

UNIT 3

HEGEL

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3.0. OBJECTIVES

In this Unit you are expected to know:

- Explanation of the Absolute Idea of Hegel
- Evolution of reality – Organic theory
- Dialectic method
- Hegel, an idealist

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Hegel is a German thinker who devoted his life wholly to academic purists. His science of logic, dialectical reasoning, encyclopaedia of philosophical sciences, philosophy of Right – all provide an intellectual foundation for modern nationalism. Hegel was an idealist who methodically constructed a comprehensive system of thought about the world. He took a much more systematic approach than Kant by making absolute consciousness as the key source of ultimate connections among all other things. Hegel held that Reality must be Rational and that its ultimate structure is revealed in the structure of our thought. He attempts to give an elaborate, comprehensive and systematic ontology from a logical standpoint.

As Kant has noted in antinomies that one general description of the world commonly leads us into a contemplation of the opposite, Hegel made a further supposition that the two concepts so held in opposition can always be united by a shift to some higher level of thought. Thus, the human mind invariably moves from thesis to anti-thesis and then to synthesis, employing each synthesis as the thesis for a new opposition to be transcended by yet a higher level continuing, in a perpetual walk of intellectual achievement.

Compared to other philosophers, it is rather very difficult and harder to understand Hegel. He differs from Parmenides and Spinoza in conceiving the whole, not as a simple substance, but as a complex system like an organism. In Hegel's view, world is not an illusion. The apparently separate things of the world have a greater or a lesser degree of reality and their reality exists in the aspect of the whole. Hegel calls, 'The Whole', in all its complexity as 'The Absolute'.

3.2 CONCEPT OF THE ABSOLUTE

This Absolute is not a Being separate from the world, nature or even individual persons, thus not making a sharp distinction between appearance and reality as in Plato's philosophy. In Hegel's view, nothing is unrelated and whatever we experience as separate things, will upon careful reflection, lead us to the other things to which they are related, until at last, the process of dialectical thought will end in the knowledge of the Absolute. Still, the Absolute is not a unity of separate things. He never accepted Spinoza's view that, everything is one, a single substance, with various modes and attributes. But, Hegel describes the Absolute as a dynamic process, as an organism having parts but nevertheless, unified into a complex system. Therefore, the Absolute is not an entity which is separate from the world as Kant's Noumena, but it is in the world in a special way.

3.3 ORGANIC THEORY

The relation of the Absolute, the Whole to its parts like an organism – is the basic conception of Hegel's philosophy. The conception of the relation between the parts and the whole in an organism is extended by Hegel to all truth and reality. Every truth or fact is dependent on and in turn helps to determine every other truth or fact. Since, everything is internally determined by its relation to every other thing, as opposed to Locke's doctrine of externality of relations, this theory is called, '**Organic theory of Truth and Reality**'

Hegel explains this organic theory of Truth and Reality with an example of a work of art. The meaning of a painting can be understood not by analysing the chemical constitution of the canvas, though the painting cannot exist without it. Nor, can we appreciate it by studying its each part, though each part has an artistic relation to the rest. It is part of a whole and the true significance of this whole is more than the addition of these different parts. The whole logically determines the character of each of the parts and in turn each part contributes to the whole. In the same way, the personality of man is determined not by what he is at present, but by the biologically inherited traits of his parents, influences of his relatives, teachers, playmates, associates, other individuals and human race itself. Not only that, even the planets on which he lives, which in turn is conditioned by the other heavenly bodies in the universe. Life as a whole is conditioned by human society, which in turn is related to the entire universe. Thus Hegel concluded that universe becomes conscious of itself in the individual and considers the Absolute as the world in its unity and completeness. Hence, he opines that this Absolute is not beyond space and time, but it is in space and time, in its infinite, all embracing thought.

