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A PROBLEM OF RECOGNITION:
ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE AND THE END OF HISTORY*

MICHAEL S. ROTH

The big secret of French philosophy, behind Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Aron, and also Lacan, behind the thinking which dominates France between '45 and '70, is the presence of Kojève, who formulates the leftist intellectual theory of *engagement*. . . . thanks to Kojève, an incalculable number of intellectuals and militants have seen the World Spirit pass by. In the parades from République to Bastille, in various struggles of the Third World, or in the miracle of the Soviet economy.¹

The subject was at the same time universal history and the *Phenomenology*. Through one, the other was brought to light. Everything made sense. Even those who were suspicious of historical providence, who suspected artifice behind the art, could not resist the magician; at the moment, the intelligibility that he conferred on the times and on events served itself as proof.²

Since the Second World War, developments in French philosophy and historiography have had an enormous impact on the ways in which we understand change over time. The French theoretical approach to history has itself been deeply informed since the 1930s by an original understanding of Hegel, and since the mid 1950s by an equally novel reading of Nietzsche. In this essay, I shall discuss the work of Alexandre Kojève, best known as the principal interpreter of Hegel in the twentieth century.³ By examining his interpretation, we shall confront some of the major issues that arise in historical thinking's confrontation with modernity, and come to comprehend the development and power of one of the most important philosophers of history in the twentieth century.

Only a small portion of Kojève's writings had been published before his death in 1968, and since then a series of posthumous works have been brought to light.⁴ Although four books have already appeared since 1968, there remains

* I am deeply indebted to Mlle. Nina Ivanoff for having given me access to Kojève's papers and library.

1. André Glucksmann, interviewed in *Le Nouvel Observateur* 992 (11 novembre, 1983), 4. All translations from the French used in this paper are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

2. Raymond Aron, *Mémoires: 50 ans de réflexion politique* (Paris, 1983), 94.

3. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris, 1947) (hereinafter, *ILH*); an abridged English translation was published in 1968 as *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, transl. James Nichols, ed. Allan Bloom (New York, 1968).

4. *Essai d'une histoire raisonnée de la philosophie païenne*, tomes II, III (Paris, 1972, 1973); *Kant* (Paris, 1973); *Esquisse d'une phénoménologie du droit* (Paris, 1981).

a sizable *Nachlass* from which important texts will still be published.⁵ *The Independent Journal of Philosophy* will publish the thirty-year correspondence between Leo Strauss and Kojève as the centerpiece of its special issue on the latter's work, and the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* will print in 1985 Kojève's essay on his uncle's art, "Les peintures concrètes de Kandinsky." Correspondence between the painter and his nephew on the significance of non-figurative painting has also recently been published.⁶

The center of Kojève's oeuvre is, and will remain, however, his book on Hegel. This interpretation, a collection of notes and texts assembled by Raymond Queneau, is gleaned from a seminar which was a hothouse for intellectual development: Raymond Aron, Georges Bataille, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Eric Weil, Aron Gurwitsch, Gaston Fessard, Alexandre Koyré, Queneau, André Breton, and Jacques Lacan were among the auditors.⁷ Aron describes the seminar, which he attended regularly only in its final year, as follows:

Kojève translated first a few lines of the *Phenomenology*, accenting certain words, then he spoke, without a note, without ever stumbling on a word, in an impeccable French to which a Slavic accent added originality and a winning charm. He fascinated an auditorium of superintellectuals inclined to doubt or criticism. Why? Talent and dialectical virtuosity counted for something. I do not know if the art of the orator remains intact in this book . . . but this art, which had nothing to do with eloquence, was attached to his subject and to his person.⁸

Kojève's course was given as a replacement for the seminar normally given by his friend, Alexandre Koyré. When the latter went to Egypt in 1933, Kojève took over his students and the essentials of his teaching on Hegel. However, if Koyré's reading of Hegel was original, Kojève's was violent; if the former

