeregbe 2001: 29)

The dialectics is therefore the method of the movement of spirit  
(Geist). It is a logical system which determines the progressiveness  
of the spirit from abstraction to concreteness, from being to

becoming. But both being and becoming are aspects or moment on the life of the spirit. At the stage of being, it is abstract but at the state of becoming it is concrete and empirical. It came to the ultimate truth about itself. To be more precise, we shall expatiate upon the various aspects in the phenomenology of the dialectics. This will aid a better and richer appreciation of the dialectics.

### **Dialectics**

Etymologically, the term dialectics is a derivation of Greek word-*dialectike* which means the art of conversation or debate. In Socratic tradition it is the process of eliciting the truth by means of questions aimed at opening out what is already implicitly hidden. That is to say that dialectics is the philosophical method that tries to explain the truth of reality via the confrontation of opposing doctrines. Moreover, for purposes of this paper, dialectics is explained as building a thought systems that either affirms or negates the previous systems and because this is not done without taking into cognizance the social status of inquiry, reasons are advanced as to why a system is better than the other to the extent at which rationality comes into play at every stage of inquiry. In Hegelian tradition which is the concern of this paper, dialectics is defined as the movement of the Absolute Spirit in trying to actualize itself. Suffice it to mention that this movement happens in a triadic fashion, namely; the thesis, the antithesis and the synthesis.

### **Development**

The term development can be analyzed as ‘to de- envelop’. This simply means bringing out of that which envelops. It also means to bring to the fore that which was hidden. Iroegbu defines it as “the progressive unfolding of the inner potentialities of a given reality.” (Iroegbu: 1994:81). Oguejiofor in his own words sees it thus:

Development concerns first and foremost the human aspect of the society. The development of a nation is primarily the development of human personality. And to this, all aspects of development should be subordinated. This development is in turn summarized by the development of the mind and the will. One role of Philosophy in this regard is to

Nnadiabube Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 2 (2), 2018  
discuss the meaning of life and how it ought to be  
lived. (Oguejiofor: 2001:127 )

On his own part, Mbaegbu submits that:

Most scholars are agreed that the concept of development implies an ongoing process, that is, it is dynamic rather than static. Again, development is an all-round concept, it must be inclusive, more encompassing than ambitious, neither can it be a one sided affair. The core areas of development are psycho-personal development, the intellectual, the spiritual, the politico-economic and the scientific technological areas. For an all-round and authentic development in Africa, these various areas must be truly integrated. (Mbaegbu: 2006:109)

## **Exegesis of Hegelian Dialectics**

### **Dialectics as Logic**

Hegel's dialectical logic or dialectics as logic is contained in the science of logic. According to Carl Friedrich, "it is the culmination of his philosophical system" (Siebree: 1991:123). Some devoted Hegelians' have claimed that Hegel's dialectics as logic compares with Kant's critique of pure reason like the ripe fruit with the much promising bud. Hegel believes that his logic is a promise slur cast on Kant's limitation of "any future metaphysics." It is intended to show that the absolute reality can be grasped by a logical movement of reason. In fact, Hegel equates this dialectics movement of reason (logic) with reality (being in itself) in such a way that the real becomes rational and the rational becomes real. Dialectics as logic is simply defined as how thought moves in reality. Thus, Hegelians

believe that dialectics is a logical process, an actual process that events in the world follow.

To be sure “all change, especially historical change, takes place in accordance with the law of the dialectics; a thesis is produced, it develops an opposition (antithesis) a conflict between them ensues and then this conflict is resolved into a synthesis that includes both thesis and antithesis”.(Siebree: 1991:123) It is important to note that Hegel's dialectical logic is strongly and inseparably linked with his metaphysics. As metaphysics, being is its subject matter but it studies being by way of dialectics. In fact, the dialectics is an externalization and projection of being (absolute) in the material universe. It projects itself in this way:

Matter is the antithesis of spirit and by projecting itself into matter the spirit negates itself, but this negation is in turn negated and overcome when the spirit comes back to itself in and through the human spirit through which the spirit attains self consciousness. Everything in the universe is a manifestation of the absolute and part of the dialectical process of his self-development. (Siebree: 1991:123)

