

DIALECTICS

Ever since Heraclitus and Plato Dialectics has meant the game of opposites. The opposite poles (thesis and antithesis) initially exclude each other, thus configuring an excluding relation of opposition: one always excludes the other, although always pointing at it. In a second moment, however, this excluding relation of opposition, worked on by reason which depurates and elevates it, becomes a unit (synthesis) in which the formerly opposite poles are now reconciled and unified. In order to carry out the necessary depuration and thus allow unification, a few elements of thesis and antithesis have to be overcome, others, kept. The term *Aufheben*, so often used by Hegel, has both meanings: overcoming and keeping. An example from the Greek classics illustrates this clearly and convincingly. On entering University a boy sees the most beautiful girl in the world coming his way in the crowd. He stops, glassy-eyed, as though struck by lightning, and sends the girl a look that says "I love you". This first, initial love was called *phílesis* by the Greeks. We do not have an equivalent term in Portuguese, but we all know what it is about. Every *phílesis* (thesis), despite its wonderful core, is a unilateral, risky act. In most cases the girl looks, sees, lowers her eyes, and goes by hurriedly. If, however, the girl looks back, faces the person who is making this silent declaration of love to her, if she answers with a look that says: "I love you too", at this moment we have the antithesis, i.e., *antiphílesis*. *Antiphílesis* (antithesis) is no longer a risky act, but she too is a unilateral act. When, immediately after this, he and she love each other and know that they are loved, here comes synthesis which, in Greek is called *philía*, the love that knows that it is also loved, love of one to another, which despite pointing to poles that were previously opposite, is a single, great love that reconciles and unifies what was, initially, excluding opposition. In the genesis of *philía* there was both an overcoming and a keeping (*aufheben*). The risk and one-sidedness that exist in *phílesis* and *antiphílesis* were overcome, the most positive and beautiful aspect that existed in the previously opposite poles was kept. Dialectics is, thus, the game of two opposite poles that initially exclude each other, but then, after having been worked on and depurated (*aufheben*), are unified in a concept or synthetic proposition. Thesis and antithesis are false because, although they apparently are the whole, they are only incomplete parts of a higher totality, which really is true. – The opposition between the two opposite poles is called by Hegel contradiction (*Widerspruch*). It is obvious that stating the logical contradiction between two

opposites, means to always and necessarily say that one of them is true, the other false. Since Aristotle we have known that it is thus, to deny it would mean to deny the very Principle of Non-Contradiction and to destroy all and any rationality. Therefore it must be concluded that what Hegel calls “contradiction” is not the contradiction of logic, but contrariness. And two contrary opposites can, indeed, be simultaneously false. There are strong indications that Hegel himself, although using the term “contradiction”, means contrariness, since in the opposition between contradictory aspects, one of the terms must necessarily have existential quantifiers; this never occurs in Hegel.

Ascending dialectics (anábasis) is the one that begins with the multiplicity of things in the world in which we live, and to understand them correctly, it seeks and finds the synthesis between initially opposite poles. From the plurality of two opposites (thesis and antithesis) thus appears a higher concept or principle, a single one, in which the previous multiplicity is “overcome” and “kept” (*aufheben*). On applying this method, on seeking unity from multiplicity, we arrive at increasingly broad concepts and principles, which are thus more universal. In the beginning these synthetic concepts constitute more or less broad theories, which are the subject of the empirical sciences. As the dialectics rises to higher and more universal concepts and principles, philosophy emerges. When the dialectics reach the first and last principle of the universe, we have the hard core of dialectical philosophy. Dialectics is thus, both the method to be used to rise from multiplicity to unity, and the philosophy made in this trajectory. – *Descending dialectics (katábasis)* begins with the first and last principle, to descend step by step and return to the multiplicity of existing things. It is only now that the philosopher who understood the last, one principle of the whole multiplicity, sees unique things as moments in the development of the *good and the beautiful*, based on which and by which, appears the multiplicity of things. Substance is thus unique, one, but always in movement, to which it folds (*implicatio*) and unfolds (*explicatio*) in a perpetual becoming. According to the dialectical philosophy, all things are moments in the evolution the substance which is one and unique, but always, also, within itself, multiplicity in movement. The philosophical system which arises from Dialectics is always monist and universalist, it is a system of the one and the whole, of totality in movement. The triadic element (thesis, antithesis and synthesis) is mostly, but not always explicit. The same goes for the unity and unicity of substance.

In *Heraclitus* we already find the game of opposites, i.e, dialectics. The path that ascends is the same one that descends, he says. Ascending and descending are opposites, but the path is the same, the unity of both the opposite poles. In *Socrates* dialectics presents thesis and antithesis expressly and clearly as false positions. Synthesis however is not said and expressed. Socrates, on showing the falseness of thesis and antithesis, in a way obliges the listener to formulate the synthesis, since there is no other way out of this aporia: aporia means precisely a blind alley. The way out, synthesis, is not given by Socrates; the listener must discover and formulate the concept or the principle that, overcoming the falseness of thesis and antithesis, gives them unity and truth. This is Socratic Pedagogy. In Plato's dialogues we usually find dialectics without an expressed synthesis, as was said above about Socrates. In many dialogues (for instance, in *Menon*) Plato presents remembering a myth as though it were synthesis. This is the meaning, for instance, of the myth of the star (*Menon*) or of the myth of the cave (*Republic*); this is ascending dialectics. Descending dialectics, in Plato, is based on two first principles, the One (*to hén*) and the indeterminate Multiplicity (*aoristos dyás*). These two principles, one interacting with the other and thus building new and more complex figures give rise, first of all to the ideas which are numbers, then to the other ideas, and finally to the soul of the world, from which is developed this concrete world in which we live. In Plato, as we see, there is an attempt to build, based on two principles and using the theory of ideas-numbers and of a geometry of proportions, a whole system in the form of a descending dialectics (*Timeu*). In Platonism, the first part of the system is, thus, One and indeterminate Multiplicity, from which came the ideas and numbers; the second part is the soul of the world, the third and last part, the sensitive world. In *Plotinus* and *Proclus*, as among the Neoplatonic philosophers in general, we have, with very few exceptions, the presence of dialectics as a method, and as a triadic system in a pyramidal shape. As the first principle, at the top of the dialectical pyramid is the One and the Good or the Universal, as the second part *lógos*, as third part the soul of the world. *Augustine* merges Christianity with Neoplatonic dialectical philosophy. The Augustinian system, always working with the dialectical triad, also has three parts. At the top, as the first principle we have God who is one and necessarily three; this is the apex of the pyramid, the first part of the system. The second part, which is about created nature and man who sinned (antithesis) is opposed to this first part (thesis). In the third part of the system (synthesis), man and nature are rendered divine by incarnation (participants by the grace of divine nature) and rendered eternal in

Celestial Jerusalem by resurrection. The Neoplatonic doctrine of Augustine dominates medieval philosophy until *Albertus Magnus* and *Thomas of Aquinas* receive and take over Aristotle, from the Arab universities in Spain. In the Renaissance, both *Giordano Bruno* and *Nicolas de Cues* should be highlighted as dialectical thinkers. In the Modern Age, *Spinoza* occupies a special place for two reasons. First of all, he does not take his inspiration directly from the Greek or Christian tradition, but rather from the Neoplatonic tradition which is present in passages of the Kabala, and in the very beautiful poems by *Judas Abravanel*, the Lion of Judah. Secondly, he does not explicitly explain the triads, although he gives extraordinary emphasis to unity and the unicity of substance. *Spinoza* had great influence on Goethe, as the latter himself said in his memories (*Wahrheit und Dichtung*). *Fichte*, *Schelling*, *Hegel* and *Marx* are typically Neoplatonic philosophers; *Hegel* is the one, among them, who works most explicitly on the triadic method and the unity of substance. In the *Phaenomenology of the Spirit* he draws the main lines of ascending dialectics; from the multiplicity of here and now, he reaches absolute knowledge in the last chapter. The *Science of Logics* is the great attempt by *Hegel* at deriving (*herleiten*) and explaining – descending dialectics- the system of the world with its multiplicity, based on a single great principle, which is at the same time principle as in beginning and principle as in rule; below we will return to this point.

Here, for its historical importance, we should mention *Dialectical Materialism*. Already in the three first chapters of his book *Das Kapital*, *Marx* elaborates the theory on value added to the product by labor. The capitalist who owns the machines in the production line, buys very cheaply the work, the labor of those who can and know how to work but do not have the capital to purchase the necessary equipment. The final product which is then sold in the markets is the result of two elements: capital and labor. *Marx*, and then dialectical materialism, say that all the value that was added to the original input, the so-called *Mehrwert* (accrued value), should belong to the workers. The capitalist and capitalism appear, thus, as the parasitic exploiter who takes from nature and from workers what should belong to the latter. Capital and labor are therefore in dialectical opposition. Thesis and antithesis are always false in dialectics: therefore one must seek a synthesis that will reconcile and unify the two opposite poles at a higher level. Since this must happen in history according to dialectical materialism, the Communist Revolution is the inexorable final stage. In Communism then, the excluding opposition between capital(thesis) and labor (antithesis) disappears, and the workers are the

synthesis in the Communist state, the final stage of the revolution (synthesis). – The theoretical errors of Dialectical Materialism are basically two. First of all the uncritical takeover of historical necessitarianism, according to which the revolution is inexorable; besides philosophical reasons, the facts are there refuting this point of the theory. Secondly, an error in the analysis of relations between capital and labor. Wild capitalism, as described above, was overcome, yes, not by Communism but by social-democracy and by the reorientation one now sees in the ongoing Chinese model.

In the 20th century we find, among Christian thinkers an eloquent Neoplatonic philosopher, Jesuit *Teilhard de Chardin*. Also in the 20th century, *Horckheimer* and *Adorno*, founders of the Frankfurt School, tried to expound and advocate negative dialectics, i.e., dialectics without a synthesis. Actually, in the case of these authors, it is a criticism of the Marxist concept of Communism as the final stage of the dialectical trajectory of history. We consider correct the criticism made by them against Marx and Communism, but here it must be recalled that neither one nor the other of the authors cited develops dialectical thinking properly. Dialectics, strictly speaking, is absent in these authors. Still in the 20th century, *Ludwig von Bertalanffy*, inspired directly by *Nicholas de Cues* and also by Goethe, Schelling and Hegel, recreates the Neoplatonic system in contemporary language and gives birth to what is called the *Systems Theory*. The latter heavily influenced such disparate authors as *Umberto Maturana* (Biology), *Niklas Luhmann* (Sociology), *Fritjov Kapra* (Physics and Biology); in these authors, who refer explicitly to Bertalanffy, neither the methodic triad, nor the unicity of substance are emphasized, although they are latent or presupposed in them. The *International Society for System Sciences* (ISSS), founded by Bertalanffy in 1956, from the point of view of scientific strictness has undergone and, unfortunately is still undergoing highs and lows. The aforementioned authors, especially in the United States, are no longer aware that “system” is the modern name for Dialectics, above all when one thinks of system unity as something which is evolving; they have forgotten their philosophical origins and do Neoplatonic Philosophy without realizing it. Important authors, who do not quote Bertalanffy or Systems Theory, even today still work based on the Neoplatonic and Neohegelian foundations. Here Neoplatonism appears under the name of Theory of Complexity, Theory of Self-Organization, Theory of complex evolutionary Systems, *Artificial Life* etc. Let us mention John Holland (*Adaptation in Natural and Artificial Systems*, 1975), Richard Dawkins (*Selfish Gene*,

1976), John Maynard Smith (*Evolution and the Theory of Games*, 1982), Stuart Kaufmann (*Origins of Order*, 1993), Daniel Dennett (*Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 1995), Edward Wilson (*Consilience: The Unity of Science*, 1998), Eric Beinhocker (*The Origin of Wealth*, 2006).

But let us return to Hegel and to the corrective reformulation of the system I am proposing. In *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, - ascending dialectics - Hegel begins with the here and now of our concrete world, going through a series of figurations in which the Self becomes broader and realizes itself, and finally arrives at the Self which knows itself to be identical with the Universe. Self is the substance of the Universe, Substance is the universal Self. In *The Science of Logic*- ascending dialectics – Hegel traces the great lines of the last great project, in philosophical language, of a Neoplatonic system. In the first book, the *Logic of Being*, the categories are created, i.e., the very general predicates. In the second book, the *Logic of Essence*, radical criticism is leveled at all philosophic systems of our Western tradition, which advocate a dualist structure of the Universe. In the third book, in *Logic of Concept*, Hegel intends to reconstruct the old *Metaphysics*, in creating a meta-logic of all possible logics and mathematics (subjective concept), a meta-theory of all objective sciences, such as Physics, Biology, etc. (objective concept), and an absolute theory which would be the synthesis of the first two. In this third book Hegel obviously failed, since he did not achieve any of the goals proposed in the project. The meta-logic of all logics does not exist so far.; the great unified theory of nature (*Great Unified Theory* - GUT), has not been satisfactorily formulated either. Despite this, it is necessary to continue trying: to sail is necessary, said the Argonauts who were Theseus' companions. This was repeated by Fernando Pessoa. Here is a new attempt. The critical and thus corrective reconstruction of the project of the dialectic system, in the tradition of Plato and Hegel, in my opinion can be articulated as follows: *Logic of Being*

1.0. How to begin? A critical philosophy, after Descartes and Kant, cannot make any determinate assumption. If it does, it is no longer critical but dogmatic. Consequently, the beginning of a critical philosophy can only be a proposition that does not assume anything determinate. Now, when one does not assume anything determinate, and even so says it, we are assuming everything in an indeterminate manner. Whoever uses the completely indeterminate categories of being and of nothing, is not making any determinate assumption. This is the critical way, this is the beginning of the road.

1.1. Everything is being, being without any determination, without any content, this is the first proposition of the system. This proposition –thesis- is false, since the act of speaking which enounces it and expresses it is something determinate; thus a performative contradiction arises, since the determinate act of speaking disavows the spoken content. This shows the falseness of the initial thetic proposition).

1.2. Everything is nothing, a nothing without any determination, without any content. This proposition – antithesis – too is false, since it contains the same performative contradiction mentioned earlier. In linear logic, the conclusion to be arrived at from the falseness of thesis and antithesis – both universal propositions – is that some things are determinate, others not. This conclusion, however, is a particular proposition and, as such, although correct and real, does not fit the picture of the very universal determinations of the Universe. In dialectical logic, one does not play the game of contradictions, but rather the game of contraries. We rule out as false the categories of indeterminate and empty being and of the likewise indeterminate and empty being. Proof: there is something determinate in this Universe. But since this determination cannot come from outside, it must necessarily be concluded that, ultimately, the Universe is undergoing a self-determination process.

1.3. Thence emerges the truth of the synthetic proposition. All is becoming, i.e., everything is in a process of self-determination. This is the first dialectic triad of the Logic of Being. After showing the falseness of the thesis – everything is being – as well as the antithesis – everything is nothing – we have the true conclusion: Everything is becoming.

2. From this first triad come the following very universal categories or predicates: Everything is quality, turned on itself. The becoming presupposes within itself its quality and quantity in a movement of self-determination; the latter, folding back on itself, discovers itself as a measure.

3. In this way, all philosophies that are either dualistic or only idealistic or only materialistic are excluded from the Logic of Being. The worst position, obviously, is that of the dualist.

2. Logic of Essence

2.1. This second book could be called *Against Essence*, since in it the very notion of essence is dissolved; according to Hegel there are no essences, only a few configurations that are logically necessary and other configurations that are contingently

more or less stable. Man does not have an essence; this is only a stable configuration of relations in a contingent history; man is the result of a long evolutionary process. The central issue, when dealing with binomials is that we inevitably enter the irrationality of a *progressus* or *regressus ad infinitum*; what Hegel calls bad infinitude. The attempt at solving the problem linearly always leads, as it did Aristotle and Thomas of Aquinas, to the arbitrary and dogmatic postulation of placing, somewhere, a first beginning (*arkhé*) or a last end (*télos*). Place it where? In what place in the series? Anywhere in the series? Is it not *ad infinitum*? How then to find a beginning or an end? The right answer, which avoids arbitrary dogmatism, is in the dialectic thinking that places the opposing poles in the form of a circle that turns and thus is constituted and feeds itself back. This circle, in which a pole constitutes and feeds the pole opposed to it, is the virtuous circle. This, being virtuous, solves the issue of *regressus ad infinitum*. The beginning turns on itself and meets its end in a new beginning. The causing cause and the effect caused do not go into *regressus ad infinitum*, because the first cause is always the *causa sui*; the causal movement is first of all self-causation and it is only by analytic abstraction – analysis – that we have, later, the causing cause as something separate from the effect caused. But is there not also the vicious circle? Is it not of this that one thinks when one talks about circularity? True, there are virtuous circles such as self-awareness, self-causation, self-organization, etc, as there are also vicious circles, as for instance, the escalating violence in a game in which there is attack and defense. In these cases the philosopher has the job of transforming the vicious circles which are always self-destructive into virtuous circles, which are always self-constitutive. The criterion here is completely pragmatic; the successful circle is a virtuous one. Vicious circles are always self-destructive.

2.2. Essence and appearance, act and power, form and matter, substance and accident, founding and founded, causing cause and caused effect, need and contingency come into the dualist philosophies as opposite and excluding poles. Dialectics makes us think about them as internal moments of flexion (turning on itself), unity of two poles which mutually constitute good circularity. Thus, instead of dualism of essence and appearance, what emerges is the synthetic and circular category of self-manifestations : from the founding and the founded emerges the synthetic and circular category of self-manifestation; from the founding and the founded comes the monism of self-foundation, which generates, within itself, as moments that are internal to it, what founds and what is founded. Causing cause and caused effect are not irreducible, nor

do they exist in themselves and by themselves, they are, instead, internal moments constituted by self-causation (*causa sui*); the opposition between one and the other only arises when we forget the original unity that gives rise to them. Subject and object first oppose and exclude each other, then – in the synthesis – they unify under the name of absolute subject. The inside and outside constitute another classical binomial; no specific term has been created to synthesise them.

The whole and the part constitute a special binomial, because in this case the term ‘whole’ is not a pole that is opposed by the other pole, namely, the ‘part’, but it means the synthesis of the many parts within a higher identity. The whole is not a thesis, the part is not an antithesis. The whole is the synthesis which inside itself engenders, constitutes, reconciles and unifies the parts. – That is why I – on this point agreeing with Hegel- do not work with a transcendent God, a pure act without power, need without contingency, which would then create nature in its multiplicity and contingency. In this theist contingency which is that of Thomas of Aquinas and some contemporary authors, such as *L. Puntel*, in my opinion there is a contradiction. Because truly universal totality is only that which includes both God the Creator and the creature, both the absolute and the contingent. On trying to prove the existence of a necessary God that is not the all-embracing absolute, i.e, is not the really universal totality, God is proved twice. Here there are two gods, and one of them is not the whole, the absolute, the all-embracing. If anyone, therefore, wishes to use the term ‘‘God’’, they must use it only in the singular, and only in relation to the universal and all-embracing whole. The whole is more than the sum of its parts – transcendence – but, on the other hand, it is present in each of them – immanence-. This is the pantheism that I propose and advocate.

2.3. Here we have the radical dissolution of the dualisms that penetrate the great philosophical systems of our tradition. Does this not lead us to total dissolution? Does not the Universe fall apart? Is reason not broken into shards? No, obviously not. Because for each deconstruction of a dualist binomial there is a corresponding construction of a dialectical triad. We do indeed overcome the duality of opposites that exclude each other, we maintain these same opposite poles, but unified according to the synthetic concept. Instead of excluding binomials, we work with dialectical triads; in all of them thesis and antithesis reconcile and unify. The radical dissolution of the dualist binomials leads us to the final category of the Logic of Essence: Everything is a relation with oneself, an absolute relation.

3. Logic of Concept

3.1. Since the Logic of Essence dissolves all essences, the Logic of Concept dissolves all concepts. Hegel's project of creating a meta-logic of all logics (subjective concept) and a meta-science of all sciences, *Theory of everything*, (objective concept) has not been fulfilled until now. I do not deny that Philosophy will get there one day, I do not deny that the hard nucleus of Philosophy is exactly this. But these attempts at reconstructing the Neoplatonic system of Philosophy, have so far failed, as is known.

3.2. Allow me to propose to my peers, with the necessary intellectual humility, a meta-science of all sciences, a *Theory of Everything*, a new Metaphysics. It has been around for many years in the terminology of the biological and social sciences, and since *Ludwig Bertalanffy* it has been called *Systems Theory*, more recently *Theory of Complexity* or *Theory of Complex Evolutionary Systems*. I believe that beginning with the concept of absolute relation as presented before, with the concept of the Universe which is constituted and develops while moving, I believe that we can indeed trace the master lines of a general theory of the world.

The first and only great principle of the Universe is the one that formulates the identity which, by mutation or emergence of the new, is moving, and which always reorganizes, repeatedly, in order to have the indispensable coherence of the parts between themselves and towards the whole. Everything is identity, everything is difference, everything is coherence – Identity here is not the identity of the logics, “ $x = x$ ”. Let us think of the position of an educator dealing with an adolescent who is seeking his identity. This identity of the adolescent, in this case is indeed an identity which confronts its differences and, in the process of identification, seeks to become that identity which here and now is an end that is projected and to be achieved. In the adolescent, identity is a process in which the initial Self goes a long way until meeting itself again in the final Self. Identity, the first element of the great principle of the Universe, is identity on the move. It doubles, trebles and, on replicating constitutes the series of the iterative identity: “a, a, a...” The new has not yet appeared; the difference has not yet emerged, but there is already the procedural dynamics. When the new appears, the identity encounters the mutations that sprout in the process: that is where the new emerges, from something that was not preprogrammed in the merely iterative identity of the “a, a, a...”. The Universe which replicates and multiplies develops into itself; outside the Universe there is nothing. The great system of the Universe, thus, on

replicating and engendering its subsystems, does not put them outside itself, but into itself.

3.3. The Universe, the first and all-embracing system, being itself, the becoming engenders from itself and into itself the subsystems that will configure, through a long evolution, the concrete plurality of things in the world we live in. Man, goat, plant, molecule, atom and quark are configurations of more or less stable relations that arose from inside this universal process of contingent and historical evolution. The subprinciples of identity and coherence constitute and ensure the unity of the whole, the subprinciple of difference engenders the multiplicity into which it deploys. Hence the term fold and unfold (*implicatio, explicatio*). We are all folds – *plica* – of the only substance that is the absolute object itself. It is clearly perceived when the contemporary notion of system arises, and how this system engenders its subsystems. Systems Theory, Theory of Complexity and Theory of Evolution are the modern names of Neoplatonism and Neohegelianism. Here I wish to thank Bertalanffy, Maturana, Luhman, Kapra, Kaufmann and so many others who, although not in the language of Philosophy, brought back this Neoplatonic view of the world, kept it alive during the 20th Century and introduced it into the 21st Century..

As we end, we return to the beginning. Philosophy, in its long history, from Thales of Miletto to our days, can and should be seen as a tree. The roots are the Pre-Socratic philosophers until and including Socrates; this is the soil, this is the stem from which is born the tree of Philosophy. This, Philosophy, here already bifurcates into two large branches – with its many derivations -, namely, Platonism and Aristotelianism. *Platonism* is characterized by the triadic-dialectic method, and by the unity and unicity of the substance of the Universe, as we saw above. *Aristotelianism* greatly emphasizes the cuts (*analysis*) and the dichotomies that appear in them; not enough emphasis is given – in my opinion – to synthesis, and philosophical principles appear as binomials (substance and accident, form and matter, act and power, body and soul, etc.). In the Aristotelians there is always a plurality of substances. The dialectical line begins with Platô and leads to Plotinus, Augustine, Proclus, Johannes Scotus Eriugena, the Chartres School, Giordano Bruno, Ficino, Nicholas de Cues, Espinosa, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Marx, Teilhard de Chardin, Bertalanffy, Maturana, Luhmann, Kaufmann etc. The analytical line comes from Aristotle and leads to Albertus Magnus, Thomas of Aquinas,

Ockham, Descartes, Hume and English Empiricism, Kant, Wittgenstein and to the Analytical Philosophy of our time.

Dialecticals and analytics are we all, however when, arguing with reasons and in friendship with each other, we construct the dialogue which is dialectics itself. It is precisely this that we are doing. Truths, but also falsenesses will emerge; the process of falsification will unmask the untruths. In the course of the process, we approach the truth, without ever fully reaching it. Because the truth is always and only the whole.

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