5. The Kojève archives will soon become a part of the *Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur Hegel et Marx*, located at the Université de Poitiers. There is now a growing secondary literature on Kojève; see, for example, Barry Cooper, *The End of History: An Essay on Modern Hegelianism* (Toronto, 1984); Patrick Riley, "Introduction to the Reading of Alexandre Kojève," *Political Theory* 9 (1981), 5–48; Denis J. Goldford, "Kojève's Reading of Hegel," *International Philosophic Quarterly* 22 (1982), 275–294; Michael S. Roth, "A Note on Kojève's Phenomenology of Right," *Political Theory* 11 (1983), 447–450; Vincent Descombes, *Le Même et l'autre: quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (1933–1978)* (Paris, 1979) Chap. 1. For more complete bibliographical information on Kojève and secondary materials, see Michael S. Roth, "Alexandre Kojève: Une Bibliographie," forthcoming in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*.

6. Two letters from Kojève to Kandinsky are in *Kandinsky: Album de l'exposition* (Paris, 1984), 64–74. See also Michael S. Roth, "Introduction à la lecture de Kandinsky par Kojève," forthcoming in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*.

7. It is impossible to determine the exact composition of Kojève's seminar. The École des Hautes Études was (and is) very flexible about who can attend classes, and some people (e.g., Hannah Arendt) simply attended a class or classes when they were in Paris. I have compiled a class list based on the *Annuaire* of the school and its *Registre des Inscriptions*. See the Appendix to Roth, "Knowing and History: The Resurgence of French Hegelianism from the 1930's through the Postwar Period" (Princeton University Ph.D. thesis, 1983).

Cooper (p. 9) lists Sartre as attending the seminar, but I know of no evidence that he did so. In an interview with Lawrence Pitkethley, Sartre explained that he did not attend: Pitkethley, *Hegel in Modern France (1900–1950)*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1978.

8. Aron, *Mémoires*, 94.

shed light on difficult texts, the latter exploded them. In this regard, it would be a complete mistake to try to understand or evaluate Kojève's work on the basis of its faithfulness to Hegel. We shall see, on the contrary, that Kojève found in Hegel a language he could appropriate in order to speak to the philosophical issues which chiefly concerned him. Kojève himself was most direct about this. In a letter to a critic from *Les Temps modernes*, he described his interpretation as an "oeuvre de propagande destinée à frapper les esprits."⁹

What was so *frappant* about Kojève's reading of Hegel? Although it is difficult to isolate aspects of his interpretation that are more fundamental than all others, it is clear that Kojève's conceptions of the human and of history were of crucial importance for his auditors and readers. These ideas, fundamentally linked, were given a militant content through the late 1940s, but afterwards were used as a theoretical justification for resignation and irony. We shall briefly examine these ideas here, and explicate the transformation of the political content with which they were infused.

Koyré developed an historical/anthropological reading of Hegel based upon a consideration of the Hegelian notion of time.¹⁰ This notion is a paradigm for historical thinking insofar as it organizes future, present, and past as temporal dimensions *for man*. According to Koyré, Hegel's great originality is to have given primacy to the future. The significance of any "now" is found in its future, and in the connection of that future to the past *of the "now."* The "future" is that which is hoped for, worked for, or most generally, willed by people; the "past" is what they choose from time-gone-by to make relevant to a present. Hegelian time is history as apprehended by man; Hegelian knowing is the discursive form of this apprehension.

Koyré shows that Hegelian time is history for man, but he does not try to specify what is properly human. Kojève begins with the question, "What is Hegelian man?" and answers it by explicating the structure of human desire, in contradistinction to the needs or demands of the animal. Human desire is the desire for recognition (*reconnaissance*), which, according to Kojève's Hegel, alone can lead to self-consciousness. Human desire, properly so-called, has as its object another desire and not another thing.¹¹ Thus, it is an animal desire which draws one to the body of another, but a human desire which is expressed as the wish to be desired, loved or — most generally for Kojève — recognized by another.¹²

The essential mark of human desire is that it does not consume its object.

9. Letter from Kojève to Tran-Duc-Thao, Paris, 7 octobre, 1948.

10. Koyré published three major articles on Hegel in the 1930s: "Rapport sur l'état des études hégéliennes en France," (1930); "Note sur la langue et la terminologie hégéliennes," (1931); "Hegel à Iéna," (1934). All three articles are reprinted in Koyré's *Études d'histoire de la pensée philosophique* (Paris, 1961, 1971).