The dialectics is the process in which the absolute develops itself logically in the course of historical events. We can see this in normal human activities. A serious thinker is first of all aware of his thought or of the faculty of thought. He affirms and asserts the existence of a particular reality. This reality forms the basic concept that this thinker possesses. It is the clear starting point for any serious thinker. Stumpf refers to it as "the original featurelessness which precedes all definite character and is the very first of all" (Stumpf: 2003:310). He continues: "Hegel's system begins, therefore with the concept of being, and this is the thesis".(Stumpf: 2003:312). In line with this, Stumpf notes that:

He (Hegel) found that because pure being is mere abstraction, it is therefore absolutely negative. Whenever we try to think of being without any particular characteristics, the mind moves from being to non-being. This, of course means that in some sense, Being and non-being are the same...the movement of the mind from being to nothing produces a third category, namely, becoming. The concept of becoming is formed by the mind when it understands that being, for the reasons already mentioned, is the same as nothing. (Stumpf: 2003:312).

Implicit in this logic of metaphysics and/or metaphysics of logic is the dialectics of development.

### **Dialectics as Development**

Dialectics is also derived when there is an abstract change in history in which the better and more perfect is attained. The dialectic movement of human history is in itself a phenomenon of development. Thus, Hegel believed that development is intrinsically linked with human history. Dialectics as development consists in the logical objectification and realization of reason in Cosmic History. In this way, the History of Philosophy becomes the progress of the absolute in coming to know itself. It is therefore by way of dialectics of development that the *Weltgeist*, (i.e. world -- Spirit, or World - Soul) comes to know itself. Events in the course of history have a common goal- that of the self-realization of the spirit. It is instructive to note that since history inevitably follows the pattern of logical necessity through the dialectical movement from thesis to antithesis to synthesis, the present age must be the highest stage of development. Certainly Hegel regarded the cultural achievements of his time, namely Nationalism, Romanticism, Protestantism and idealism as the culmination of all that had gone before, with his own Philosophical work as its highest expression.

Moreover, the dialectics is meant to show the necessity of development, or transition from one stage of consciousness or of history, or

Nnadiabube Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 2 (2), 2018  
from one abstract category of logic to a higher stage or category. It is the dialectics that therefore gives the philosophical foundation for development. Development, henceforth, becomes a Reality because it is Rational. Hegel writes that "the dialectical principle constitutes the life and soul of all knowledge which is truly scientific." (Siebree: 1991:123)

Here there is an actualization of that "hidden" potentiality in an organism which therefore and thereby matures into freedom.

Hegel views freedom as the "*Teleos* of history and the actual course of history as a dialectical development of (the human) capacity or potentiality (for freedom) striving to realize itself." There is however a link between the logical dimension of the Dialectics and the developmental dimension that is that the spirit is self-determined, that it assumes successive forms which it successively assumes. In phenomenology, dialectics describes the "path of the natural consciousness which presses forward to true knowledge or the way of the soul which journeys through the series of its own configurations as though they were stations appointed for it by its own nature, so that it may purify itself for the life of spirit and achieve finality through a completed experience of itself and the awareness of what it really is in itself. The dialectic is therefore a kind of channel through which the *weltgeist* must pass in order to attain authentic spirituality, or it may be linked to the painful path which Plato describes in his Republic by which the person chained to the world of appearance becomes liberated and gradually and painfully ascends through intermediate forms of opinion and belief to a genuine knowledge.

### **Dialectics as Negativity**

Dialectics is defined by Hegel as the power of negativity. Negativity involves in general, the opposing of something to its "other". When applied to epistemology, this is the "pathway of doubt" and "loss of immediate certainty" involved in disparity between subject and object in the course of consciousness of experience of the world.

