

The Problem of Absolute Knowing  
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We have to admire Hegel's confidence: on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1806, as Napoleon rides into Jena, and the day before a decisive defeat of the Prussian army, Hegel is finishing his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>i</sup> The book's final chapter, less than twenty pages, is called 'Absolute Knowing'. Here we have an unsalaried professor, in his thirties, abandoning his own place to the ransacking of the French army, staying with one of his student's parents, yet claiming to have solved the problems of critical philosophy, to have established the authority of science, and to have achieved wisdom itself. At minimum, Hegel is bold.

If we ourselves are bold enough to pursue philosophy, Hegel's claim of absolute knowing should provoke us. Here we are, striving for wisdom, and along comes Hegel purporting to have it. When encountering Hegel, we must at least consider whether his claim is genuine, or whether he is rather just a modern day sophist, pretending to something he doesn't have. (An aside: even if we count philosophy less central than, say, art or religion, Hegel's audacity should still shock us. In the *Science of Logic* he claims to be expounding the eternal essence of God before creation (*SoL* 29), and in his lectures on aesthetics he is reported to say that art "is and remains a thing of the past." For tonight I will mostly focus on the philosophic problems.)<sup>ii</sup>

In 1967 Gilles Deleuze proposes that the model for the seeker of truth is not the scholar asking 'what is it?' questions, but rather is the jealous lover. Not τὸ τί ἔστι, but instead who is it, how often, when, how, how many, where? The thinker is not one of simple leisure and wonder, but rather is incited by the force of ill-will.<sup>iii</sup>

In this case, at least, I think Deleuze is right. I am jealous of Hegel, and encountering his writings has provoked me both earlier and now. From the first I *needed* to know the truth of Hegel's system, whether I could rely on his method or not. I don't just want to know *what* absolute knowing is. I also need to know *how do I reach absolute knowing?* *How* is this book, the *Phenomenology*, supposed to get me to this point? *Is* this book the only way to reach absolute knowing, and does it guarantee it? *Why* is it 'phenomenology' that leads to Science? *Who* knows absolutely? *How* does one know 'absolutely', *where and when* can I find such knowing, *for how long* can one 'absolutely know', *who* are the 'false claimants', the sophists who propose a mere image of wisdom, *how* can I tell the difference between wisdom and its image, and if I do finally achieve absolute knowing, *what do I do with it?*

Hegel tells us that we can neither simply summarize his philosophy, nor can we just jump to its end. "Impatience demands the impossible, to wit, the attainment of the end without the means" (§29).<sup>iv</sup> Instead, philosophy requires the force of necessity: every step must have its reason, and we lose the necessity and reason when we summarize a philosophy or try to simply list its conclusions. We can contrast this with axiomatic mathematics: while the deductions of mathematics also have the force of necessity, our proposed axioms and postulates are only hypothetical, and there is no absolute procedure for reaching conclusions. Philosophical necessity must, for Hegel, be stronger than this: not only must our conclusions follow from our premises, but they must somehow be implicitly present in the premises. Moreover, the premises of philosophy must be absolutely necessary, rather than merely hypothetical or presupposed. Since these requirements are lacking for mathematics, the truth of a mathematical theorem does not depend on the validity of its proof: a mathematical theorem is either true or false, and a good proof merely *demonstrates* the truth already present. Not so with a philosophic truth: for Hegel, a

truth can *only* be comprehended as such insofar as it is a *result* of its deduction. Thus there are no philosophic theorems: the truth of a principle can only be realized in the coming-to-be of that very principle. Without being understood in the necessity of its genesis, philosophic truth will only ever be contingent, inadequate, and incomplete.

Hence my attempt tonight is doomed to fail. In principle, I cannot adequately review the *Phenomenology* as a whole, nor can I give a true rigorous account of the last chapter and figure of the work, Absolute Knowing. Nevertheless, despite himself, Hegel time and again feels the need to preface his texts, to summarize the arguments, to add contingent asides or ‘extra-philosophical’ remarks, and to propound what look like philosophic theorems [for example, “Reason is *purposive activity*” (§22), “The true is the whole” (§20), “everything turns on grasping and expressing the true, not only as *substance*, but equally as *subject*” (§18)]. Thus we find a curious split (and not always a neat one) inside of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* between the central argument or deduction (the phenomenology ‘proper’, necessary according to Hegel’s philosophic standards), and the contingent asides, remarks, or summaries (occasionally marked off with the phrase “in-itself, or for-us”). This talk, then, while not measuring up to the stringent requirements of Hegelian *science*, nonetheless accords with the *style* of the Hegelian *aside*, a contingent reflection on philosophic necessity.