11. Hegel's analysis of Desire, *Phenomenology of Mind*, transl. J. B. Baillie, 225–227, did not have the dualist form that Kojève stressed. This form was crucial for Kojève, because it was one of the bases for his fundamental distinction of the natural from the historical.

12. *ILH*, 13.

The satisfaction of a human desire is thereby creative, since its object is empty. Desire, Kojève says (following Hegel) is the presence of an absence. To make the same point somewhat differently: the satisfaction of human desire requires some form of mutuality (the loved one “returns” the love), or social recognition of an object’s value (a medal is given social value; the enemy fights to keep its flag). When satisfaction occurs, something new is introduced into the world (a useful object becomes beautiful; two individuals become a couple). For the satisfaction to endure, the desire *qua* object has to be preserved, albeit in an altered state. The simultaneous preservation and change (negation) marks the dialectic of human desire. The effort at satisfaction and conservation demands that this dialectic be linked with the development of self-consciousness.¹³

The pursuit of satisfaction of the desire for recognition and its parallel development of self-consciousness is History, as Kojève would say, “properly-so-called.” Of course, man—even “Hegelian man”—does not always make history and does not only have properly human desires. His *désir de reconnaissance* coexists with purely animal needs. For Kojève’s Hegel, there is a crucial conflict between *les désirs humains* and *les désirs animaux*. The latter are always in the service of preserving the life of the individual, while the former are not necessarily attached to objects which contribute to his continued existence. The “proof” of the predominance of the human over the animal can be found in an individual’s willingness to risk his life for the sake of some form of recognition; to decide self-consciously that it would be preferable to die than to live without the satisfaction that came from this recognition. The will to risk one’s life knowingly is *the* sign of a person’s “humanness,” for Kojève. Clearly, animals other than man are often in situations where their lives are at stake. Risk itself is not sufficient proof of “humanness.” The risk has to be in the service of a desire for another desire.

This abstract version of properly human desire and its “coming to light” through risk is made more concrete in Kojève’s work through a re-appropriation of an Hegelian account of “universal history.” First, this understanding of human desire is made the basis of the master/slave dialectic, and then this dialectic is used as the lens for seeing the crucial features of the development of history and philosophy. We shall not retrace the outlines of this development here,¹⁴ but can instead move onto Kojève’s claim that history is comprehensible because it is now essentially complete. Bloody battles are no longer engendered by the master/slave dialectic as universal equality is introduced first as a principle, and then as a reality. The properly human desires of us slaves are satisfied. After this satisfaction, there are no longer significant reasons for risking one’s life. The pleasures of risk-taking become the pleasures of play, where once they led to the satisfactions of struggle and work.

13. *Idem*.

14. For a very schematic summary of the stages of history from the perspective of Right, see my “Note on Kojève’s Phenomenology of Right,” 448–449.

Kojève's idea of the "end of history" draws on both Heidegger and Marx, whom he calls the only significant figures in post-Hegelian philosophy.¹⁵ He projects the former's conception of the essential finitude of man onto the historical plane, arguing that history, since it is the product of human action, should likewise be finite. If this were not the case—and here Kojève accepts Heidegger's critique of the dominant version of Hegelianism—men could flee from the consciousness of their mortality by identifying themselves with part of the story of the infinite progress of History.¹⁶ The satisfaction that will come in the End is assimilated explicitly with Marx's "*Reich der Freiheit*," "where men (recognizing each other mutually and without reserve) no longer struggle, and work as little as possible (Nature being definitively tamed, that is to say harmonized with Man)."¹⁷ When Kojève first writes of the realization of the realm of freedom, he is not pointing out that a final liberation has already taken place. It is rather that the idea of this realm has been fully described (by Hegel), and the process of its realization mapped out (by Napoleon). We can now know the End of history, but—as Kojève writes in 1946—the actualization of this End, the ultimate proof of our knowledge, is still dependent on our action:

In our day, as in the time of Marx, Hegelian philosophy is not a truth in the proper sense of the term; it is less the discursive revelation equivalent to a reality than an idea or an ideal, i.e. a "project" to be realized and therefore proved by action.¹⁸

The interpretation of the Hegelian ideal has, then, the status of political propaganda. And as this ideal pretends to account for all historical possibilities, the stakes in the hermeneutic conflict could not be higher. As Kojève emphasizes:

We can say that, for the moment, every interpretation of Hegel, if it is more than small talk, is only a program of struggle and work (one of these "programs" is called *marxism*). And that means that a work of Hegel interpretation has the significance of a work of political propaganda. . . . it is possible that the future of the world, and therefore the meaning and direction of the present and the significance of the past, depends, in the final analysis on the way in which we interpret Hegelian texts today.¹⁹

15. In a review of Alfred Delp's *Tragische Existenz: zur Philosophie Martin Heideggers*, *Revue Philosophique* 6 (1936–1937), 415–419, Kojève wrote that Heidegger was the only post-Hegelian philosopher to make significant progress. In a longer manuscript for this review—actually an essay on Hegel and Heidegger—Kojève had written an additional phrase, "with the possible exception of Marx."

16. *ILH*, 380.

17. *Ibid.*, 435n. Patrick Riley shows how Kojève injected his own ideas of recognition into Marx's conception of the "realm of freedom:" "Introduction to the Reading of Alexandre Kojève," 16–17. Following Marx's claim that the shortening of the workday was the crucial step towards the realm of freedom, Kojève would later playfully write of Henry Ford as one of the great prophets of Marxism: "Marx est Dieu, Ford est son prophète," *Commentaire* 9 (1980), 135–137.

18. Kojève, "Hegel, Marx et le christianisme," *Critique* 3–4 (1946), 365.

19. *Ibid.*, 366. Kojève distinguished between a commentary and an interpretation. The former starts from the text only to rediscover the thought of the author, while the latter starts from the thought in order to discover the text: review of G. R. G. Mure's *A Study of Hegel's Logic*, *Critique* 54 (1951), 1004.

In Kojève's perspective just after the war, then, the "triumph of the slave" is not yet definitive. Struggle and work will continue, but the End—mutual recognition among rigorously equal citizens—is in sight.

The Kojèveian version of what I call "heroic Hegelianism" is based on the view that Hegel gives us a complete account of the meaning of history. Kojève's answer to the question, "What is man?" can now be developed more fully: Man is that being who is what he is not yet. He is history, and lives *qua* man by giving priority to the future. But how can we know a being who "is not yet?" One alternative is what Kojève calls the "theological solution"; that is, to make sense of an historical being by reference to some criterion or god that is—at least in large part—outside of history.²⁰ According to Kojève, Hegel rejects this alternative in favor of a philosophy that grasps the realization of the "not yet." In other words, we can know man only through history, and given the priority of the future in historical time, we can *know* history only if it is essentially complete. This is the dilemma that Koyré had already pointed out in 1934:

Thus, the dialectical character of time alone makes possible a philosophy of history; but at the same time the temporal character of the dialectic makes it impossible. Because the philosophy of history, like it or not, is an immobilization. The philosophy of history . . . would only be possible if history was over; only if there was no longer a future; only if time could be stopped.²¹

Kojève accepts the force of this argument, and—at least through the mid-1940s—is willing to assert that historical time is in the process of stopping. Hegel may have been wrong about Napoleon and Prussia, but he was right about the End of history in a universal and homogeneous state or empire. In other words, we can accept Marx without disturbing the fundamentals of Hegelianism.²²

Kojève's insistence on the idea of the end of history is tied to his view that Hegelianism is "[C]omprendre l'Histoire comme le devenir de la vérité."²³ A key term in the Hegelian view of history is "the cunning of Reason." This term points to the way in which the meaning and direction (*sens*) of history can re-

20. The connection of this "theological solution" to the task of making sense of historical development is one of the main themes of Kojève's first published work, and remained an important issue for him throughout his life. See A. Kojevnikoff, "La métaphysique religieuse de Vladimir Soloviev," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 14 (1934-1935), 534-544, and 15 (1934-1935), 110-152.