And when applied to ontology, negative is 'the differentiation of substance by which it "becomes other" to itself. Differentiation is a feature of becoming; another feature of becoming is concretion. These two features of becoming are due to the principle of negativity. Negativity is externalizing, because, according to Hegel, "what is undifferentiated is lifeless." (Siebree: 1991:135) It is precisely the immanent impulse of negativity which accounts for differentiation. Self-identity without negativity spells the death of being whether this being is the being of an individual existent or the historical being of world culture. Hence, Hegel writes in his Philosophy of History that the nation lives the same kind of life as the individual in the enjoyment of itself and the satisfaction of being which is exactly what it desired to be.

Negativity is also a making- concrete, a self determination, in that self-development is brought about by "the dialectical force which deposes the things and gives it a specific character." (Siebree: 1991:135). Specificity is thus linked to negativity by Hegel. While negativity is externalizing, it is also positive for it makes the thing determinate or individuated. If determinate negation gives a "Thing" its "Content", which is to say that in actualizing a potentiality through its externalization, then a thing is determinately negating various other potentialities, transforming the initially merely hypothetical nature of the thing into a concrete content.

Thus Negativity, Development and Logic are interlinked in the context of the Hegelian dialectics. The implication of this connection is that in the frame work of the dialectics, there is a transition of things, and of knowledge, from potentiality or abstraction to actuality and content, but in such a way that the arising of a fuller determination points beyond itself to a further determination. Every determination is both a result and a new beginning, concrete and abstract, for it occurs within a process of the becoming of a thing, hence is concretely relative to the origin of the process but abstract relative to the *teleos* of the whole process. A thing becomes more and more fully developed through this successive dialectics of self-reconstruction.

## **Africa and Dialectics Of Development**

Hegel excludes Africa from what he considers the movement of history towards its fulfillment. For him, the Spirit has not realized itself in Africa. This effectively excludes Africa from the realm of rationality because history, as Hegel understood it was none other than the manifestation of the Spirit (reason). Hegel's understanding of history is crucial in deciphering why he relegates the black person to the realm of the irrational. He understood spirit as being essentially historical realizing itself in the dialectical process towards ever increasing liberty. Reality is therefore spirit manifesting itself in nature, in human history, and in the actions of men. History is the development of the spirit through successive stages, which reaches full consciousness with rational freedom. The aim of history is the freedom of spirit, its being in and for itself. The progress of history proceeds from level to level, through the dialectical movement from thesis to antithesis to synthesis. The dialectics consist in the fact that the Greco-Romans World is the 'antithesis of the oriental world, which unite in the dialectical trial to form a synthesis in the modern Christian Germanic world.

That Africa is presupposed eliminated from this historical process is that it has no movement or development to exhibit and thus is unhistorical, undeveloped spirit still involved in the conditions of mere nature. This buttresses the fact that in Negro life the characteristic point is that consciousness has not yet attained the realization of any substantial objective existence. The argument is that since it is with reason that cultural change and development can be achieved towards civilization, but since the African, according to Hegel has no reason, he also has no historical world properly speaking, which means he is lacking in culture and civilization. This indicates that Africa's developmental experience which has been analyzed as some sort of paralysis has no space in the Hegelian developmental thesis for the spirit (geist) of development has not yet ventured into Africa. However, Hegel's Philosophy lacks sympathy with the general African reality as there are some instances of dialectics of development in African experience. For a proper comprehension of dialectics in Africa this paper considers it only proper to briefly analyze Hegelian dialectics of development as applied to Africa. As has been explained before, Hegelian dialectics

Nnadiesube Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 2 (2), 2018 involves three movements, namely; thesis, antithesis and synthesis. These three phases are aptly represented in the African dialectics of development. The explanation goes thus:

**Thesis:** this is the status of the African continent prior to any colonial intervention either by European-Christian or Arab-Islamic nations. This represents the state of pure being of Africans.

**Antithesis:** this is the phase of Africa's several encounters with colonialism and imperialism. This era marked enslavement and subjugation of Africa's primordial free status.

**Synthesis:** this is the period of post colonial independence and struggles for liberation and emancipation. This also implies Africa's present development status.