The problem, then, is absolute knowing. Tonight, I will raise this problem from two directions. The first is through a review of the larger project of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Not only is such a review helpful for getting us all on the same page, I shall contend that *the* guiding problem of the *Phenomenology* is the problem of the *appearance of science*, or the *spiritual shape of science*, that is, of absolute knowing. The second direction will be an interrogation of absolute

knowing itself. Here I will return to the questions of who, when, how, etc. and examine some of Hegel's claims about absolute knowing at the end of the *Phenomenology*.

## Part I: An Introduction to an Introduction

Many readers of Hegel's *Phenomenology* find the text to be full of valuable resources for all sorts of problems and questions. Yet too many of them miss the goal of the text. For all of Hegel's supposed obscurity, he is clear on the purpose of the *Phenomenology*: it is "the way to science" (§88), the "coming-to-be of *science as such* or of *knowledge*" (§27), the deduction of pure science, or absolute knowing (*SoL* 29). Hegel even says "To help bring philosophy closer to the form of science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title 'love of knowing' and be *actual* knowing—that is what I have set myself to do" (§5). In the age of revolutions and pamphlets, I propose that the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, mammoth of a work that it is, can be seen as Hegel's pamphlet – *philosophical science is possible, here is how!*

At this point, there are three major lingering questions. (1) What does Hegel mean by science? (2) Why do we need a 'way' into science, can't we just start doing science? And (3), how is phenomenology, in particular, going to accomplish this goal?

Our first question, what does Hegel mean by science, is perhaps best left aside for now. Certainly he is not simply referring to the 'laboratory' sciences. The answers Hegel might give to this question are somewhat cryptic: science is the unity of thinking and being, science is the unity of theoretical and practical cognition, science is the absolute idea, the self-movement of the concept, or the method of methods. And Hegel would remind us that all of these answers are fundamentally insufficient when separated from the labor of science itself. For now, I merely wish to maintain that we can link together science, on the one hand, and knowing, on the other,

as Hegel himself does in some of the aforementioned quotes. This connection between science and knowledge is nothing new: the Greek term ἐπιστήμη and the Latin *scientia* can each mean either knowledge or science, depending on the situation, and in our present context knowledge translates the German *Wissen* while science translates *Wissenschaft*. More concretely, I propose that science is the *result* of knowing; I will return to this later.

Yet why do we need a pathway to science at all? If science is our goal, then why don't we just start by doing science? One reason we have already seen: for Hegel science must meet the standard of absolute necessity. Such a necessity is foreign to our daily lives, and demands a different sort of consideration than that to which we are accustomed.

Further, recalling Socrates' claims in the *Republic*, for Hegel true knowledge must be un-hypothetical and without presupposition. Many thinkers have tried to find a self-evident principle, an immediate truth from which we can go forward to achieve knowledge. Yet for Hegel *every* supposedly self-evident principle must, in truth, rely on some presupposition or other, precisely insofar as it is an isolated principle. Any single statement (or concept, or argument) considered on its own proves to contain some implicit presupposition or other, and ultimately implies, for Hegel, its own contradiction. We thus need a pathway to science insofar as science itself requires a seemingly paradoxical beginning.

Finally, and perhaps most crucially for the text of the *Phenomenology*, due to the nature of consciousness we naturally find ourselves opposed to some sort of object. Within a given consciousness a division is made between what belongs to that consciousness, or the 'self' of that consciousness, and what is other than, or outside of, or the object of, that same consciousness. This split can take a number of shapes: my observing mind and the data that I observe, my passions and the laws imposed upon them, my inner worthlessness and the divine

other, and so on. Without reducing consciousness to a single form, we find again and again that it divides itself along the lines of self and other. Such a division, for Hegel, is in tension with the project of science, insofar as it proposes an object outside of or other than the limits of our comprehension. Science, as the unity of thinking and being, must work against our consciousness' natural tendency to set itself against its object.

To recap: for Hegel, science requires necessary deductions, a starting point which is presuppositionless without being reduced to a principle, and the rejection of all divisions between self and other. If the *Phenomenology* is to show us science is possible, then it needs to both show *why* these are requirements for science and *how* we can meet such requirements. In truth, Hegel hopes to do even more: not only is science *possible*, he thinks, but rather it is *necessary*, given our nature. Thus the *Phenomenology* is not a bare appeal to the 'fact' or appearance of science: rather, it engages in the work of deducing the necessity of absolute knowing, and demonstrating the inadequacy of other spiritual forms.