21. Koyré, "Hegel à Iéna," (1934) in *Etudes d'histoire de la pensée philosophique* (Paris, 1971), 189.

22. Kojève's interpretation was not accepted by orthodox Marxists. J. T. Desanti, often used in party publications to protect the pure from threatening ideologies, bitterly attacked Kojève's reading for giving too much importance to man, and not enough to his material context. He suggested Lenin's reading of Hegel's *Logic* as an antidote to Kojève's insidious influence: "Hegel, est-il le père de l'existentialisme," *Nouvelle Critique* 56 (1954), 91-109. The East German response was even more straightforward: "The great return to Hegel is only a desperate attack against Marx . . . a revision of fascist character;" in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 3 (1955) 357. I borrow the citation from Iring Fetscher's introduction to the German translation of *ILH* (Stuttgart, 1958).

23. *ILH*, 249.

main hidden beneath events; to the fact that a series of events can seem to mean “X,” but from a retrospective appreciation of the *longue durée* can have quite another signification. If we are to know the *sens* of history, we can do so only retrospectively, even anachronistically. If such a retrospective view is in principle never definitive, if history has no end, then we are left with the skeptical position that history, despite what we may wish, makes no sense; that one can never KNOW what is progressive.

Kojève rejects this skepticism, but he refuses to make use of any criteria for judging historical change “from the outside.” He regards the use of such categories as “theological,” insofar as one has to believe in their value independently of occurrences in the world, and as their own development can not be accounted for. He thought that the rejection of both skepticism and theology left only a single alternative: an historicism that accepted the finitude of historical development; understanding history as the becoming and the realization of truth.²⁴

Most critics of Kojève have taken one of two approaches to the interpretation of Hegel that culminates in the “end of history.” The first is to argue that Hegel never said *that*, and to criticize Kojève for seriously distorting the ideas of a more reasonable philosopher.²⁵ The second is to claim that the idea of the end of history is not necessary to save historicism from relativism, or that, if we do need this concept to make definitive judgments about historical change, we certainly have not experienced the ending of history.²⁶ I will not examine either of these lines of criticism in any detail, because neither of them engages Kojève on his own terms. It should be clear, however, that he was well aware of the personal or even violent nature of his reading of Hegel.²⁷ And the Kojèveian response to those who claim that we cannot have *knowledge* of historical change, but that we can still speak reasonably about it, would probably take the form of a commendation of the perseverance of wishful thinking.

24. It should be noted that Kojève thought that the choice between theological and historical knowing was pre-philosophical; that is, it was not determined by reason. See, for example, the review of Delp cited above in note 18; *ILH*, 293; “Hegel, Marx et le Christianisme,” 347, 363ff; *On Tyranny* (Glencoe, IL, 1963), 161.

25. This is Riley’s approach in “Introduction to the Reading of Alexandre Kojève.” Tran-Duc-Thao’s Marxist critique was the most important contemporary example in this regard: “La Phénoménologie de l’*esprit* et son contenu réel,” *Les Temps Modernes* 36 (1948), 493–519.

26. See, for example, Michel Darbon, “Hégélianisme, marxisme, existentialisme,” *Les Etudes Philosophiques* 4 (1949), 346–370. Mikel Dufrenne thought that God saved us from relativist historicism, while Jean Desanti settled for Marx (as revealed by the Party): “Actualité de Hegel,” *Esprit* 17 (1948); and “Hegel, est-il le père de existentialisme.”

27. In addition to the letter to Tran-Duc-Thao cited above (n. 9), one can note Kojève’s marginalia to an article by Aimé Patri, “Dialectique du Maître et de l’Esclave,” *Le contrat social* 5 (1961), 231–235. Patri wrote: “under the pseudonym of Hegel, the author [Kojève] exposed a personal way of thinking”—Kojève added “bien vu!” In the preface to his (unpublished) history of philosophy and Hegelian wisdom, Kojève wrote: “Finally, the question of knowing if Hegel truly said what I have him say would seem to be puerile” (8).

