A HEGELIAN DIALECTIC OF ENTITLEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract:

This study applies the Hegelian dialectic to analyze two opposing frameworks for social change processes, one disempowering and leading to demoralization, and the other empowering, leading to positive and sustainable social change across historical and contemporary contexts. It explores how seven conceptual dyads undergo aufheben (sublation) to transcend opposition. Using Hegel's triadic dialectic (thesis-antithesis-synthesis), the study identifies absolute negations and synthesizes them into a higher-order framework. The dialectical process reveals contradictions that resolve into transformative syntheses, offering a diagnostic tool for democratic erosion and renewal. The study bridges Hegelian philosophy and sociopolitical praxis, advancing a pluriversal lens for global conflicts. The shift from a unipolar to a pluriversal global order necessitates moving beyond traditional political strategies—rooted in hegemony and zero-sum logic—toward relational frameworks centered on co-sovereignty and civil reciprocity. The framework can assist social scientists and activists in navigating power asymmetries (e.g., epistemic injustice, colonial legacies) through dialectical resolution, with speculative moments serving as a conceptual blueprint for fostering mutual recognition, coexistence, and international peace. Future research could explore how the sublated framework shapes adaptive strategies, relational bonds, and normative codes. Methodologically, scholars should investigate whether Hegel's distinctive application of deconstruction within the analytical process of abstraction constitutes a substantive departure from Derrida's approach to deconstruction. Additionally, to advance toward Hegel's ideal of comprehensive understanding and achieve a more robust synthesis, scholars should: 1) systematically integrate multiple antitheses emerging from competing ideological perspectives, and 2) identify not only their determination, but the essence of what causes dynamic tension to thereby refine and strengthen the method.

*Keywords***:** Absolute negation, Abstraction, Aufheben, Deconstruction, Derrida, Dialectic moment, Moment of Understanding, Multiple antitheses, Speculative moment.

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17

Introduction:

Many Hegelian scholars have contributed to the understanding of his works (see [1-7]), with numerous others utilizing his original concepts of being, nothing, and becoming (Maybee, 2020, citing Forster, 2006). [8-9] A few have applied his method (see [10-13]). However, others, like Popper, [14] claimed Hegel's dialectic lacks characteristics of a scientific method, and that "accepting contradictions… would mean a complete break-down of science" (p. 408). Therefore, this study aims to apply Hegel's dialectic in a novel way to two dialectically opposed social change processes discussed in Forde's [15] social change theories, seeking to elucidate the method that leads to absolute negation and aufheben. The theory was constructed from the substantive content in the national founding documents, which reflect the spirit that led to America's transition to democracy. The American Revolution represents a pivotal moment in the history of democratic governance, establishing a paradigm for revolutionary social change. While Marx and Engels's (2001/1848) social change theory sought to explain the mechanisms of societal evolution, particularly in response to contradictions between opposing forces through dialectical materialism, this paper addresses a critical gap in the literature: Forde's [15] democratic social change theory identifies disempowerment/empowerment dyads but lacks a Hegelian synthesis. This study fills that gap by operationalizing the absolute negation and the aufheben. Specifically, it extends beyond Hegel's abstract determinations by operationalizing paired dialectical concepts derived from Forde's [15] social change theory, which integrates disempowerment and empowerment strategies. Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory was employed to explore America's transition to democracy through a bounded sample that limited the selection of theoretical samples to the founding documents. This methodological approach provided a novel lens for interpreting historical and contemporary sociopolitical transformations arising from dialectical tensions.

While existing democratic social change theories have primarily focused on the interplay of thesis and antithesis, this paper examines absolute negation and the aufheben—the moment of sublation—within the disempowerment-empowerment dyad and its attendant subcategories. Building on Hegel's dialectical method, this study presents a framework of transcending concepts that neutralize the tension between thesis and antithesis referred to by Oxford (2025, p. 1) as the "sublation that abolishes these oppositions," and identifies the essence that leads to dynamic tension. Moreover, the process and rigor of the Hegelian dialectic method will be appraised. This study does not purport to offer a comprehensive exegesis of Hegel's works. Instead, its objective is to find the absolute negation and aufheben of two opposed social change processes—one characterized by disempowerment and consequent demoralization, the other by empowerment and sustainable transformation—in response to the central research question: How can dialectical sublation of seven conceptual dyads yield an integrated framework for sustainable social change? The paper begins by situating the study within Forde's democratic social change theory.

18

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Objective

This theoretical exploration employs the Hegelian dialectic method of conceptual analysis, grounded in abstraction, to examine seven dyads with two primary objectives:

1. Identify the tension-producing essence and the absolute negations that cancel the tension within dyads: disempowerment/empowerment, misinformation/knowledge, fear/security, dehumanization/human dignity, nativism/unity, subjugation/hope, and social distinctions/fairness.

2. Articulate the aufheben as actionable syntheses.

Background

Forde's (2023) study aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of democratic social change by exploring America's revolutionary transition to representative democracy as a paradigmatic example. The approach necessitated a systematic examination of democratic and anti-democratic principles as articulated in key founding documents, which comprise the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Federalist Papers, and the U.S. Constitution. Given the inherently political nature of theoretical samples, Charmaz's constructivist approach was the most suitable grounded theory typology for exploring politics, power, and social equity. Grounded theory's method of constant comparison of theoretical samples (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was supplemented with multiple complementary techniques: deconstruction, perspective-taking, dramaturgical analysis, holistic and systems thinking approaches, and Clarke and Washburn's (2016) situational analysis, which included the development of relational, social world/arena, and positional maps. The coding procedure progressed through open, selective, and axial coding phases. From this rigorous analysis, two fundamental sensitizing concepts emerged: disempowerment and empowerment, which became distinct categories. [15] These core categories, each supported by six distinct subcategories, demonstrated significant theoretical utility. The disempowerment category, which surfaced first during the analysis, encapsulated anti-democratic principles identifiable within the founding documents. The first principles of democracy emerged through progressive abstraction under the category of empowerment. The study employed a post hoc polytheoretical framework demonstrating alignment with Marx and Engels's [13] analysis of hierarchical power structures and class struggle, Bourdieu's concepts of cultural reproduction, [19] fields of power, [20] and Foucault's [21] relational and strategic power maintained through discursive practices. Within this context, the colonists were reconceptualized as the proletariat. This distinction diverges from conventional interpretations in political science, facilitating a multidimensional analysis of power dynamics within the historical context of democratic formation.

An Overview of Democratic Social Change Theory

Existing scholarship on democratic decline has predominantly focused on symptomatic manifestations such as political polarization. In contrast, the present framework traces regressive and progressive social change to their foundational principles, exploring the dialectical opposition between paired concepts (e.g., dehumanization and human dignity). Grounded in dialectical reasoning, this social change framework analyzes the dynamic tensions inherent in paired disempowering and empowering principles. The dyads fear and security, dehumanization and

19

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025   ISSN (E): 2583-1348
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human dignity, misinformation and knowledge, and subjugation and hope are contradictions of essence. The social distinctions and fairness dyad constitutes a contradiction of notion, while the dyad nativism and unity represents a contradiction of being. These contradictions create tension, which is the driving force behind positive social change.

Colonial tension against Great Britain's disempowerment process stemmed from strategies designed to diminish agency, motivation, or collective efficacy, often resulting in demoralization — a significant impediment to positive and sustainable change. This social change process functions through a divisive and dehumanizing strategy designed to facilitate domination and subjugation, which elicits internal processes that produce motivational or demotivational effects on subjected populations. Historically, such strategies consolidate power by reinforcing social divisions. For example, politically entitled groups (e.g., colonial powers like Great Britain) have systematically deployed disempowerment strategies to suppress self-determination and democratic advancement. Collectively, the strategy embodies a "divide and rule" paradigm that undermines agency and liberty. They engender affective responses (e.g., anger, resentment, and envy) among populations invested in maintaining power asymmetry, frequently precipitating retaliatory reactions (e.g., hate crimes). Conversely, the empowerment process operates through motivational and strategic stages that establish an ethical foundation for positive, equitable, and sustainable social transformation. Empowerment constitutes a critical strategy for social change. As a social change process, it facilitates social consciousness and collective agency. It prioritizes a relational framework grounded in mutual respect and fundamental fairness. For instance, in educational settings, restorative practices [22] have supplanted punitive disciplinary models, enabling norm co-creation among students and educators. Rather than reinforcing exclusion, co-creation fosters intersectional solidarity by centering shared vulnerability as a unifying principle. Thus, Forde's [15] democratic social change theory advances a dialectical understanding of social transformation that creates awareness of oppressive structures and emancipatory possibilities.

Challenging the traditional democratic social change scholarship, which frequently conceptualizes it as a political phenomenon, Forde's [15] dialectical framework reconceptualizes it as mutually constitutive processes that recursively shape social and political development. This theoretical shift reveals how ostensibly anti-democratic phenomena paradoxically generate the conditions for democratic evolution, as exemplified by nativist exclusionary politics inadvertently intensifying demands for inclusive unity, the resultant tension yielding novel syntheses of pluralistic cohesion. The framework's analytical power stems from its treatment of contradiction as the fundamental driver of social transformation. It transcends outcome-focused analyses, favoring process-conscious examination and offering nuanced insights into normalized power dynamics. It shows how protracted disempowerment strategies (e.g., institutionalized subjugation eroding collective hope) ultimately undermine their perpetrators through systemic moral deterioration— even when temporarily successful. Conversely, empowering people (e.g., institutionalizing fairness

20

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to mediate social distinctions) exhibits democratic durability by maintaining consonance between strategy and emancipatory aims.

Forde's [15] dialectical approach to social change offers valuable insights for postcolonial contexts. It rejects Western-centric democratization narratives in favor of pluriversal value systems. The framework accommodates analyses of caste-based hierarchies and their challengers in South Asia, [23] colonial legacy systems and fairness movements in the Global South, [24] as well as authoritarian propaganda and epistemic resistance in the Middle East. [25] Moreover, the model facilitates a retroactive analysis of historical conflicts through six constitutive dialectical pairs:

- Misinformation vs Knowledge: Reveals how 20th-century totalitarian regimes collapsed when independent media achieved critical epistemic mass. [26]
- Fear vs Security: Exposes the cyclical relationship between manufactured threats and surveillance regimes. [27]
- Dehumanization vs Human Dignity: Demonstrates how exclusionary rhetoric paradoxically mobilizes human rights movements. [28]
- Social Distinctions vs. Fairness: Unmasking meritocratic narratives that legitimate structural inequities. [29]
- Subjugation vs Hope: Explains authoritarian co-option of aspirational narratives amid repression. [30]
- Nativism vs Unity: Tracks exclusionary politics' unintended consequences for solidarity building. [31,32]

These dialectical pairs form an analytical toolkit for identifying contemporary anti-democratic strategies, [33] tracing democratic actors' tactical adaptations, mapping epistemic warfare in disinformation campaigns, and exposing the paradoxical dynamics of jingoism. The framework ultimately advances social change theory by illuminating the recursive relationship between democratic erosion and renewal, providing both diagnostic and strategic insight for scholars and practitioners navigating social transformation.

Theoretical, Conceptual, and Methodological Contributions

Forde's [15] study makes several significant contributions, most notably identifying core democratic principles, anti-democratic strategies, and two opposed social change processes comprising power strategies that, when integrated, challenge prevailing assumptions about authoritarian invulnerability. The first principles of democracy, defined as the foundational basis of the democratic ideal of government of, by, and for the people, encompass knowledge, human dignity, fairness, hope, unity, and security. [15] The frameworks can also lead to a better understanding of Foucault's relations of power. The disempowerment framework suggests that the strategies could lead to demoralization. Conceptual contributions include the revival of the classical Aristotelian conception of fairness, which had been obscured by political discourse that erroneously equated it with equality, and is reintroduced in the framework. Fairness represents the highest

21

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025   ISSN (E): 2583-1348
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synthesis of virtues, constituting the moral essence of equality and the procedural foundation of justice. [34] Unlike rigid egalitarian standards, fairness permits contextual deviation from normative rules to achieve substantive and procedural justice in exceptional circumstances, [34] restoring the original philosophical distinction between these frequently conflated concepts. At the same time, commensurate with grounded theory methodology, Forde [15] redefined democratic social change as a strategic process embedded within the founding documents of the United States of America. Nativism, a process of disempowerment, is used to demonize the "other" and was substantially expanded beyond its traditional association with nationalism to encompass broader sociopolitical ideologies and beliefs associated with cultural, moral, and intellectual in-groups and out-groups. This binary division between in-group and out-group serves as a protective mechanism and an instrument of exclusion, reinforcing structural inequalities through defensive postures against perceived external threats, reflecting persistent historical and contemporary dynamics. [31,32] Methodologically, Forde's [15] grounded theory study contributed a more rigorous approach to grounded theory's data analysis method by employing various data analysis techniques during comparative analysis (e.g., systems and holistic thinking, perspective-taking, dramaturgical analysis, situational analysis, and deconstruction), and Aristotle's first principle approach to abstraction. Forde used several techniques to achieve credibility and went beyond the constructivist typology framework to establish rigor. Five grounded theories, with each leading to the next, were presented as abductive discoveries alongside the abductive preference, the theory that answered the main research question.

Implications and Applications

Moreover, the study makes four substantive contributions to political theory, social movement scholarship, and praxis by: (a) integrating philosophical, (b) political-theoretical, and (c) social movement perspectives to address contemporary challenges of democratic backsliding, while (d) advancing an emancipatory strategic framework. This interdisciplinary approach reconceptualizes conflict as a potential catalyst for moral, social, and institutional progress while analyzing democracy through intersecting cultural, social, psychological, and political lenses. For instance, the social dimension of democracy offers potential for national and global solidarity. By contrast, the psychological consequences of disempowerment processes (e.g., the erosion of individual hope through sustained subjugation) demonstrate the micro-level affective impacts of macro-political phenomena. [15] The cultural lens reveals the disempowerment strategies employed by children, adults, and in social institutions.

The framework's utility extends across multiple levels of analysis and contexts. At the national level, it explains phenomena ranging from protectionist policies and suffrage movements to contemporary issues like immigration reform and LGBTQI+ rights. [15] It is an analytical tool for evaluating political rhetoric, policy formulation, and institutional practices. [33] Forde's [15] findings reveal how disempowerment strategies permeate interpersonal relations and institutional cultures, manifesting in intimate partner violence, school bullying, punitive educational policies, [35,36] and medical gaslighting practices, [37] all reflecting systemic prioritization of control over tolerance.

22

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025   ISSN (E): 2583-1348
AGPE The Royal Gondwana Research Journal of History, Science, Economic, Political and Social science

Internationally, it could explain shifting geopolitical dynamics, including the rise of BRICS nations, the alignment of the Global South with China's ascendancy, global strikes in support of Palestine, the Ukraine-Russia war, and the recent assault on Iran's sovereignty. It remains consonant with the democratic ideals articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. [38] Hence, the framework offers fresh insights into the American Revolutionary War. It is relevant to contemporary sociopolitical challenges, demonstrating its comprehensive utility. The systems and holistic approaches made it possible to understand America's transition to democracy across diverse contexts and degrees of generalization.

Applying Hegelian Dialectics to Concepts

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) is a central figure in German idealism, and his philosophy has had a profound influence on modern thought. [6] His dialectical method, a dynamic conceptual development process, posits that those contradictions and their resolutions drive progress. [39] Dialectical tension arises from contradictions, motivates change, and facilitates structural transformations. The Hegelian dialectic unfolds through three key stages: (1) the thesis, an initial proposition, or the status quo; (2) the antithesis, its negation, or the desired change; and (3) the aufheben (sublation or synthesis), which reconciles and transcends the opposition while preserving elements of both. Alternatively, they are known as moments: the moment of understanding, the dialectical moment, and the speculative moment. [8] This triadic movement leads to negation, sublation, and higher-level integration, offering a framework for understanding historical, logical, and social transformation. [39] Hegel proposed that the "broad distinction between instinctive act and act which is intelligent and free is that the latter is performed consciously" (Di Giovanni, 2010, p. 19, §21.16). [39]

Procedure

1. Determinate Negation: Deconstruct the disempowerment/empowerment dyad to identify their characteristics as antitheses.

2. Absolute Negation: Find the shared essence that resolves dynamic tension.

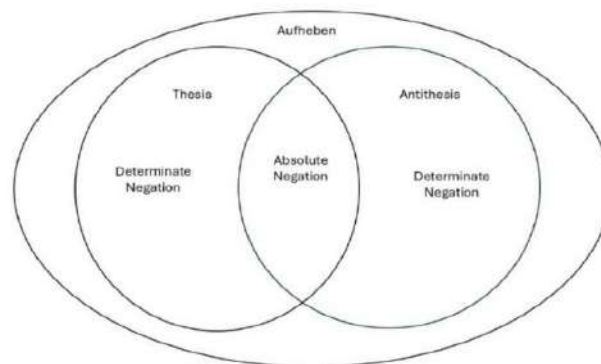3. Aufheben: Sublate incorporating judgment (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. *The Triadic Structure*

Analytical Tools:

- Abstraction: Comprises deconstruction, comparative analysis, relational analysis, and judgment to determine the essence of the dyads.

- Triangulation: The concepts will be triangulated within the substantive content of the American Revolution as found in Forde's [15] work, and contemporary examples.

Conceptual Analysis: The Method

Hegel's dialectic, as interpreted by Di Giovanni, [39] entails an iterative non-linear process that leads to uncovering the essence that cancels, preserves, and sublates to a higher ethical unity. Although intuition often guides this process, Hegel advocated for deliberate attention to foster deeper and broader understanding. Hence, a conscious attempt is made in this study to arrive at the absolute negation and the aufheben of the dichotomies between disempowerment and empowerment through conceptual analysis. More specifically, this is achieved through abstraction, which encompasses comparative analysis, relational analysis, and deconstruction. These techniques are used in analyzing the subject (particular) and the predicate (universal) to identify the essence by engaging in the process of judgment [39] (see Fig. 2).
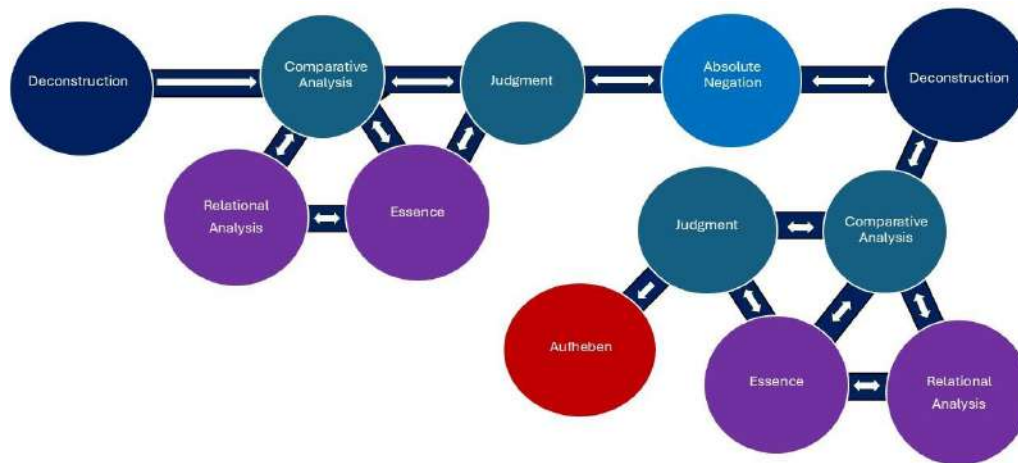

Fig. 2. *Behind the Abstraction*

- *Deconstruction*: The peeling away of layers of ideas and values to gain a better understanding of multiple meanings and characteristics of a concept. [15]

- *Comparative Analysis*: Two or more concepts are compared and contrasted to identify similarities and differences. [15]

- *Relational Analysis*: Exploring associations between concepts. [15]

- *Judgment*: "The determinateness of the concept posited in the concept itself" (Di Giovanni, 2010, p. 550). [39] Judgment uses relational analysis to understand the interconnection of shared characteristics between the subject (particular) and the predicate (universal). [39] It is

24

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025 ISSN (E): 2583-1348
AGPE The Royal Gondwana Research Journal of History, Science, Economic, Political and Social science

an indispensable iterative process of refinement and evaluation of particular and universal. It is the process responsible for the emergence of the essence.

> o *Essence*: Hegel described essence as "the truth of being" and a product, artifact [that] is neither *in* itself nor *for* itself; it is *by virtue of another*, through external abstractive reflection; and it is *for another*, namely for abstraction and in general for the existent which still remains opposite to it" (Di Giovanni, 2010, §11.241). [39] By contrast, Aristotle [34] defines essence as what makes a thing what it is.

Bearing in mind that this is a continuation of the democratic social change theory grounded in the substantive historical content, [15] the present study will focus on conceptual analysis and will accept the current thesis and antithesis and continue to present Hegel's dialectical method. The aim is to identify the absolute negation, conceptualize the aufheben, and explain the role of the determinate negation in two opposing social change processes —one disempowering and leading to demoralization, and the other empowering and leading to positive and sustainable social change when integrated with the demoralizing process, to answer the research question: How can dialectical sublation of seven conceptual dyads yield an integrated framework for sustainable social change? The research question is explored through the use of conceptual maps and memos during the analysis.

Determinate Negation

In Hegelian dialectic, according to Di Giovanni's [39] interpretation, tension arises with determinate negation, which distinguishes a concept as what it is and what it is not. This tension drives progress. In Forde's [15,39] original study, the determinate negation, the antitheses, emerged from employing disempowerment and empowerment as sensitizing concepts in an attempt to gain a holistic understanding of America's transition to democracy. The categories of disempowerment and empowerment, along with their subcategories, were deconstructed and analyzed independently of Forde's [15] study's substantive content, then against coded content in the original democratic social change research. —This was a valuable triangulation point for verifying whether a proposed aufheben represents abstract speculation or constitutes a universal principle capable of dialectical cancellation, preservation, and higher unity. This empirical grounding ensures the conceptual synthesis maintains fidelity to observable phenomena while achieving theoretical integrity. The determinate negation plays a crucial methodological role in conceptual analysis aimed at arriving at the aufheben. [39] It is the constant referent during the search for the absolute negation and aufheben that facilitates resolving dynamic tension and yielding a higher-order unity capable of simultaneous cancellation, preservation, and elevation. This process becomes evident during mutable moments. Further conceptual analysis of the disempowerment vs. empowerment dyad revealed that power, affect, and motivation remain invisible forces (e.g., oppress, liberate, depress, enliven, threaten, and embolden; see Fig. 3). The analysis preceded finding the essence of what drives the tension between the thesis and antithesis. This may be part of the moment of understanding or a separate stage in Hegel's dialectic method. For now, it has been incorporated into this stage.

25

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025 ISSN (E): 2583-1348
AGPE The Royal Gondwana Research Journal of History, Science, Economic, Political and Social science

Disempowerment	Empowerment
Triggers	Motivates
Demoralizes	Invigorates
Oppresses/Restricts	Liberates
Pessimistic	Optimistic
Demotivational	Potentiality
Depressive	Enlivens
Negative Esteem	Positive Esteem
Threatens	Emboldens

Figure 3. *Determinations of the Determinate Negation*

The essence of tension-producing ideas were sought and identified before moving to isolating tension-resolving concepts, two steps that are crucial in Hegel's dialectic method. Some concepts have more than one potentially tension-producing essence. Judgement determines which concept is selected. Weaponization is the source of tension in the misinformation and knowledge dyad since both can be weaponized and used to manipulate perception, attitude, and alter behavior. Weaponize was selected for its abstract nature. Subjugation and hope can lead to overconfidence, being possessed, passivity, blind faith, and dogmatism, all of which have an element of control, the essence, from a subjective and objective perspective. Fear and security can create a false sense or distort reality. The false perception is often the result of societal beliefs, ideology, and institutional values (see Fig. 4).

Absolute Negation

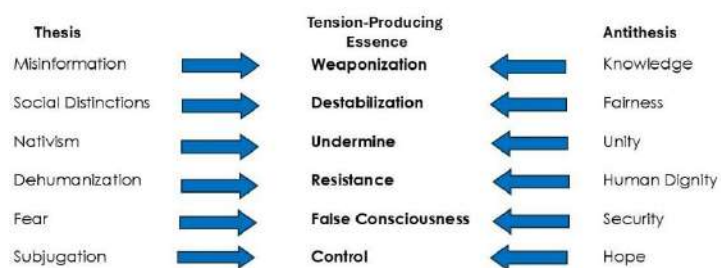| Thesis		Tension-Producing Essence		Antithesis
Misinformation	➡	Weaponization	⬅	Knowledge
Social Distinctions	➡	Destabilization	⬅	Fairness
Nativism	➡	Undermine	⬅	Unity
Dehumanization	➡	Resistance	⬅	Human Dignity
Fear	➡	False Consciousness	⬅	Security
Subjugation	➡	Control	⬅	Hope

Figure 4. *The Essence of Tension-Producing Concepts*

Identifying the essence of the determinate negation and the absolute negations is an indispensable step that leads to the construction of the aufheben—the sublation that simultaneously cancels, preserves, and elevates opposing elements. These steps produce support for the mutable and destabilizing moments, and lead to identifying the aufheben—the sublation that simultaneously cancels, preserves, and elevates opposing elements. Alternatively termed the negation of the negation, absolute negation is the resolution of a contradiction that preserves the characteristics of both the thesis and the antithesis, contributing to a higher-order synthesis. [39] Two critical characteristics of absolute negation are a) determinations—specific and limited characteristics of a

thing, a particular, that make it distinguishable from other things or particulars, [39] and b) revelation of the essence that resolves the tension of the paired concepts. The essence may emerge intuitively, but Hegel recommends deliberate effort to achieve a higher level of understanding. [39]

The idea behind the absolute negation can be understood through the analogy of property ownership in various jurisdictions in the United States. To understand property ownership rights means understanding that adjoining property boundaries are co-owned by property owners. In other words, building a boundary fence precisely on a property line magnifies the problem of joint ownership. Assuming the property owner who erected the fence decides to take it down, they will have to obtain the approval of the neighbor who shares the boundary line. Similarly, the essence of the thesis and the antithesis that resolves the tension, the absolute negation, is the boundary line that preserves a common ground. The absolute negation takes part in the sublation process as the essence that preserves the resolution of dynamic tension. This dynamic is evident in the disempowerment/empowerment, misinformation/knowledge, and other dialectic pairs, where some constitutive elements ebb and flow, culminating temporarily, with the sublation or aufheben. However, Hegel's dialectical process continues and evolves from a speculative moment into a new moment of understanding upon the proposal of an antithesis.

Abstraction is the same method used throughout the process. With the exception that the essence of the aufheben encompasses the totality of the thesis and antithesis. From this perspective, the aufheben constitutes the essential nature, the being, of the thesis and the antithesis, enabling it to transcend while incorporating the contradictory elements it mediates to achieve Hegel's threefold movement of negation, preservation, and elevation. [39] To reiterate, the absolute negation is the *essence* that cancels the tension between the thesis and antithesis. Using the disempowerment-empowerment dyad and bypassing their lists of contradictions and ways in which these tensions can be overcome, inherent entitlement (respect) stood out as the best concept to represent the substantive content from Forde's [15] study, and absolute negation. In the original research on America's transition to representative democracy, inherent entitlement represents the monarch's perception of the power and respect it was due based on title, status, and dignity. By contrast, the American Founders' inherent entitlement stemmed from their humanity and political authority. From a different perspective, transformative might be a better absolute negation if it were solely a social change framework. However, context and field play key roles in judgment, which determines the selection of the absolute negation and aufheben.[39] In other words, a holistic understanding of the phenomenon leads to the selection of the universal that best describes both the absolute negation and aufheben. For instance, *Ideas* is a more relatable example of the essence that resolves the dynamic tension between the misinformation and knowledge dyad. It is descriptive, neutral, and subsumes misinformation and knowledge. Nonetheless, *ideas* remains at the level of knowledge (knowing) versus transcending to holistic understanding, the aim of Hegelian dialectic [39] (see Fig. 5).

27

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025 ISSN (E): 2583-1348
AGPE The Royal Gondwana Research Journal of History, Science, Economic, Political and Social science

Thesis/Antithesis	Absolute Negation
Disempowerment/Empowerment	Inherent Entitlement
Misinformation/Knowledge	Ideas
Social Distinctions/Fairness	Order
Nativism/Unity	Solidarity
Dehumanization/Human Dignity	Valuing
Fear/Security	Holistic Awareness
Subjugation/Hope	Intentional

Fig. 5. *Absolute Negation: Mutable Moment*

The Aufheben

In Di Giovanni's [39] translation of Hegel, the aufheben is the teleological objective of Hegel's dialectic. It is the speculative moment that simultaneously negates, preserves, and elevates. It is the process in which the initial idea is not simply rejected but transformed through sublation. It is described as a "shift [of the thesis and antithesis] into one another, and that their play of mutual replacement is finally resolved into a third concept" (Di Giovanni, 2010, p. xxxiv), [39] where a higher-level synthesis reduces tension. Oxford Reference interprets Hegel's aufheben as the "sublation that abolishes the dichotomies between the thesis and antithesis," where the dynamic tension between the thesis and the antithesis is "overcome by a synthesis that builds only on the good bits of each" (2025, p. 1).[16] It contrasts with the moment of understanding, "in which concepts or forms have a seemingly stable definition or determination" (Maybee, 2020, p. 3), and the dialectical moment, the "process of self-sublation" (Maybee, 2020, p. 3). [8] The aufheben of the disempowerment and empowerment framework is mutual-reciprocal entitlement or mutual and reciprocal respect. The subcategories were sublated. The aufheben of misinformation and knowledge, dehumanization and human dignity, social distinctions and fairness, subjugation and hope, nativism and unity, and fear and security are characterized by prudence, humility, conscientiousness, agency, oneness, and beneficence, respectively (see Fig. 6).

Disempowerment/Empowerment	Mutual-Reciprocal Entitlement
Misinformation/Knowledge	Prudence
Social Distinctions/Fairness	Conscientiousness
Nativism/Unity	Oneness
Dehumanization/Human Dignity	Humility
Fear/Security	Beneficence
Subjugation/Hope	Agency

Fig. 6. *Speculative Moments*

28

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025   ISSN (E): 2583-1348
AGPE The Royal Gondwana Research Journal of History, Science, Economic, Political and Social science

The dialectic process does not end with the aufheben but continues with the emergence of negations and new sublations. It becomes easier to understand sublation when applying the concepts to an idea, such as the strategy employed by the American Founders during the Revolutionary War to achieve self-determination and a republican form of government through revolutionary social change, by temporarily appropriating disempowerment strategies during the empowerment process. Though deployed toward opposing ends, both processes share fundamental drivers, including agency, the pursuit of power, recognition, and security. The persistence of agential potential proves particularly significant. Even under conditions of apparent disempowerment, latent capacities for agency and hope remain dynamically present, capable of activation regardless of subjective or observational biases. Moreover, historical precedents abound where attempted disempowerment paradoxically generated empowerment, from the American colonists' revolutionary mobilization to contemporary examples like China, Russia, Burkina Faso, the EU, and BRICS nations. These cases demonstrate how conditions of demoralization can dialectically become catalysts for collective action and transformation, underscoring the complex interplay between oppositional social forces in contemporary social change.

Judgment

Di Giovanni [39] interpreted Hegel's fundamental process whereby the subject and the predicate are iteratively refined and reevaluated to achieve a higher level of abstraction as judgment. The process played a key role in exemplifying the aufheben's negating, preserving, and elevating characteristics. In reflecting the breadth and depth of understanding that is gained through the processes that lead to the aufheben, four perspectives were considered and synthesized through an objective lens: a) the perspective of the disempowerment initiator, b) the target of disempowerment, c) the empowerment initiator, and d) the empowerment target and affected persons. The result of the process led to a higher level of unity and understanding of the dichotomies. The following concepts —existence, essence, consciousness, conscientization, and awareness — were initially considered in the context of the fear and security dyad. However, their definitions proved to be overly restrictive. Holistic awareness was also considered. While it ultimately retained its more encompassing framework, it failed to achieve an ethical unity. *Beneficence* was selected as the aufheben as it goes beyond knowing to understanding beyond the here and now. In the context of misinformation and knowledge pairing, truth value, self-preservation, and ideas were considered but ultimately dismissed in favor of prudence, as the latter more effectively encapsulates the dynamic interplay between the two poles and highlights the importance of self-reflection and discipline. Prudence preserves self-interest and shapes moral values, whereas truth value necessitates further epistemological scrutiny.

Regarding the subjugation and hope binary, humility was initially proposed but rejected due to its implicit requirement of agency, and it is more appropriate for a different dyad. Consequently, *agency* was selected as the more fundamental and analytically precise concept. In the case of dehumanization and human dignity, self-worth and valuing were initially posited, despite valuing

29

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025 ISSN (E): 2583-1348
AGPE The Royal Gondwana Research Journal of History, Science, Economic, Political and Social science

extending beyond solipsistic valuation to encompass intersubjective recognition, another sublation was selected. Valuing failed to represent the aufheben as adequately as *humility*. While often interpreted as weakness, humility was chosen as it mitigates against under- and overvaluing. In the social distinctions and fairness dyad, hierarchy, balance of power, security, and order were all considered. The primacy of fundamental fairness, distinct from equality and justice, terms often co-opted for political expediency, could be incorporated under order for a just society. Although order comes close, *conscientiousness* was preferred for its inclusivity and representation of an ongoing dialectical process. For the nativism and unity dyad, indivisibility and consensus were considered, but *oneness* was selected because it is a higher-level integration that subsumes both concepts.

To reiterate, although judgment is predominantly associated with the process of considering and selecting the universal concept that best represents the absolute negation and the aufheben, perspective-taking must be engaged before the analyst can determine which universal concept represents the absolute negation and the aufheben. In this case, four perspectives, two perspectives for each concept, were considered. Judgement is the objective eye and fifth perspective that provides a synthesis. For the fear and security dyad, the fear initiator's and the fearful's words and actions were explored. The words and actions of the secured, as well as those of the secured on the insecure and others involved in the secured's journey to security, were analyzed. This holistic approach leads to a more accurate and in-depth understanding of what the aufheben must cancel, preserve, and transcend. Moreover, perspective-taking exposes relationships between the dyads and other dyads. Beneficence cancels and preserves fear and security. Those who leverage fear as a means to an end should consider the long-term (physical, mental, and emotional) effects of both momentary and chronic fear, as well as how the fear others experience can affect those initiating fear and the people or communities affected. Those who are manipulated through fear or who are prone to react to fear could benefit from responding beneficently (e.g., welcoming neighbors versus responding with hate crimes). Security is cancelled because the security of others is also taken into consideration. Achieving personal security without considering the security of others could expose others to insecurity (e.g., human trafficking and employee exploitation). In selecting the most appropriate aufheben, both the determinate and absolute negations were considered. The aim was to achieve both depth and breadth of understanding by examining how the ideas, behaviors, and attitudes embedded in these dichotomies shape cultural values and norms across temporal contexts. For example, both misinformation and knowledge can be weaponized and used strategically. Although ideas can be said to dissolve tension, prudence, however, achieves not only a higher-level unity but also a greater level of understanding.

Within the disempowerment and empowerment dyad, power, control, and transformation were initially examined but ultimately supplanted by *mutual-reciprocal entitlement*, a catalyst for social transformation. This synthesis is grounded in the substantive content of America's founding documents and other areas where the framework has been applied to interpersonal relationships marked by dynamic tensions. For instance, while Great Britain asserted political entitlement—oppressive power over its subjects, American colonists demanded inherent entitlement—

30

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025 **ISSN (E): 2583-1348**
AGPE The Royal Gondwana Research Journal of History, Science, Economic, Political and Social science

recognizing fundamental human dignity and rights. The negation of hereditary and moral entitlement is inherent entitlement—the understanding that governments, leaders, and human beings deserve inherent entitlement, and one that must be reciprocated beyond status and title. However, it is understood that there is no duty to reciprocate entitlement if inherent or contractual entitlement is breached. For example, the Declaration of Independence [40] reads:

> [W]henever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends [life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness], it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Government long established should not be changed for light and transient Causes[.]

Entitlement aptly captures not only the historical dynamic between the government (e.g., Great Britain) and the citizens (e.g., American colonists). It also captures the phenomenon of entitlement between the West and the Global South, Israel and Palestine, Russia and Ukraine, France and Great Britain, and Africa, marketers and consumers, and interpersonal relationships where power dynamics can lead to bullying/violence in the quest for recognition and security.

Discussion

This paper presents a novel application of Hegel's dialectical method by analyzing paired concepts driven by dynamic tension from a social change framework that emerged from America's founding documents. It contributes to Hegel's dialectic by expanding his aufheben beyond abstract logic to sociopolitical praxis. It reintroduces the principle of mutual-reciprocal entitlement as a governance principle, which is relevant in national politics and international relations. The findings support existing empirical research in policy (e.g., the role of conscientiousness in restorative justice) and activism (e.g., leveraging agency from subjugation and hope to counter authoritarianism). It addresses Popper's [14] critique by demonstrating the aufheben as a scientific tool with the medication dosage analogy. Contradictions were identified and resolved through the aufheben, which canceled, preserved, and incorporated the negations into new configurations of meaning to answer the research question: How can dialectical sublation of seven conceptual dyads yield an integrated framework for sustainable social change? Hegel's dialectical method offers a structured approach to analyzing and synthesizing dichotomies through abstraction. In finding the essence of a thing, one can explicate the idea that the aufheben cancels, preserves, and elevates to a higher level of integration.

The dyads underwent abstraction, where they were deconstructed, followed by comparative analysis and relational analysis. They were analyzed to identify their tension-resolving concepts from multiple perspectives (e.g., adverse outcomes of the dyads and are descriptive). The descriptive concept was selected as the absolute negation, while the universal concept capable of elevating the dyads was identified as the aufheben. For example, misinformation and knowledge are weaponized to subdue listeners; subjugation and hope share the characteristic of control, while

nativism and unity can be leveraged to undermine. It has been suggested that bypassing this process and intuitively determining the aufheben may be possible. The problem with relying on intuition is that it produces superficial interpretations that will likely lead to several antitheses, as it limits the analyst's understanding of the phenomenon. Numerous instances arose in which the same question emerged in search of absolute negation: How do they differ, despite exhibiting substantial similarities? It was as though the cognitive process became fixated on identifying patterns of similarity, rendering a shift in perspective challenging. It was at this moment that I understood the depth of similarities between the paired concepts. Hegel's absolute negation highlights the moment where dynamic tension is resolved into new configurations, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the subject matter. In this case, I understood the dyads share a common essence or absolute negation in the form of adverse outcomes (e.g., embolden, weaponization, destabilization, undermining, resistance, false consciousness, control), responsible in part or sum for dynamic tension and destabilization.

The absolute negation undermines and preserves the thesis by employing different tactics for the same strategies. The negation, which encompasses both the disempowerment and empowerment dyad, is *transformative*, a reminder that the aufheben of the subcategories leads to social transformation. Like Hegel's concept of becoming, [39] the transformative is constantly changing: it is never a fixed entity but is always in the process of becoming. It negates disempowerment and empowerment. Prudence, valuing, order, agency, oneness, and holistic awareness, all of which are processes, sublate the thesis and antithesis of their respective dyad. The aufheben is the essence that cancelled, preserved, and elevated the dialectic to a higher ethical unity. Conceptual analysis revealed that the disempowerment and empowerment social change processes operate within the same structural logic: a yearning for solidarity, an emphasis on valuing of people be it oneself, others, or a combination, holistic awareness of self, others, and environment, a pursuit of order and one's place, a reliance on agency to shape their lives, and the importance of ideas in advancing their respective agendas. Dynamic tension, like that created by the thesis and antithesis, vie for resolution. However, the dialectical method transcends dynamic tension and leads to a holistic understanding. [39] The speculative moment leads to a mutual-reciprocal entitlement where citizens co-author with governments, and governments work together (e.g., the West and Global South) to co-author international policies and global relations in accordance with principles (e.g., agency and beneficence) and virtues (e.g., oneness, conscientiousness, humility, and prudence) in the sublated framework (see Fig. 7).

The Dyads	Determinate Negation	Absolute Negation	Aufheben (Sublation)
Disempower vs Empower	Destabilization	Inherent Entitlement	Mutual-Reciprocal Entitlement
Misinformation vs Knowledge	Weaponization	Ideas	Prudence
Social Distinctions vs Fairness	Destabilization	Order	Conscientiousness
Nativism vs Unity	Undermine	Solidarity	Oneness
Dehumanization vs Human Dignity	Resistance	Valuing	Humility
Fear vs Security	False Consciousness	Holistic Awareness	Beneficence
Subjugation vs Hope	Control	Intentional	Agency

Figure 7. *Moments in the Hegelian Dialectic*

Popper suggested Hegel's dialectic "would mean a complete break-down of science" (p. 408). [14] It is suggested that Hegel's dialectic is compatible with science and could contribute to the field by sublating efficacy (thesis) and deterioration (antithesis) with a *controlled dose process* (aufheben), to the point that any given medication could heal with little or no deterioration. For example, Plaquenil is an antimalarial drug used to treat rheumatoid arthritis. [41] However, the drug builds up in the system and lingers for three months or more after the last dose. [41] One of the adverse effects of Plaquenil [41] is that it can cause temporary blindness [42] and nerve damage, among other complications. Perhaps scholars can investigate the dosage (instead of daily, two weeks per month) to reduce the system buildup. Amiodarone, [43] the generic for Cardarone, is another drug that is efficacious but deteriorating simultaneously, particularly if the patient has kidney, liver, or lung disease. The drug remains in the system months after the last dosage. [43] It can cause pulmonary toxicity, blindness, thyroid cancer, and even death. [43] Determining the maximum level a person can tolerate without adverse effects can reduce complications and even death. Nevertheless, the argument that Hegel is too abstract persists.

The methodological rigor of Hegel's dialectic approach ensures that conceptual analysis yields not merely conceptual synthesis but genuine philosophical progress in understanding dialectical processes. The subcategories' aufhebens were compared to what grounds the framework's aufheben, mutual-reciprocal entitlement (e.g., the Republican form of government and the government "of, by, and for the people"), to determine through examples whether they continue to be transformative. They continue to lead to positive and sustainable social change. Like the concepts of disempowerment and empowerment, these are motivational (see [44-47]). Moreover, the subcategory sublations are measurable (see [48-70]). For example, oneness can be pursued through a unified effort to promote a culture of respect for the human dignity of all people. It can be measured as a sense of belongingness. The concepts have the potential to alter motivation, perception, and systems. In conclusion, this study advances the understanding of how the dialectical method can help foster a better understanding of a phenomenon by engaging in conceptual analysis, in this case, Forde's [15] disempowering and empowering social change binaries. While facially different, the processes lead to either demoralization or, when integrated, to positive and sustainable social change: canceling, preserving, and elevating to a more comprehensive understanding. Hegel's dialectic challenges us to rethink tension and consider alternative conflict resolution strategies that lead to equitable outcomes and a balance of power.

Despite the method's rigor, the Hegelian dialectic has two critical limitations: (1) no requirement to identify the essence of the tension-producing concept of the thesis and antithesis during the moment of understanding, and (2) reliance on a single source of tension, one antithesis, versus multiple sources of tension that require multiple antitheses. Although superficially opposed, the thesis and antithesis often pursue identical fundamental objectives. This is because the antithesis is grounded in the thesis and shares common essence and characteristics. [39]

33

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025 ISSN (E): 2583-1348
AGPE The Royal Gondwana Research Journal of History, Science, Economic, Political and Social science

Additionally, humans interpret the world differently due to differences in experience, culture, perception, and social contexts. Therefore, competing formal and informal theories ought to be included as a set of antitheses, even though the absolute negation and aufheben will invariably subsume them, as both are products of abstraction. [39] Analyzing multiple competing antitheses (i.e., ideologies, belief systems, or schools of thought; see Fig. 8) broadens understanding and leads to a more holistic, dialectically stable, and robust aufheben. These refinements will add rigor to the framework by advancing Hegel's ideal of comprehensive understanding. [39]

Monarchy (Thesis)	Perspectives	Antithesis	Essence of Determinate Negation	Absolute Negation	Aufheben
Symbolic Representation	Capitalism	Private Ownership	Distrust	Wellbeing	Human Flourishing
	Communism	Classless Society			
	Socialism	Collective Ownership			
	Anarchism	No Hierarchy			

Figure 8. *Multiple Antitheses*

Future Directions

As a result of the conceptual analysis that took place in this work, similarities between the need for recognition in the lord-bondsman dialectic should be explored in Forde's [15] theory. There is a need for scholars to examine the underlying similarities between Derrida's and Hegel's deconstruction. To dismiss their similarities because Hegel's process moves beyond deconstruction to the aufheben is spurious to say the least. One can argue that Derrida's deconstruction is but an intrinsic process of Hegelian dialectic or, more broadly, abstraction. The sublated framework requires testing in areas such as criminal justice, human and international relations, political science, psychology, and sociology. For example, future research should explore how the sublated framework shapes adaptive strategies, relational bonds, and normative codes among incarcerated or other institutionalized individuals. The framework can be tested in non-Western revolts, such as the Arab Spring and Intifada, as well as in the trade war between China and the United States, the West, and the Global South. Studies applying Hegel's method to new concepts are needed. Moreover, studies testing the sublated framework (e.g., measuring holistic awareness in security policies, source of oneness among the Global South and West, humility in trade negotiations, how beneficence emerges in war-torn countries, the part ideology plays in beneficence, and the role of prudence on economic development) are also needed. Comparative case studies can be engaged to determine how Western and Global South leaders (e.g., Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, and Ibrahim Traoré) have employed the sublated framework of mutual-reciprocal entitlement internationally.

34

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025 **ISSN (E): 2583-1348**
AGPE The Royal Gondwana Research Journal of History, Science, Economic, Political and Social science

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Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025   ISSN (E): 2583-1348
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38

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025   ISSN (E): 2583-1348
AGPE The Royal Gondwana Research Journal of History, Science, Economic, Political and Social science

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39

Vol-6, Issue-8, August 2025   **ISSN (E): 2583-1348**
AGPE The Royal Gondwana Research Journal of History, Science, Economic, Political and Social science