A pathway to science is, indeed, necessary for us to reach the point of properly beginning our scientific system. Yet here is an impasse: if we need an introduction to show that science is necessary, presuppositionless, and undivided from its object, then our introduction itself must meet these same requirements. If not, then our science will rely on the contingency of our pathway and the presuppositions carried with it. Thus "the way to science is itself already science" (§88): the *Phenomenology* is not only an introduction to science and a demonstration of its necessity, but it is also the first part of the system of science.

This brings us to our third question: why is phenomenology in particular the proper introduction to science? Moreover, how does phenomenology meet the aforementioned requirements of science (i.e. be necessary, without presupposition, and unified with its object)?

Hegel is looking to establish the necessity of the *appearance* of science in our world. Phenomenology, then, is going to be an account of appearances, up to and including that of science. Still, there are a number of ways in which things can be said to really or truly appear, and this often relies on various commitments or attitudes we have towards the world. Thus the ancient skeptic only concedes the force of appearances which demand his or her passive assent; the Baconian scientist, though, counts as true and certain data anything which can be recorded as an observation. If Hegel were to simply propose a definitive essential schema of appearance, the *Phenomenology* would not meet up to its scientific standards: it would not carry the force of necessity against those who have a different model of appearances, it would rely on unjustified presuppositions about the nature of appearances, and it would create a division between 'Hegelian' appearance and other sorts of appearances (e.g. the skeptic's appearances).

We might be tempted to go to the other extreme: if we cannot impose a single schema on appearances, perhaps our *Phenomenology* should embrace the style of a narrative or biography, or maybe a review of different real, historical positions. However these methods cannot work, either: at the very least, such biographical or historical accounts are filled with contingencies, and thus inadequate for the purpose of introducing science.

Neither a schematic nor a biographical/historical account, the *Phenomenology* is a science of the *shapes* of appearances, their essential features, together with the various personae, experiences, activities, objects, and commitments entailed in these various shapes. It takes up the forms of appearance as they present themselves, without fetishizing their chance idiosyncrasies or imposing an alien structure upon them.

So, then, the *Phenomenology* examines the shapes of appearances and shows the necessity of the appearance of science. Its investigation is interior to the different shapes of appearances

themselves: Hegel examines each shape based on its own *internal criteria*, whether these are implicit or explicit, active or passive, concerning the object or regarding the subject. This gives phenomenology its scientific rigor, each stage of the project containing its own immanent necessity, immediacy, and unity. And what is it that Hegel finds, when he examines the various shapes of appearances? Speaking generally, it is that within each shape of appearances (other than, perhaps, absolute knowing) there is a tension within that shape itself. For example, let us consider the Baconian scientific observers: they are committed to their observational reports as the true data appearances, as what counts as real in their world. Yet their own activity is at odds with this commitment: they treat their observations as a pure natural given, as simply objective, but ignore their own role in the composition of observations. This leads to problems of which these observers are aware, but cannot adequately resolve: e.g. how can we distinguish between biased and unbiased observational reports? Yet this ignorance of the self is constitutive of the observer's appearances: the self cannot be observed like a hot-spring or a skeletal structure, and upon realizing this problematic element, this inner tension, any observers who are genuinely truth-seeking must change the way they approach appearances, they must abandon simple observation and modify their commitments, objects, actions, or some other factor. Thus through phenomenology we see a tension interior to this 'observing' shape of appearances, plus the immanent motion that takes place when that tension or contradiction resolves itself.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is consequently the movement through the various shapes and stages of appearances. While it may not be necessary that every peculiar and idiosyncratic possible shape of appearance be investigated in the *Phenomenology*, the project still should be mostly exhaustive in the types it considers. If 'appearance' is what phenomenology investigates

in its broadest terms, the two most general ways in which appearance takes place for us are those of consciousness and spirit.

Consciousness is the domain where I immediately grasp both myself and any external objects. It is appearance at the level of the first-person-singular: e.g. objects are given to my senses, or laws are imposed on me. Consciousness, to quote GM Hopkins, “Deals out that being indoors each one dwells / Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speak and spells.”<sup>v</sup> For Hegel, consciousness begins with the certainty of what is immediately given, whether that is an object outside of it (in simple consciousness), its own self (in self-consciousness), or knowledge of itself as an agent in the world (in what Hegel calls reason). This immediate certainty proves to be inadequate, requiring a more substantial conception of what there is (so, for example, we move from immediate certainty in our senses to a more nuanced understanding of the world as the consequence of invisible forces; or we move from the certainty of our own absolute authority to the truth of a more complex relation we have to an authority outside ourselves).

Ultimately, consciousness can never be adequate to itself. Consciousness wants the final say over everything, wants to become identical with its object, yet it is always resisted by a larger world, which conditions it. When we recognize this, the certainty of consciousness’ self-assured individuality turns into the truth of what Hegel calls spirit. Spirit is what consciousness aspires to be: spirit is its own world. Spirit is identical with what is other than it: it has objects, but these are a part of its spiritual domain. Spirit, then, is appearance at the level of the first-person-plural: e.g. objects matter only insofar as they are useful to us, or we must act only of our own free will, etc. Consciousness has not disappeared (any more than the singular would ‘disappear’ in the plural): we cannot have spirit without consciousness, no more than we could have a community without individuals. Yet by making spirit the primary object of

phenomenology we acknowledge that there are limits to any analysis of an individual consciousness: consciousness takes itself as self-sufficient, but in truth its ground is the social world of spirit. We can think of Hopkins, again: “I say more: the just man justices [...] Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his” here, we can see that we have gone beyond the “myself” that consciousness “speaks and spells”, and onto justice, a social virtue, which is reflected through others (and indeed, for Hopkins, through God).

Like consciousness, spirit too has different shapes which can be examined and evaluated. While the movement of consciousness was from certainty to truth, spirit moves from truth to certainty: beginning as substantial, unalterable truth (as with the eternal laws of the family and gods, or the unequivocal identification of God with light), spirit develops a self-certainty by incorporating and inscribing this truth within the consciousness of individuals who make it up (as with Spirit as the self-legislating and autonomy of individuals, or the community that must reconcile itself with the death of God). For Hegel, this takes place in three stages. The first is spirit as such, the social world we inhabit. Next is religion, which is spirit’s comprehension of itself in what Hegel calls ‘picture-thinking’. Finally, spirit’s last stage is absolute knowing, which is Spirit certain of itself as the truth, where picture-thinking becomes genuine cognition.

In this way Hegel’s *Phenomenology* purports to bring us to absolute knowing. Indeed, the goal of the book, to show the necessity of the appearance of science, is nothing more than to bring us to this final stage. Absolute knowing is spirit’s free thinking of itself and its world, a thinking by means of what Hegel calls the concept, the “pure element of spirit’s existence” (§805). The exposition of this thinking and the concept is nothing else but science, which is constrained by nothing but the necessity of its content. Science is then the result of absolute

knowing: “Spirit, therefore, having won the concept, displays its existence and movement in this ether of its life and is *science*” (§805).

## Part II: The Time of Absolute Knowing

Even if, by this point, I have given an accurate sketch of how the *Phenomenology* is meant to bring its readers to absolute knowing, there is still so much we don't know about this stage. I wish, then, to interrogate absolute knowing itself, as to who it is, how it works, and what it does. The most pivotal question though, for tonight at least, is that of *when*: *when* can I find absolute knowing, can it be localized to a particular time? Is there absolute knowing before Hegel? Before the French revolution? Before Christianity? Further, can we simply rely on absolute knowing to be there *in perpetuum*? Or perhaps the possibility of absolute knowing has past, and we cannot or should not return to it today.

These questions are not purely phenomenological, but instead concern the relation between a phenomenological shape and actual history. Hegel is clear that all figures of consciousness or spirit must first have a real existence before they can be comprehended phenomenologically: “nothing is *known* that is not in *experience*” (§802). In other words, Hegelian knowledge is neither projective nor prophetic: we can only comprehend what was and is (although it does seem that for Hegel knowledge is ‘retrojective’, that is, capable of thinking the present back into the past, as implicitly and necessarily there all along). This holds just as much for absolute knowing: “as regards the *existence* of this concept, science does not appear in time and in the actual world before spirit has attained to this consciousness about itself” (§800).

Absolute knowing can, then, be localized in time, and we may rightfully ask: when does science appear? When is absolute knowing? There is evidence that the answer to this question

is actually quite specific: “until spirit has completed itself *in itself*, until it has completed itself as world-spirit, it cannot reach its consummation as *self-conscious spirit*” (§802), or “As spirit that knows what it is, it does not exist before, and nowhere at all, till after the completion of its work of compelling its imperfect ‘shape’ to procure for its consciousness the ‘shape’ of its essence” (§800). That is to say, absolute knowing requires the stages that come before it, it comprehends them and recapitulates them. Again and again Hegel considers absolute knowing in light of the various shapes of appearance that precede it. Yet some of these stages have their existential-historical reality in just less than the twenty years before Hegel’s *Phenomenology*: the most obvious case is the spiritual shape of ‘Absolute Freedom and Terror’, whose historical correlate is the revolutionary period in France. Thus Kojève, for example,<sup>vi</sup> dates absolute knowing to Hegel himself: Hegel is not merely *demonstrating* the reality of Science, he is *inventing it*.

Is it really the case that the birthdate of science and absolute knowing is the night before the battle of Jena, as Napoleon enters the city and Hegel completes his project? If so, when we ask *who* knows absolutely, it is Hegel, first of all.

Yet there is a problem with this answer. If we consider a post-*Phenomenology* text of Hegel’s science, such as the *Science of Logic*, it clearly and explicitly relies on material from a tradition of thought and philosophy stretching at least as far back as Parmenides. For example, when discussing the philosophy of Spinoza, Hegel says “Such a standpoint ... is not to be regarded as just an opinion, an individual’s subjective, arbitrary way of representing and thinking, and an aberration of speculation; on the contrary, speculation necessarily runs into it, and, to this extent, the system is perfectly true” (*SoL* 511). How can we make sense of this: how can Spinoza develop a true, necessary, system of speculative thought, while historically living before the French revolution? We might wish to appeal to Hegel’s claim that absolute knowing

has existed in an undeveloped, implicit state in earlier historical periods (§801). But this is not an adequate answer, insofar as Spinoza's system is far from implicit and undeveloped, but rather was written out, published, criticized, defended, and debated. Spinoza's *Ethics* is not a testament to a hidden presence of absolute knowing, a ruse of reason behind the back of history, but rather is an explicit scientific approach to the way things are.

I contend, then, that there is a sense of absolute knowing which is *not* restricted to a post-revolutionary existence. Such absolute knowing, rather, exists at any point where spirit has both raised itself out of its immediate social world, and broken with religious picture-thinking, instead thinking of itself and of its world in their own terms. Absolute knowing is a break with previous spiritual shapes. It is a latent possibility of spirit, not only in its historical culmination, but at any point in its existence. [We might think of the relation between absolute knowing and spirit as analogous to that of reason and consciousness: reason is not a simple historical result of object-consciousness and self-consciousness, but rather is its inner truth which can be realized at many times and places.] Spirit, as "Pure self-recognition in absolute otherness ... is the ground and soil of science or *knowledge in general*" (26). Thus if the germ of science is the unity of thinking and being, the overcoming of the division between spirit and its object, then absolute knowing has a historical reality stretching back at least to the Greeks.

We have, then, two different senses of absolute knowing: the first as precisely localized in Germany, in the culmination of the *Phenomenology*, with the advent of the Hegelian system of Science, while the second can be found through our history in the guise of philosophy and the sciences in general, namely in any case where we take up our object in thought. Can we reconcile these senses, or is absolute knowing merely equivocal?

To answer this, we must ask *how* absolute knowing knows itself. All the earlier movements of the *Phenomenology* somehow find their place in this culminating stage, to the point where it can be hard to keep track of how everything is supposed to work together. For our purposes, though, we will only need to sketch out the movement of self-knowledge itself, which has three components. In absolute knowing, spirit knows itself as the identity between itself and its other. For Hegel, such an identity is only possible insofar as the self and other are genuinely different, and this difference is superseded and transformed. In absolute knowing, this all happens at once. In its first component, spirit knows “not only itself but the also the negative of itself, or its limit”: the absolute other, outside of it, namely the “*free contingent happening*” of nature, of an external time and space (§807). Simultaneously, spirit, entered into existence, recognizes itself in its otherness, transforms what is other than it to a moment of itself, and recollects itself in the contingencies of time: this is spirit’s self-knowledge as what Hegel calls *comprehended history* (§806, §808). Such a history is the play of contingencies and necessities, the shape of spirit which loses itself in externality to find itself again. Finally, with the immediate identity of spirit and its other achieved, self-knowledge is identical to science itself. Science, as both comprehended and comprehending, is a perfect activity wherein time is annulled (§801). Other-against-self, other-as-becoming-self, and other-as-self: time, history, eternity. In one movement Spirit knows itself through these three temporalities.

By seeing *how* absolute knowing lives in time, we can start to reconcile our two different *when’s* (the one being located at Hegel in particular and the other extending across the history of philosophy). While science is the accomplishment and result of absolute knowing, the finished achievement of grasping the other-as-same, absolute knowing is not restricted to this scientific endeavor, to the pure, timeless system of thought. The accomplishment of science is, rather, a

result of real, historical transformation of the other into the self. While spirit is always capable of producing science, of reaching absolute knowing, at the same time science always has a spiritual history. Further, the unity of self and other can be established more or less comprehensively, and as such science itself can be more or less comprehensive. This point is worth restating: science, the timeless and necessary articulation of what is, the home of eternal verity, is somehow conditioned by the contingent history of spirit. (As an aside: our other temporality – natural time – has dropped from our discussion. I propose that in fact, while the content and even form of science can change given spirit’s history, spirit always has the same immediate relationship to nature: that of other, limit, and death.)

Returning, now, to our ambiguity. Yes, in the Napoleonic wars absolute knowing and science break from what has come before, and we can rightfully say that Hegel, or the spiritual community of which Hegel is a part, discovers this speculative system of science. Further, this figure of absolute knowing and the science which results is, indeed, dependent on its history, on reformation Christianity, on Kant’s critical philosophy, on the French revolution, and on Napoleon’s conquests. Nevertheless, this historical moment does not mark the *advent* of either absolute knowing or science as such. Absolute knowing “plays in ten thousand places”: whenever Spirit arrives at the unity of thinking and being, wherever it casts away the form of time and dares to think the truth as such. Plato’s *διαλεκτική*, Aristotle’s *θεωρία*, Spinoza’s *scientia intuitiva*, Kant’s transcendental cognition: all are shapes of absolute knowing. And which new shapes, whose new science, and what new eternal truths might we find in these two hundred years after Hegel?

**Conclusion: The Force of Hegel’s Thought**

Turning back, we are faced, it seems, with a tension. In the first part of my talk, I presented the *Phenomenology* as a deduction of the necessity of science, which itself is the necessary, presuppositionless, and unified system of thought. Yet in the second part I concluded that the real existence of absolute knowing, and with it science, depends on spirit's history, which itself contains an ineliminable element of chance. Hence the problem of absolute knowing – how we reach it, when we find it – has carried us to a new problem, that of necessity and contingency. This is not a question of understanding 'where' each modality applies (for example, heavenly necessity and mundane contingency, or transcendental necessity and empirical contingency). Rather, the problem is how to think through the contingent becoming of necessity. How can chance events give rise to necessity? Only by addressing this can we reconcile the necessity of science with its dependence on spirit's history.

Finally, I want to conclude with a reflection on the challenge Hegel poses for us. I began my talk by pointing out Hegel's confidence in claiming to achieve absolute knowing. If philosophy calls to us, I suggested, then even more so will the wisdom absolute knowing purports to have achieved. By the end of the talk, I tried to close some of this distance between Hegel's absolute knowing and earlier philosophies. If history is a gallery of shapes of spirit, I tried to show that we can consider the history of philosophy as the gallery of shapes of absolute knowing. With this assertion, though, perhaps Hegel's achievement seems diminished, and the force of his text undermined. Before ending tonight, I want to dissuade you of this impression. Hegel's writings present a speculative thinking that forces us to reimagine what thought can be. He dares to think being, the infinite, the absolute, but also externality, negativity, and contradiction. He refuses to accept any presupposition, any limitation, any edification, as a replacement for the labor of thought. Yes, Hegelian science can be seen as a philosophy among

many, but it is also a challenge to all others, an expectation that *any* thought and *any* philosophy, whatever it be, think itself to and past its own limit. Not bad for a professor who needs to crash at his student's parent's house.

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<sup>i</sup> Pinkard, Terry P. *Hegel: A Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 227-229.

<sup>ii</sup> Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *The Science of Logic*. Trans. George Di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Trans. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975. 10.

<sup>iii</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004. In particular, the 1967 lecture and discussion "Method of Dramatization". Also related "The Image of Thought" from *Difference and Repetition*.

<sup>iv</sup> Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. Arnold V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon, 1977. Quotes may have with minor modifications, and citation is of paragraph numbers.

<sup>v</sup> From "As Kingfishers Catch Fire", Gerard Manley Hopkins.

<sup>vi</sup> Kojève, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. Raymond Queneau. New York: Basic, 1969.