

# HEGEL AND FREDRIC JAMESON: A STUDY OF FREDRIC JAMESON'S WRITING

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## ABSTRACT

Jameson and his followers held that culture must be studied relying on the idealistic theories of Hegel. Interestingly, Marx was also greatly impacted by the idealistic critique in his writings of Hegel. Jameson argued that the contribution of Hegel in the evolution of Marxism is undeniable. Jameson wrote *The Hegel Variations* and expressed his views on Left Marxism and Hegel. Jameson emerged as a cultural critic and philosopher of postmodern movement and a critic of American society. W.E.B. Du Bois was a black American novelist who incorporated the ideas of Hegel in his theory of double consciousness. Jameson wrote on the ideas of Hegel with a view to bring a systematic study of Hegel as Jameson's *The Hegel Variations* is a close reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Jameson found that the philosophical ideas of Hegel are incoherent and unsystematic scattered in various places. He looks to rectify the shortcomings of Hegel's philosophical system. Jameson's book is a text of 400 pages on the dialectical theory of Hegel covering all the important topics such as art, criticism, globalization and cultural studies. Jameson clarifies all the major ideas of Hegel in simple language. He puts forward a new system of thought, new dimension of thinking and follows the dialectical method of Hegel. Jameson argued that the reading of Hegel should be open system reading and closed ended system based on orthodox ideas. Jameson argued that Hegel can help the modern people to understand the postmodern tendencies to impose a correct language. Hegel helps man to come out of a mirage of universality that regresses the cultural growth. Jameson argues that Hegel and his ideas can help human beings to understand the main problems of postmodernism. He redefined meta-narrative and discussed its cultural value

**KEYWORDS:** Postmodernism, Marxist, Dialectical, Incoherent, Ideological, Epistemology, Globalization, Mirage, Cultural

## INTRODUCTION

This research paper entitled: *Hegel and Fredric Jameson: A Study of Fredric Jameson's Writings* is a serious attempt to explore and investigate the postmodern ideas of Fredric Jameson. He was greatly influenced by the idealistic philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. He was a prominent German thinker and philosopher; a scholar of Tubingen and explored the philosophical ideas of Immanuel Kant and Fichte and Russell. Hegel's philosophy is the culmination of the movement of German philosophy. Hegel wrote his seminal book

*The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Hegel came under the influence of French Rationalism, British empiricism and the transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The philosophical ideas of the Romantics also influenced Hegel. He dedicated his whole life to explore the mystery of truth and envisages a philosophical theory incorporating all knowledge developing a totalizing philosophy comprehending reality. The main focus of Hegel is to integrate all the ideas found in art, religion and literature. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is an idealist who followed the principles of Plato and wrote *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), *Science of Logic* (1812), *Elements of Philosophy of Right* (1820), *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837), *Lecture on Aesthetics* (1830) and *Philosophy of Nature* (1842). Hegel brought a revolution in the domain of philosophy as he emerged as a great German thinker and philosopher, a scholar of Tubingen.

### Hegel and his Philosophical Ideas

The punch line in the Philosophy of Hegel is "only the whole is real" as Plato declared that art is thrice removed from reality. Like Plato, Hegel is an idealist who introduced a new concept of *Geist* or Spirit that unifies everything. Hegel sees an order prevailing in the universe and argues that each particle of reality in isolation is incomplete and is an abstraction. Every particle of reality becomes effective when connected with the whole. For Hegel whole is the real factor operating in the universe; it symbolizes the Spirit and has the potential to resolve all the perplexities and problems of life and society. Russell also argued that Hegel came under the spell of mysticism and opposed separateness and demonstrated that nothing in this universe existed independently. Jameson lays emphasis on the whole because he feels that units have no existence.