This paper beams searchlight on three black African nations in an attempt to engage in reevaluating Hegelian Dialectics in Africa perspective. Thus, these three nations comprising Ghana, Tanzania and Nigeria will serve as gateways in understanding the quidity of this paper.

### **Ghana and Nkrumah's Dialectics of Consciencism**

Nkwame Nkrumah's philosophy of consciencism gives an African voice to Hegelian dialectics. He sees Africa as still being economically caught up with capitalism. An African renaissance is realized when Africa becomes free from the grip of economic imperialism just as Marx and Lenin would emphasize Marxism. It is supposed that the term consciencism is derived from the word conscience. Nkrumah states that his book "*Consciencism*" was born out of the crisis of the African conscience. We are now obliged to examine the coherence or coordination of this thesis within the framework that dialectic *consciencism* which is a philosophy and ideology for de-colonization and development, with particular reference to the African revolution as a new way of life (culture) to end the identity crisis and oncoming development in African nation.

Nkrumah's consciencism is in itself antithetical to western imperialism, antithesis presented to and even imposed on Africans. According to him, these do not foster authentic development; at least not for African societies. He opines that development in traditional African society was based on egalitarianism and communalism. Capitalism is irreconcilable with the egalitarian and communalistic bases of development found in traditional African societies. Thus capitalism can be regarded as an antithesis to the foundation of development in African nations. It is an antithesis against the thesis of communalism in African experience *ab initio*. For everything, including all land and all the means of production belonged to the community and everybody worked for the common good of the community. In that way, development affected everybody positively since everybody share in this product. Nkrumah therefore recommends a synthesis which he called socialism. This can be achieved when African nations first return to the egalitarian and communal development structures of the traditional African Societies.

Kwame Nkrumah became the first president of Ghana in 1957 (March 6<sup>th</sup> 1957 to be precise). As it were, he appropriated the Marxist Dialectical materialism. However, because of his unique insight and talent he cleverly adapted it to African-social cultural reality as he found it in Ghana. As Makumba puts it "he learnt from Lenin to approach Marx through African eyes rather than approaching Africa through Marxist eyes."<sup>4</sup> Nkrumah's position of African socialism as the preferred political/economic Model for Ghana, and his vision of the Black power movement as the Pan Africanist Movement culminating in African continental government, and de-ethnization of African political states which he began in practice in Ghana by his CPP political policies detribalization and African socialism, Natural integration and coordination of the Ghanaian state which was his ideal for the African central super state. With this kind of metaphysical foundation the Nkrumah era of 1957 -1966 in the country continental scale as represented in the context of the then global division of the cold-war between the Capitalist West and Marxist-Socialist/communist East Blocs was another Hegelian moment in

History. With the continental unity Nkrumah envisioned representing for the West its antithesis in opposition to – its thesis Neoliberal-Gobal – Capitalist democracy. The synthesis of this became the reaction of the leading western power, the USA through its external secret intelligence police force the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) in sponsoring the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah's government, utilizing reactionary elements embodied in the Ghanaian military led by General Joseph Ankrah.

### **Tanzania's Julius Nyerere and Ujamaa**

Etymologically, Ujamaa simply means 'the Family' or 'Family hood'. Nyerere chose it as the concept to capture his vision of African-socialism. For Julius Nyerere, the idea of socialism has its foundation in the principle of human equality, which equality has to be applied to the different sectors of society namely, economic, social, and political. The ideal society is based on human equality and on a combination of the freedom and unity of its members. Love, sharing and work become the basic principle for the freedom of the existence of society. Within this context of the teleological constitution of Julius Nyerere's mind-soul personality, we can look at his own Hegelian moment in his role as Tanzania's founding father and first president.

His political activism against the British, which is anti-colonialism which is the antithesis and which culminated into the new-colonial/post-independence liberation and emancipation into the Pure-Becoming or Hegelian process of an authentic new African Socialist Society in process of Becoming the ideal "Synthesis" phase of the Dialectics. The overall success of Ujamaa was that in the colonial era he kept his country on the side of socialism but avoided a radical break such as would have placed him in direct confrontation with Britain and the USA with their other NATO Allies. He put Tanzania in its state of Becoming as a state onto the ideological and real political radar of the world and African and kept his country reasonably free from external forces. Going by Hegelian dialectics, one can see that the period of colonialism represents the

phase of antithesis which was eventually overcome by the ideology of Ujamaa that gave rise to a new consciousness and a new becoming which could rightly be called the synthesis.