Hegel's uniqueness is exhibited in the use of the terms – 'Abstract' and 'Concrete'. He explains that understanding the functioning of a leaf in its relation to the tree or viewing the individual's experiences as a member of the society is more 'concrete', while getting knowledge of a leaf by examining it under a microscope or regarding individual's experiences depending on separate instances as 'abstract'. That means, if we look at anything by itself apart from its relationship, we are looking at it 'abstractly' and on the contrary, if we consider it in its organic relationship, we view it 'concretely'. Hegel claims that the absolute is wholly concrete Reality comprehended within a whole and not something apart from other things.

This reality is Absolute, Divine and Abstract, but it is Concretized through different types of expressions in nature and humans. It is 'thought - thinking' itself, 'a unity of the subjective and objective Idea'. According to Hegel, there is no truth except the whole truth. So, Absolute is

the synthesis of Subjective Spirit and Objective Spirit because, Reality is Rationality. Man's knowledge of the Absolute is actually the Absolute, knowing itself through the finite spirit of man.

Hegel believes that this Absolute is the ultimate reality, which passes through the different stages of development in time and becomes conscious of itself in human reason. Yet, this absolute is timeless, eternal, all embracing, self completed whole.

By his logical method called **Dialectic**, he shows how everything is connected in principal with everything else and helps to constitute this whole. His method of reasoning is not linear like that of Descartes because, he does not start with some undoubted simple proposition and then proving each successive step in a mathematical way. Rather, he adopts an implicative system where in each phase of argument is shown to imply the rest. This mutual interdependence of all details and the comprehensiveness without ambiguities and inconsistencies prove the truth of the system as a whole. Thus, a system in which all is explained in a clear and consistent manner must be true. For, **'the truth is the whole'**. Everything of it is internally systematically related having reason for its existence at its basement.

The basic theme of Hegel's metaphysics is to demonstrate the unity of the opposites like, one and many, nature and culture, individual and society. The sense of fragmentation and discreteness is alien to the spirit of Hegel's philosophy. The self positing and self negating spirit of wholeness is the very nature of Hegelian reality.

In his metaphysical system, he wants to achieve two objectives:

- a. Man's unity with nature
- b. Man's unity with his own self and other selves

According to Hegel world is intelligible, reason being at the heart of things. Man can understand this truth through its faculty of reason. Hegel directly throws out a challenge to Hume and insists that there are things beyond our sense experiences which have equally real existence and one can know them through reason, even going beyond one's senses. Pure reason, as opposed to practical reason has formal existence, as opposed to material existence. Pure reason though is beyond space and time, it exists in the abstract sense with as much reality as the existence as the other concrete things. For example, the proposition 'two' and 'two' equals 'four' has a formal existence and remains true though we have never seen the abstract quantity 'two' through our senses. Without the existence of an abstract measure of quantity, we would never be able to distinguish between the concrete quantities of things in experience.

It is Hume's view that, we can never discover a first cause for the world or indeed a cause for anything, while Hegel argues that even if we cannot find a cause, we can at least find a reason for it. A cause is an active force that produces an effect in time. A reason is a logical necessity which has nothing to do with time. The reason for the world has a logical temporal priority to the world, just as a mathematical problem has a logical non-temporal priority for its solution. The 'logical' exists as truly as the 'physical'. Therefore, he argues that **'the Real is the Rational'**. For Hegel, 'the Real' does not mean the real in an empiricist's sense. He means by it that, every thing that is, is knowable and this view gave a new basis for thinking about the very structure of reality and about its manifestation in morality, law, religion, art, history and above all thought itself.

Hegel calls this Absolute – 'The Idea', 'The Spirit', 'The Mind' etc. Here, the word 'Idea' should always be spelled with an initial capital letter 'I' and prefixed by 'the'. In his opinion, 'Idea' means not the subjective creation of one's mind or an idea of this mind or that mind, a resultant or a faded out image. It has a special meaning. Nothing is so real for him as

'The Idea'. This view may be compared with Plato's conception of 'Idea' to the extent that, ideas are realities that human mind may discover, but do not create. In other respects, Hegel differs from Plato. In his opinion, Idea exists by itself and is independent of its being expressed in different particular forms. 'The Idea' is not static and self subsistent. But, has in it a force or power which makes its expression not only possible but also necessary. It's self expressive power which is natural to it, is inherent in it. In and through, all forms of dialectical development, progress as well as regress, 'The Idea' preserves its organic and purposive character.

Hegel laid great stress upon logic believing that knowing and being coincide. His view is that we can know the essence of reality by moving logically step by step, avoiding all self contradictions along the way. Since the rationality and actuality are identified by him, he agrees that, thought must follow the inner logic of reality itself. That means, logical connections must be discovered in the actual and not in some 'Empty Ratiocination'. Logic then is a process by which we deduce from our experience of the actual, the categories that describe the Absolute. This process of deduction is at the very heart of Hegel's dialectic philosophy.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for the answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Explain Hegel's concept of Absolute

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3.4 DIALECTIC METHOD

Existence is all inclusive, it comprises within it the state of 'not being' as well as 'being'. Everything contains within itself, its own opposite. It is impossible to conceive of anything without conceiving at the same time its opposite. We cannot think of finiteness without thinking of the infinity, or the time without thinking of the timelessness. Every thesis for an argument has its anti thesis as life and death, love and hate, day and night, youth and old age.

Whole nature is a reconciliation of opposites and Hegel's dialectic shows that any thesis implies its anti thesis and that the two are united in a higher synthesis in which the opposition between the two is reconciled and overcome in a larger unity. The Absolute Idea passes through a dialectic of many triads – each of which has its own Thesis, Anti Thesis and Synthesis. In the thesis, a certain aspect of reality is revealed and in the anti thesis, a contrasting aspect appears and the two are synthesised in a higher synthesis. The synthesis again gives rise to a new triad and that too another in turn. Thus, there are triads within triads and still other triads within there. Hegel tries to prove this by a logical deduction. Hence, the order of the dialectic is considered to be purely logical.

Hegelian dialectic, usually presented in a threefold manner comprising of three stages of development – A thesis giving rise to its reaction, anti thesis which contradicts or negates the thesis and the tension between the two being resolved by means of a synthesis. Hegel uses the term *Abstract* or *Immediate* to thesis and *Negative* or *Mediate* to anti thesis and *Concrete* to synthesis. If a particular moment of thought or what it is about is regarded as a *position*, time and

reflection show that it is incomplete and has its *opposition*. In due logical course, this opposition emerges further reflection and time and again shows that it is incomplete. In spite of their incompleteness and negative features, i.e. what they lack, both position and opposition have in them some positive promising and complementary features. These features and expressions in a higher composition in which position (thesis) and opposition (anti thesis) are sublimated and creatively reproduced is called synthesis. Thus, Hegel's dialectic method exhibits a systematic tri-rhythmic process until it culminates in the Absolute Idea.

The first basic triad of this logic is *Being Nothing and Becoming*. Hegel observes that our mind always moves from the more general and abstract to the specific and concrete. The most general concept that we can form about things is that – 'They are'. Although various things have specific and different qualities, they all have one thing in common. i.e their Being. So, Being is the most general concept that our mind can formulate. For, being must be logically prior to any specific thing, for things represent determinations or the shaping of what is originally without features. Hegel's concept begins with the concept of *being* and this is the thesis. 'Absolute is pure Being', which means that 'it just is', without assigning any qualities to it. But, 'pure Being' without any qualities is *Nothing*. Thus pure being alone suggests its own opposite, Nothing. Therefore Nothing is the anti thesis and we are lead to say that *Absolute is Nothing*.

But, both being and nothing are incomplete as they are opposed to each other. Therefore, this opposition must be reconciled in a higher concept called becoming. Hence, we can say that the 'Absolute is Becoming'. Thus, the higher concept 'Becoming' is a union of 'Being' and 'Nothing'. These three stages must be present at every stage of development in reality. The nature of reasoning must therefore be the same as the nature of reality. Reasoning and reality are never passive and static, but always dynamic. Thus both the method and nature of reasoning are applicable to reality which means that what is true of thought is true of reality, without any dualism between them.

Hegel believed that the inner essence of the absolute could be reached by human reason because the Absolute is disclosed in nature as well as in the working of the human mind. What connects these three – the Absolute, nature and man's mind is thought itself. Nature is the *objective self*, as opposed to the *conscious self*. If we wish to obtain the truth, we must not only view the world from the stand point of our inner selves, but we must view our inner selves from the stand point of the world. This is the supreme test we must pass, if we have to follow the highest law of reason. We must regard ourselves with complete objectivity as our own opposite, anti-thesis and then we are ready for the synthesis known to human experience. By withdrawing from our imperfect and fragile consciousness, we will achieve a far greater, sublime, perfect consciousness of self. It is only then that we will be able to realise that this self is completely aware of its own organic unity in all its inclusiveness. In this way, nature rises to self consciousness in man and man rises to self consciousness in freedom. Thus *the Absolute Idea* in itself as pure reason (logic) acts a the thesis and the *nature* becomes the anti thesis and the grand synthesis of the two is *the spirit or the mind*, the self knowing.

The second basic triad of nature is matter, life and mind. In matter, the thesis we do find that parts are related mechanically and in life, the anti thesis, they are united organically. Therefore, every living being is an organism and every part in it is controlled by the central life principle. That means, a living organism is not only mechanical and physical in its constitution, but something more. That is, it has life in it. The higher concept, mind is a union of matter and life. Mind or the subjective spirit is the synthesis of the evolution of matter and life. Therefore, the presence of a well developed mind or ego constitutes the distinguishing feature of human

existence, which cannot be found at the lower level of nature. This mind in man is capable of controlling both the material body and the principle of life in man. In fact, the mind is the union of both matter and life in man who can reason with self-consciousness. Hegel calls this self-consciousness – mind or spirit. So, the Absolute mind which is in a world external to itself in nature, returns to itself in finite individuals which participate in its own rational thought. In this way, the opposition between matter (thesis) and life (anti-thesis) is overcome at a higher level called, the subjective mind (synthesis). This brings him to the third part of the system called the philosophy of mind.

In this third part, the philosophy of mind, Hegel deals with the cultural experiences of mankind which sets forth the elements of his dialectic in a clear exquisite manner. The basic triad of this part are subjective spirit (thesis), which refer to the inner working of the human mind and the objective spirit which represents the mind in its external embodiment in the social and political institutions become the anti-thesis and at the apex of knowledge stands the absolute as its synthesis.

Hegel has pointed out that there are triads within triads, even in the understanding of the subjective spirit. We can try to understand this subjective spirit through different branches of knowledge. Anthropology, which deals with the structure of human body and the cultural developments through generation, provides the thesis, while phenomenology which deals with ego, which is opposite to body and other objects of the world provide the anti thesis. This opposition can be overcome by the higher consciousness of mind which is the subject matter of psychology as synthesis. Thus, in this triad, we are having Anthropology as thesis, Phenomenology as anti-thesis and Psychology as its synthesis.

The objective spirit is explained by Hegel with reference to the social consciousness or the society in general. The society in which man lives is not a mere collection of people, but has got a consciousness of its own called social consciousness which is characterised by a set of psychological attitudes, traditions, beliefs, cultural patterns etc. This doctrine of objective spirit can be analysed in three sub parts, called the concept of right, the concept of morality and the concept of social morality.

Right means that which gives security and protection of life to everyone who lives in that society. This concept of right has three implications – Right to property (Thesis), Right to contract (Anti-Thesis) and Right to punish (Synthesis) respectively. Right to property promises everyman the right to possess some property for the sustenance of his own life and his family. At the same time, everyman should recognise that the other persons also should have the same right like him. So, he enters into a contract with which other's right is recognised. Thus the right to contract becomes the anti-thesis of his right triad. To unite the above thesis and anti-thesis, a higher level of concept called, right to punish arrives as a synthesis. When a person's property is encroached upon by others, it becomes necessary to punish them. To restore the right to property of each individual against its laws finds an important place in social life and thus emerges the right of punishment.

If, claiming certain rights from the society called the concept of right becomes the thesis, then discharging certain duties to the society with duty consciousness called the *concept of morality* becomes the anti-thesis. Man being conscious of his rights and duties becomes aware of the fact that his own happiness is tied up with social happiness. If the society as a whole prospers, then the individual in that society also prospers. Therefore, must work for the progress of the society as a whole which may be termed, the concept of social morality as the synthesis. The principle triad of the objective spirit consists of law in the sense of abstract right which

Hegel defines as 'Be a person and respect others as persons' which is similar to Kant's second "Categorical Imperative" – 'Treat every human being, including yourself as an end in himself and not a means to the advantage of anyone else'. In other words, 'Respect yourself and respect others impartially and exploit no one'.

Though, there is an apparent distinction between man and society, Hegel tries to show that man finds his fullness of being in and through individuals and the relations obtaining between them. The unity of reality finds richest expression at the man-society level. Society is not a mere construct for Hegel, but has an organic character since it expresses and fulfils itself through the lives of the individuals. Man being a self-conscious person has some moral capacities and the corresponding obligations to his fellow humans. When the subjective rights and inward conscience becomes objectified in social institutions like family and state, social ethics emerges. The whole sphere of human behaviour – both individual and collective is described by him as a part of the actual and therefore is essentially rational. Hegel looks upon the social institutions not as the creation of man, but as the product of the dialectical movement of history, of the objective manifestation of rational reality.

Our consciousness of the absolute, says Hegel is achieved progressively as the mind moves from art to philosophy through religion. Art provides a conscious semblance of the Idea by providing the mind, with an object of statue, building, music or poetry. In the object of art, mind apprehends the absolute as beauty. In other words, man sees through these sensuous medium the manifestation of the divine beauty. Art thus becomes the thesis of his dialectic method.

Since no sensuous form can convey adequately the profound spiritual truth, the dialectic passes from art to its anti-thesis in religion. Religion occupies an intermediate position between art and philosophy. The content of religion is representation of pure thought clothed in imagery of some kind that is God. So, Hegel does not reject the representation of religion as mere delusions, but sees in them the actual revelations of the absolute which expresses the truth as adequately as the popular mind has been able to grasp it.

Man feels the presence of divine within himself in his internal consciousness and he expresses beauty seen through the sense organs and felt religious content by means of well cultivated expression through which the highest truth comes to be expressed called philosophy. Religion and philosophy having basically the same subject matter represent the knowledge of 'That', which is eternal, of what God is and what flows out of nature. But, philosophy leaves behind the pictorial form of religion and rises to the level of pure thought.

In philosophy, the Absolute thinks about itself through the medium of philosopher's mind. At this level, there will be no distinction between the finite and the infinite, as finite becomes one with the infinite, which is the highest level of development that an individual can attain. Ultimately, in philosophy, according to Hegel – the thinker is the Absolute, the subject matter of thinking is the Absolute and the medium through which the absolute thinks is also the absolute. Thus Hegel places philosophy as the highest point of development of human knowledge. Hence, it is often said that western philosophical thinking which started from Plato passed through several stages, reached its culmination in Hegel's philosophy.

According to Hegel, philosophy does not offer man the knowledge of the Absolute, at any particular moment, because, that knowledge is the product of the dialectical process. The history of philosophy is for him, the development of the absolute self consciousness in the mind of man. The philosophical mind discovers the absolute in all stages of the dialectic and in so

doing man becomes rational. Self conscious and appreciates his position in the universe, which is organic and rational.

Dialectic, according to Hegel means no longer the art of argumentation. Rather it is the method of overcoming the limitations and rising to the level of the absolute. Each stage of the dialectic occupies an important position which has a proper place as a moment in the whole. It is possible to reach the truth only by going through all the steps in the dialectic. In this specific sense, logic becomes metaphysics and thus the fulfilment of all knowledge.

3.5 HEGEL'S IDEALISM

Hegel gave the world a more plausible and comprehensive system of idealism. His sole concern was to understand the world as it is and to explain everything logically. He explains adequately, the rational constitution of the universe. Even God as has been remarked, does not seem to be permitted any secrets which Hegel's reason is unable to disclose.

Like Berkeley, though Hegel is an idealist, his idealism differs very much from Berkeley. Berkeley being an empirical theistic idealist believes that, God created this world and has His own existence, independent of His creation. While, Hegel being a rationalistic pantheistic idealist opines that Absolute is the world in its organic unity and not the creator of it. For Hegel, world is real although its various parts are dependent upon the unity of the whole. The whole is not a blank, unknowable unity, but it is rational and knowable in its organic interrelatedness.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

Hegel points out that the Absolute first manifests itself in the categories of logic and then externalised in the physical nature, subjective mind and objective mind. Final culmination is reached in the absolute mind in which the whole reality is apprehended in its organic unity and completeness. In art, this is done through the medium of sensuous form, in religion through worship and in philosophy the absolute is disclosed in the conception of pure thought. Hegel criticises the traditional epistemological distinction of the objective from the subjective and offers his own dialectical account of the development of consciousness from individual sensation through social concern with ethics and politics to the pure consciousness, the spirit. The result is a comprehensive world view that encompasses the historical development of civilization in all its sources.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for the answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Give an account of dialectic method

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3.7. KEY WORDS

Absolute: Etymology: Middle English *absolut*, from Anglo-French, from Latin *absolutus*, from past participle of *absolvere* to set free, absolve. The following are some of its developed meanings: free from imperfection (PERFECT); free or relatively free from mixture (PURE); being, governed by, or characteristic of a ruler or authority completely free from constitutional or other restraint (absolute power).

Absolute Mind (Hegel): Absolute mind is the state in which mind rises above all the limitations of nature and institutions, and is subjected to itself alone in art, religion, and philosophy. For the essence of mind is freedom, and its development must consist in breaking away from the restrictions imposed on it by nature and human institutions.

3.8. FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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3.9. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

Absolute, according to Hegel is the idea, the spirit or the mind which is infinite, timeless, eternal, all embracing ultimate reality – union of a self positing and a self negating spirit, which is a self completed whole – Exists by itself and independently of its being expressed in different particular forms - Dynamic and having parts unified into a complex system, like an organism – Unity of opposites expressing in a dialectical method –realised by human reason and the highest point of development of human knowledge – ultimately, it is the thinker thinking subject and the medium of thinking

Explanation of the relation of the absolute – the whole to its parts – that is nature, humans, subjective spirit and objective spirit like an organism having an internal inseparable relationship like a piece of work of art and its part – Explanation of the relation of the absolute and the world following the dialectic method

Reality is rational means its ultimate structure is revealed in the structure of our thought – Concretised in nature and humans and a synthesis of subjective spirit and objective spirit – Becomes conscious of itself in human reason – Pure reason having formal existence, exists in the abstract sense with as much reality as the existence of concrete things – The logical exists as truly as physical. Therefore, real is rational – Reality is knowable through different manifestations – Knowledge of it can be attained through dialectical process – Explanation of how rationality and actuality are identified.

Answer to Check Your Progress II

Triadic structure of dialectic method having thesis , anti thesis and synthesis – Explanation of the triads – Being, Nothing and Becoming – Matter, Life and Mind – Subjective Spirit , Objective Spirit and the Absolute – Anthropology, Phenomenology and Psychology – Concept of right, morality and social morality – Right to property, contract and of punishment – Art, religion and philosophy – Philosophy being the culmination of all thought.