Spinoza had put faith in the essential homogeneous reality; it symbolizes the Substance of God. For Hegel reality is inseparable; homogeneous and universal operating all parts of the world. Hegel's views of reality differ from Spinoza; his system is complex comparable to an organism. Reality is absolute; Hegel believes that reality is ideal and the teleological principle governs the structure of reality. Hegel sought inspiration from Aristotle in his teleological conception of reality. Hegel explored Kant's theory of reality discussed in his *Critique of Reason* and argued that the approach of Kant is defective to explore reality. Kant argued that reason is supreme and reality is governed by reason because reason is faculty of the soul. Reason forms a systematic structure of truth explaining principles, forms and rules. Hegel attempts to fill the gap and he goes beyond Kant in his *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The approach of Kant is scientific and rationalistic but Hegel's approach is historical. Hegel argues that there were contradictions in his thinking but all these contradictions can be resolved by the principle of synthesis. Reason is the law which produces; it is both subjective and objective reality. Categories of thinking are just not elements of subjective thinking but are modes of being. They are not empty frames but are substantial things. Hegel opposed Kant's idea of pure reason; he opposes the deduction of categories in terms of empirical statements of facts. Hegel evolved a new theory of reality and a new metaphysics. Hegel's *Geist* includes nature, humanity and history. In his *Philosophy of History* Hegel discusses his concept of all-inclusive idealism. Hegel is an idealist believing that truth is a reality; it is a living process in the universe. The dialectical method is the ideal approach to explore reality.

### **Hegel and His Dialectical Method**

Hegel is known for his "Dialectical Method" in the history of political thought and philosophy. There are two approaches to dialectic; Plato's dialectical method is based on the solution of conflicting points of view and this was very famous in the Greek world. Immanuel Kant believed that the dialectical method is a means to discover the truth as "truth is the truth behind the appearances" In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant explores the nature of transcendental dialectic. Kant uses transcendental dialectic to analyze the obstacles to Reason. In 1808 Hegel strived to construct a bridge between the logic of Aristotle and his own and published his dialectical methods in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Hegel also wrote *The Elements of Philosophy of Right* (1820) to investigate the role of freedom in human society. Hegel maintains that freedom can be used to explain the moral, social and economic implications discussed in a text.

### **Dialectical Thinking**

Dialectical thinking of Hegel cannot be so easily explained but it can only be seen in practice. It is not a method of set of principles. For Hegel, only the whole is true. Every stage is partial and therefore partially untrue. Hegel has full faith in the concept of totality which is a manifestation of the Spirit pervading in this universe

### **Aufhebung or Sublation**

The logic of Aristotle is based on deductive pattern of thoughts. Hegel dissolves this static view of Aristotle and gave it a dynamic form giving his idea of "whole." The whole preserves what it overcomes. Hegel argues that nothing is lost or destroyed but preserves as in a spiral. The growth of a fern or shell is an example of preservation. Hegel gives an organic and dynamic approach and discards mechanical logic of Aristotle. His term *Aufhebung* means "sublation" or preservation. Today all theories; chaos theory, postmodern cosmology, Quantum theory subscribe to the ideas of Hegel of "whole of totality"

### **Hegel's Thesis; Anti-thesis and Synthesis**

Karl Marx was greatly impacted by Hegel's theory of Thesis, *anti-thesis* and *Synthesis* when he wrote his famous book *Das Capital* (1867) and brought a revolution in the history of art, literature and philosophy. The dialectic process of Hegel is the core idea to reach the Absolute Reality. All concepts are full of limitations and have limited perspective. Every concept in this universe has the opposite and defines the process of evolution. Hegel has outlined three stages of dialectical process; thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. They are the three moments of the dialectic. At the end of the dialectical process, the thesis and anti-thesis are integrated into a whole called synthesis. Hegel's exploration is based on ideal view of the world.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels took up the cause of the proletariat exploited and oppressed by the capitalists. The struggle of the workers ultimately leads to a class society and help the workers to gain a higher form of human society based on justice and equity. Contrary to Marxism, Hegelian Dialectic relies on the theory that human experience is dependent on the perceptions of mind. Marxist dialectics emphasize the significance of class and labor and the socio-economic forces. Marx used Hegel's theory of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis to

defend his economic determinism and materialism. Marx argued the evolution of social organization manifests the true spirit of material growth. Marxian concepts of Dialectical Materialism, Historical Materialism and Marxist Economics are based on Hegel's Dialectical methods. Marx rejected Hegelian dialectic and his idealist views and developed Marxist dialectics and gave the materialist view of society. He argued that the economic forces govern the growth of human civilization. His theory of base and super structure are the bases of his theory of economic determinism. For Marx, base of all societies is economic; it is all about money and who owns the means of production to make money. Out of these grows the superstructure that is determined by the base. Precisely, the shape of the superstructure depends upon the shape of base. The law of the society, ethics, religion, art and culture and political power comes under the superstructure. He talked of exploitation and poverty which were the real culprits in society. In *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), Marx defended his theory of "Dialectical Materialism" and rejected the language of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. Marx hold that the world is material and materialism is a "a realist philosophy of science" as all matter in the universe consist of matter of motion. Marx says that Hegel is concerned with "the process of "the human brain". Hegel's ideas are based on dialectical idealism but the ideas of Marx are based on dialectical materialism; the world of production and economic activity.

### **The Theory of Alienation: Hegel and Marx**

Karl Marx propounded the theory of alienation and this concept brought massive transformation in art and literature and criticism. Hegel explored the nature of alienation and this forms a significant place in religion, sociology, philosophy and literature. The poets, novelists and dramatists have taken special interest in the role of alienation and its impact on the mind and sensibility of the individuals. This concept is closely associated with Karl Marx and his critique of capitalism advocated under the influence of Hegel. In Hegel's writings the term alienation is mystical and transcendental but in Marx it deals with the relationship of labor with his product. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines alienation as "the act, or result of the act, through which something, or somebody, becomes alien to something, or somebody, else" (76). Gyorgy Lukacs in *Young Hegel* (1938) observes that alienation is a loss of freedom in society by social contract and he explores alienation in the context of social relations. Bernard Murchland in his book *The Age of Alienation* (1971) observes that alienation has multiple manifestations "disorders such as loss of self, anxiety, anomie, depersonalization, rootlessness and meaninglessness, isolation and lack of community" (Murchland 4). In Marxian philosophy of economic determinism, alienation leads to the sufferings of the workers. It is an outcome resulting from political and economic conditions. Marx sees alienation as a curse in the society. Marx's theory of alienation is based on "alienation from the product of labor and alienation from the labor process. Marx discarded the philosophical abstract concepts such as "beauty", "spirit" and "truth" and he expressed his concern for the actual economic condition of the people suffering abject poverty and unemployment and hunger. Marx wrote in 1845 that "the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is changing it" (Marx 158). Marx argued that the world needs to be transformed because the modern society is inequitable and millions of people today are living in poverty and are confronting diverse economic disparities.

### **Fredric Jameson and Marxism: Beginning of Marxist Post-structuralism**

Fredric Jameson is a prolific writer who reviewed and reformed Marxism in the 1960s developing his own neo-Marxist theoretical position in America. He has analyzed diversity of cultural texts ranging from the novel to video, from architecture to postmodernism. Fredric Jameson (April 1934) is primarily a Marxist thinker and the bulk of his critical work is engaged in the debate of Marxist post-structuralism. After the World War II the leftists had become critical of the theories of Marx and a range of debates ensued challenging the Marxian radical ideas enshrined in his *Das Capital*. Michel Foucault challenged historicism in a systematic manner in his *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969). Deluge and Guattari published *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) giving their own views of history in the twentieth century. Theodor Adorno (1939-1971), Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), and Georg Lukcas (1885-1971) wrote many articles and reinterpreted the Marxian materialism. Theodor Adorno's book *Late Marxism* (1990) is a sophisticated analysis of the Marxian ideology. Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1980) remains as his fervent critique of Marxism as it includes a lengthy discussion of the ideas and relevance of Marx's ideas. Jameson initiated the debate on Marxist post-structuralism by publishing his book *Marxism and Form* which generated huge interest in American readers. *Postmodernism* or *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1990) of Fredric Jameson's is regarded as the bible of postmodernism. His more recent works include *Valences of the Dialectics* (2009), *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013) and *The Ancients and the Postmoderns* (2015).