### **The Nigerian State and its Hegelian Dialectical Perspectives**

Hegelian Dialectical Analysis of the Nigerian State and its philosophy of governance and its probable future is the most difficult of these case studies for these reasons, namely; it is a much bigger country than either of the other sister states and its national formation under British Colonial domination encompassed more nation states of primordial origin and their primordial existential conflicts than any other of the previous two states. Ghana and Tanzania are much smaller by land area and ethnic composition in its ethnicities.

Nigeria, Tanzania and Ghana, given these antecedents the task of simplifying the philosophical-political Dialectic's of Nigeria is clearly more complex than her sister states mentioned previously. Again the historical agents of change, the theoretically posited world-historical person's or heroes, harnessed by Divine providence to actualize the 'Being' and 'Becoming' of the Nigerian state, were certainly more than one decisive hero. Some of them include the 1st colonial governor lord Fredrick Lugard, Rt. Hon. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Hon. Chief Obafemi Awolowo as well as Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu and General Yakubu Gowon. At least six decisive personages interacted in the Dialectics of the spirit leading up to Nigeria as we know it today. That having been said, we will start with the pre-colonial moment of pure-being-the thesis. Britain later colonized and eventually amalgamated the Niger-area of West Africa.

Suffice it to say there were nations and empires, such as Binin and Oyo empires, the Hausa and Hausa-Fulani, the Kanuri- Ibibio union the Arochukwu confederation, Nri and the Efik- Ibibio union, etc. All these nation states represent the pure consciousness of African spirit as embodied in the human form and collective linguistic cultural, political, economic unions which make for a single

objective entity called the state and which in subjection each particular sub group represented some primordial ethical and political sub-being of their whole. All were as at then free, self-conscious, self-governing before their encounter with the alien consciousness of the European national spirits and rival primordial-ethical consciousness. The state of affairs was to be transformed drastically by the Berlin conference organised to bring European conflicts under control by assigning new colonies for economic political exploitation in Africa to the European powers, namely Germany, Britain, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Italy.

### **Conclusion**

It is important to note that dialectics is part and parcel of any developmental process anytime and anywhere. That of Africa is no exception. Africa is right now on the part of that consciousness for development. In other words, Hegelian dialectics is playing itself out in Africa's quest for development. This is so because Africa has passed the stages of thesis and antithesis and is now on the vigorous search for freedom, unity and identity which in Hegelian tradition of dialectics is viewed as the synthesis. However, this needs to be expressed in the form of philosophical adventure. In addressing this issue, this paper recommends that a new ideology is urgently required; an ideology which can solidify in a philosophical statement, but at the same time, an ideology which will not abandon the original humanistic principle of African people and which is devoted as a new culture that will permanently solve the problems of crisis of African identity and quest for development and as well present Africans as rational.

\***Charles Kosolu Onebunne**, Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Email: [charlesonebunne@gmail.com](mailto:charlesonebunne@gmail.com)

### **References**

- Nnadiabue Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 2 (2), 2018
- Hegel, G.W.F., *The Philosophy of History*, transl. by J. Siebree. New York: Prometheus Books, 1991.
- Iroegbu, P, *Enwisdomization and African Philosophy*. Owerri: International Universities Press Ltd.,1994.
- Mbaegbu, C.C. "Philosophy as a Gate Value to African Development", in I. Odimegwu (ed.), *Philosophy and Africa*. Amawbia: Lumos Nig. Ltd. 2006.
- Oguejiofor, J.O. *Philosophy and African Predicament*. Ibadan: Hope Publication, 2001.
- Omogbe, J.I. *A Simplified History of Western Philosophy*. Lagos: Joja Educational and Research Publishers Ltd., 2001.
- Stumpf, S.E. *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies.