Social Structure of Cognition in the Philosophy of G. W. F. Hegel and L. Wittgenstein

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to give a deeper account of Wittgenstein’s epistemological view in Philosophical Investigations in the context of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit. Phenomenology of Spirit serves as a model structure with through the conception in Philosophical Investigation is being gradually outlined. The first chapters introduce some particularly influential streams in cognitive sciences that shall serve as a background for the new conception of justified true belief as a central term of contemporary epistemological discourse. After the sketch of Wittgenstein’s account of knowledge in On Certainty compared to Kant’s epistemological conception and Hume’s sceptical doubts, the paper introduces Wittgenstein and Hegel as sceptics of particular kind. After such an extensive introductory part, the sole examination of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit commences. First, the author deals with the chapter on sense-certainty. It is argued that pure sensory experience without the intrusion of a concept cannot grasp any particular object in apprehension. Second, Hegel’s account of force and understanding introduces the theme of conceptuality. Wittgenstein is being examined simultaneously, on the background of the analysis of Hegel’s dialectical course. It is concluded that both Hegelian and Wittgensteinian conception imply that any kind of knowledge requires some social basis, i.e. that cognition is possible only when language, or conceptuality and propositionality respectively, intervenes. The thesis is shortly compared to John McDowell’s concept of how a human mind approaches the world, for McDowell has been entangled with the discussions of both Hegel and Wittgenstein, and still belongs to the most influential group of contemporary epistemologists. In the final chapter the concept of justified true belief is redefined in accordance with the argumentation, i.e. the term justified true belief is defined as a socially based concept, while sociality is an indispensable element of human cognition.