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## **Hegel on Empirical Cognition: a Contribution to Understanding Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as Diachronic Epistemology**

It seems that Hegel's readers do not agree on much with perhaps one exception: that his texts are difficult to fathom. The reader's complaints about struggling to understand Hegel's philosophy can be linked with his own concerns about being comprehensible. The philosopher expressed such concerns in the *Preface* to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "to talk of the *unity* of subject and object, of finite and infinite, of being and thought, etc. is inept, since object and subject, etc. signify what they are *outside* of their unity, and since in their unity they are not meant to be what their expression says they are."<sup>1</sup>

Hegel's mode of philosophical reasoning was so new in his day that – just as he feared – traditional philosophical terminology was unable to express it. The difference between the traditional way of thinking and Hegel's approach lies at the heart of dialectic and was – in my opinion – accurately presented in *History and Class Consciousness* by György Lukács. The Hungarian Marxist claims that in Hegelian philosophy:

"the subject is neither the unchanged observer of the objective dialectic of being and concept (as was true of Eleatic philosophers and even of Plato), nor the practical manipulator of its purely mental possibilities (as with Greek sophists): the dialectical process, the ending of a rigid confrontation of rigid forms, is enacted essentially between the subject and the object."<sup>2</sup>

The essence of the dialectic lies in the movement of the subject-object relation. Within this approach, subject and object as such are to be thought of as secondary abstractions from their relation. The Hegelian manner of philosophizing emerged from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and – in many ways – anticipated the methodology of twentieth-century structuralism. In an attempt to find a synthesis of empiricism and rationalism, Kant presented a vision of subject characterized by its double nature – by both its receptive sensibility and the spontaneous activity of

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<sup>1</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller, Oxford 1979, 23.

<sup>2</sup> G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, translated by R. Livingstone, Cambridge 1971, 142.