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# PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF A DIALECTICAL ANALYSIS AS A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: TRANSFORMATION OF THE SELF IN HEGEL'S DIALECTIC

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## Abstract

*If Hegel's Dialectic is to be the subject of a research methodology then it is critical to understand what Hegel meant by his Dialectic. Insofar as Hegel articulates his Dialectic superficially as thesis, antithesis and synthesis he had a much broader and urgent viewing in mind. The thesis, antithesis and synthesis functions as the surface level of the deeper process under which the self is transformed. Once this is understood then Hegel's Dialectic can contribute as a research methodology in a profoundly more penetrating way.*

## Introduction

For Hegel the Self is the Spirit that knows itself and knows its outer appearance, the conscious self, which in turn is characterised by the personality. But it is this very relation between the Self and the conscious self that is the real conflict of life. This conflict arises because the Self, as distinct from the conscious self, is not conditioned by the ego (or personality). The ego is concerned with the immediate gratification of (conscious self) perceived needs, whereas the Self is focused upon Self conceived matters of destiny (and its *design*) that it can only bring into being (real-ise) via the conscious self. The same conflict arises but is played out in a different context (with its own consequent terminology) in Heidegger's Being (Self) and being (inauthentic self) [Heidegger, 1977, 1987] or the upshot of Heidegger's distinction between Essential Thinking and Calculative Thinking [Heidegger, 1975], [Haynes, 1999] or the implications of Heidegger's sense of the "final epoch which he called the 'Technological understanding of being'" [Dreyfus and Spinoza, 1997, p1] and, Nietzsche's Artistic Thinking (Form) and Scientific Thinking (content) [Nietzsche, 1968]. Once this conflict between the Self and conscious self is, by stages, resolved – as a result of the ego diminishing – then the self is on the journey of undergoing the process of transformation. The transformation is gradual and each cycle of synthesis brings the life closer to the ultimate goal of complete transforming (as, in Hegel's terms, a "historical process"). The Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis constitute the surface level operation for this transformation. Consider the following passage from *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* [Hegel, 1977, p 29]:

The Spirit of this world is a spiritual *essence* that is permeated by a *self-consciousness* which knows itself, and knows the essence as an actuality confronting it. But the existence of this world, as also the actuality of self-consciousness, rests on the process in which the latter divests itself of its personality, thereby creating its world.

This concentration on the surface level of Hegel, which can be construed as the 'deconstruction of Hegel', arises in the Dialectical Analysis as a Research Methodology (DARM) literature because opinions on Hegel are taken second-hand (what we could refer to as 'Handed-Hegel's Analysis as a Research Methodology' – HARM). In the DARM literature, the HARM is clearly evident, firstly, because appropriate passages or texts of Hegel are almost always absent, and secondly, because any considered opinion on what Hegel "really meant" is omitted. Certainly there will be disagreement among philosophers (and others) on "what Hegel really meant", but even this disagreement is unacknowledged. It is simply assumed that what appears in the DARM literature on what constitutes Hegel's Dialectic is sufficient. Consider now a summary position from a seminal paper representing the literature on Dialectical Analysis as a Research Methodology in the following passage from Andrew Van De Ven and Marshall Poole [Van de Ven and Poole, 1995, p 2]:

In dialectical models of development, conflicts emerge between entities espousing opposing thesis and antithesis that collide to produce a synthesis, which in time becomes the thesis for the next cycle of a dialectical progression. Confrontation and conflict between opposing entities generate this dialectical cycle.

## The Existing Treatment of Hegel's Dialectic

The DARM literature never gets to the deeper sense of Hegel's Dialectic and hence its capacity as a research methodology is accordingly restricted. Consider a further quotation from Van de Ven and Poole [Van de Ven and Poole, 1995, p 8,9]:

A third school, dialectical theory, begins with the Hegelian assumption that the organizational entity exists in a pluralistic world of colliding events, forces, or contradictory values that compete with each other for domination and control. These oppositions may be internal to an organizational entity because it may have several conflicting goals or interest groups competing for priority. Also, oppositions may be external to the organizational entity as it pursues directions that collide with the direction of other organizations. In any case, a dialectical theory requires two or more distinct entities that embody these oppositions to confront and engage one another in conflict. In a dialectical process theory, stability and change are explained by reference to the balance of power between opposing entities. Struggles and accommodations that maintain the status quo between oppositions produce stability. Change occurs when these opposing values, forces, or events gain sufficient power to confront and engage the status quo. The relative power of an antithesis may mobilize an organizational entity to a sufficient degree to challenge the current thesis or state of affairs and set the stage for producing a synthesis. So, for example, an entity subscribing to a thesis (A) may be challenged by an opposing entity with an antithesis (Not-A), and the resolution of the conflict produces a synthesis (which is Not Not-A). Over time, this synthesis can become the new thesis as the dialectical process continues. By its very nature, the synthesis is a novel construction that departs from both the thesis and antithesis. However, there is no assurance that dialectical conflicts produce creative syntheses. Sometimes an opposition group mobilizes sufficient power to simply overthrow and replace the status quo. Thus, also, many organizations persist by maintaining sufficient power to suppress and prevent the mobilization of opposition groups. In the bargaining and conflict management literature, the desired creative synthesis is one that represents a win-win solution, whereas either the maintenance of the thesis or its replacement with an antithesis is often treated as a win-lose outcome of a conflict engagement (Neal & Northcraft, 1991). In terms of organizational change, maintenance of the status quo represents stability, but its replacement with either the antithesis or the synthesis represents a change, for the better or worse.