Fredric Jameson is a reputed Professor of Contemporary Literature Romance Studies; he is known as a cultural critic of modern America. He has taught courses covering modernist literature and cinema. He studied the works of Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Sartre and Zizek and is closely linked with the Frankfurt School. He has introduced the postmodernist trends in the analysis of Marxist methodology. Jameson's originality lies in the fact that he reinterpreted most of the famous concepts of Marx such as "totality, universality, historicism, representation" in his writings. Globalization of the Western capitalism inspired to review all the prominent ideas of Marx in his books and articles. Jameson talks of "crisis of Marxism" and discusses all the major issues from the perspective of his postmodernist vision. In his book *The Ideology of Theory, Volume 11; the Syntax of History* (1988), Jameson discusses the "crisis of Marxism thus: "It would be idealistic to suppose the deficiencies in the abstract idea of social class, and in particular in the Marxian conception of class struggle, can have been responsible for the emergence of what seem to be new non-class forces" (Jameson 181). Jameson argued that intellectual ideas are useless if they don't carry forward the material conditions of society. Marxism was a dominant intellectual paradigm before World War II and many intellectuals supported Marxian "dreams of emancipated humanity." The intellectual climate changed in 1945 as humanists, Catholics, Moralists and Existentialists were dissatisfied with the Marxian ideology and wanted it to be reviewed. Marx himself had argued to "reduce human value and human experience to economic value and work experience" (Poster 64). The modern critics of Marx expressed their concern for human freedom, agency and subjectivity. Sartre and other existentialists talked of humanist Marxism as Sartre says:

A Marxist should look at the relations of daily life, not just relations of production, to make society intelligible, that picks up from existentialism the effort to capture human beings in the moment of their active creation of their world, and finally, that rejects the attempt to have a closed theory complete within itself. (Poster x1).

Sartre argued that Marxism and existentialism converge in a significant way as the subjects create their own destiny and both are the philosophers of action. (Poster 109). His first book *Sartre: The Origin of a Style* (1961) was written under the influence of his teacher Erich Auerbach. The book focused on the stylistic techniques of Sartre and, values and vision of the world. But this critical work encouraged Jameson to evolve a critical style and discard the modes of contemporary criticism. Jameson intensively explored the various critical trends and he studied Marxian literary theory of the 1960s being influenced by the New Left and anti-war movement. Fredric Jameson wrote his first book *Marxism and Form* (1971) to deal with the problem of Marxian crisis. This first book of Jameson established him as a spokesman of dialectical tradition of Neo Marxist post-structuralism. Jameson's Marxism is focused on the issue of totality. Those who believe in this concept of Hegel are called Hegelian because they believe that the whole picture of society and the universe in which man lives is governed by a supreme power and they view system as totality. But Louis Althusser of France lashed at the concept of totality and considered it oppressive. Jameson is usually seen as a Hegelian Marxist who inherited the traditions of thoughts from Lukacs and Adorno and rejected the ideology of Althusser. Marx believed that ideology is false and misleading; it is a set of beliefs that distorts the truth of the economic base of the society. He advocated the cause of the labor class exploited and oppressed by the rich capitalists for their profit aggrandizement. He rejected the idea of the people that some people are rich and some are poor because of nature. Jameson gave his own concept of culture rejecting the traditional ideas of Althusser. He argued that in *Marxism and Form* that for Marx ideology was "false consciousness" Jameson argues that "Culture is "to be thought of as something more and other than...the false consciousness, that we associate with the word ideology, and is instead something that possesses an "uneasy existence, an uncertain status" (Jameson 4).

Jameson published his thought provoking book *The Political Unconscious : Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981) which made him an international celebrity and an authority of post-structural Marxism. In this book *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson articulates his literary method. Jameson successfully establishes Marxian criticism as the most inclusive framework incorporating issues and ideas related to the workers. He provides the history of development of literary form expressing his double hermeneutic of ideology and utopia. He was inspired by Lukacs who argued that the "cultural texts contain a political conscious buried narratives and social experience." Jameson observes thus: "the construction of the bourgeois subject in emergent capitalism and its schizophrenic disintegration in our own time" (Jameson 9)

To conclude, the phrase "political unconscious" became famous in American cultural criticism expressing a class conflict expressed in his text. The purpose of the analysis is to resolve all contradictions which cannot be bridged in the material-historical level. The text is analyzed as an allegory, an ideological signifying method which functions in the gap between signifier and signified. Jameson discusses the ideas of Frye, Levi-Strauss, Lukacs and Freud. Jameson employs "mechanistic causality" "express causality" "structural causality" to analyze the structure of the texts. In the last section *On Interpretation* Jameson proposes a Marxist

method of literary and cultural interpretation through a dialectic re-reading and historicizing the archetypal system of Northrop Frye. Jameson became a trend setter in the contemporary America discarding all traditional philosophical views and he gave directions to the writers to deal the contemporary issues following postmodern ideology.

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