## The Deeper Sense of Hegel's Dialectic

Let us now consider a number of assertions in the above passage that can be reviewed in the light of the deeper sense of Hegel's Dialectic:

1. However, there is no assurance that the dialectical conflicts produce creative syntheses;
2. Many organizations persist by maintaining sufficient power to suppress and prevent the mobilization of opposition groups;
3. In the bargaining and conflict management literature, the desired creative synthesis is one that represents a win-win solution, whereas either the maintenance of the thesis or its replacement with an antithesis is often treated as a win-lose outcome of a conflict engagement;
4. In terms of organizational change, maintenance of the status quo represents stability, but its replacement with either the antithesis or the synthesis represents a change, for better or worse.

### *No Assurances of Creative Syntheses*

Jean-Phillipe Milet in "Experience as Technique of the Self" [Milet, 1995, p 1] points out that "a savoir ... has the character of 'knowing how to proceed', of familiar surety; but, also, .. in the sense of the surety of knowledge which is exposed to the necessity of adjustments and re-adjustments to which the facticity of existence constrains the [S]elf, that is, to the possibility of accidents". In other words, from Milet we can see that the Self (which only has experience – i.e., its appearance via the conscious self – as technique) is in no need of the conscious self in relation to, in our terms, *designing* a destiny. The conscious self is necessary in order to will its (Self) destiny into being, but the caution is that the conscious self is accident prone. The Self to which Hegel refers

as Spirit, is that which our conscious self sees as the “good in us”, as our conscience, as our essence, or in deeper personal senses as our Being, in short, to what we all regard as our intuition (at whatever level of deepness we care to follow this). The conscious self re-acts to and pre-judges events in the world. It is little wonder that the conscious self gets into situations of conflict and the ‘possibility of accidents’. The Self, our conscience, or sense of goodness - our Spirit according to Hegel - is what we already are. Our conscious self is what We (the essential ‘we’) are not. Yet as human beings we persist in trying to change what we are not, rather than in letting ourselves be what we already are. There are always assurances of creative “syntheses” when the group undergoing change ‘is of one mind’. According to the deeper sense of Hegel’s Dialectic the conflict does not go on at the level of the conscious selves of the participants, but at the individual level of conscious self and Self. Once that is resolved among the members of the group then there is a “creative solution”. If the group is being ‘scientific or objective’ then this is symptomatic of the conscious self’s assertion for power. If the conflict arises out of this so-called ‘objectivity’ then that is also symptomatic of the conscious self. You may ask how else is it possible. A ‘philosophical’ approach is the one that resolves the conflict within the individual first. Once this conflict is resolved then the planning (as intuition) can proceed. This is what I believe C West Churchman (in *Thought and Wisdom*) meant when he said [Churchman, 1982, p 53]:

Because I had a growing uneasiness about the planner’s role in society, I invented a fourth group in addition to clients, decision makers, and planners, which I called ‘system philosophers’. These were people who were interested in designing the role of systems planners.... In the first place they reject the idea that system’s planners are “scientific” and “objective” and therefore people whose advice should automatically be followed by decision makers.

### ***Power Against “Opposition Groups”***

With a resolution of the conflict of conscious self and Self at the individual level, for a particular group required decision, in other words, *with* the implementation of a ‘philosophical approach’, the group is no longer seen as an opposition group, but rather as a group ‘researching a question’ and providing a creative solution.

### ***Win-Lose Outcome of Conflict Engagement, and Synthesis as Change for Better or Worse***

With a ‘philosophical approach’, no longer are engagements seen in scientific terms as “on or off”; ‘win or lose’, ‘better or worse’, but rather as contributions that may or may not be appropriate in terms of the possibilities of resourced implementation.

## **Conclusion**

In this brief paper, we have attempted to articulate the essence of a field that Heidegger for one, in almost all of his extensive published work over his entire lifetime worked upon, namely an expression and elaboration of the ground of Being. What we have attempted to cover is the deeper sense of Hegel’s Dialectic and to bring its implications to bear, foundationally, upon current conceptions of assumptions upon which Hegel’s Dialectical Analysis as a Research Methodology rest. This paper has restricted itself to those philosophical foundations. Further research will centre on how this new understanding of “the conflict” can be used to analyse the *conflict* nature of IT enabled organisational change.

## **References**

Provided provided upon request.