Barry Cooper's *The End of History: An Essay on Modern Hegelianism*, marks a new departure in the interpretation of Kojève's work. Cooper wants to show that the idea of the end of history makes sense of our present social and political life in a systematic and comprehensive way.²⁸ Kojève, we are told, should help us "to understand the truth of our existence by way of our modernity."²⁹

Most of *The End of History* is an explication of *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* in conjunction with Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Cooper shows the reader both "how history ended," and what kinds of attitudes and ideologies have developed out of this ending. Through his discussion of the latter, the political scientist can show that all the alternatives to the post-historical perspective have already been anticipated by Kojève/Hegel.³⁰ To refuse to be post-historical, then, is to refuse to acknowledge our modernity.

Cooper's Kojève, though, is not engaged in a conflict of interpretation the outcome of which will determine the "future of the world, and therefore the meaning and direction of the present and the significance of the past." No, Cooper focuses on the philosopher's later view that history is already definitively over, and that there is no conflict of substance left to fight about. By the late 1940s, Kojève had adopted this perspective, which he always articulated in ironic form. Whereas the end of history had been a goal worth struggling for, it was now simply a description of a reality in which there was nothing left to do, except perhaps to remind others that there was nothing left to do. The realm of freedom turned out to be the final example of the cunning of reason.

Kojève's late philosophic work—in contradistinction to his bureaucratic labors—aims at beginning an "encyclopaedia of Hegelian wisdom." The history of philosophy is read through Hegelian glasses: the thinkers who count are the ones who made significant progress towards the completion of philosophy in Hegel's work. There are five: Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle, and Kant. Kojève's *Essai d'une histoire raisonnée de la philosophie païenne* is an attempt to provide access to Hegelian wisdom by re-collecting the history leading up to it. He wants to show how the circle of philosophic discourse is closed; how the love of wisdom is finally required, and is not a senseless longing.³¹ He does this by defining philosophy as a discourse which speaks of others and itself speaking about others,³² and then by showing that its discursive possibilities have been either actualized or shown to be impossible. The final meaning

28. Barry Cooper, *The End of History*, 3–4. See my review of this book in *Political Theory* 13 (1985), 148–152.

29. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

30. This recalls Foucault's remarks in his *Leçon inaugurale* to the effect that just when we think we may be moving further away from Hegel, he may be sneaking up behind us. Cooper quotes this passage at the start of his study, and it can also be found in "The Discourse on Language," in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972), 235.

31. Kojève, *Kant*, 37.

32. Kojève, *Essai d'une histoire*, II, 84.

of philosophy, like that of history, was made clear by Hegel. And that left only repetition for those who came after him.

It is this description of the completion of philosophy and history that Cooper finds compelling. It enables him to make sense of modern phenomena that seem to defy the very possibility of politics: multinational enterprises, gulags, and the technological society. These phenomena defy politics because they are posthistorical; political action only has a place within history. Cooper in no sense celebrates this situation, but he evidently feels that to acknowledge it enables the “wise man” to find that Hegelian rose in the cross of the present.

As we have seen, Kojève’s original conception of the “end of history” presupposed the final political action necessary to bring about the realm of freedom that would be the ultimate proof of the conception. One of the few critics of his position that he took seriously – that is, one of the few to whom he chose to respond – attacked both the idea of some final state of happiness/wisdom as a product of history, and that politics could be an ultimate proof of it. Leo Strauss, with whom Kojève became friendly during their student days in Germany, argued that the “end of history” could become the death of philosophy; the end of the possibility of and the search for wisdom. Strauss’s critique illuminates both Kojève’s early militant position and his later resignation. By looking at it briefly here, the significance of Cooper’s choice to focus on the latter should become more clear.³³

Strauss’s objections to Kojève’s reading of Hegel fall into two categories: the first is based on the view that without a teleological philosophy of nature history can be given no order, nor can we know it is “one and unique,” a single process; the second criticizes the fundamental value attached to the desire for recognition, and asserts that it is the quality, and not the universality of recognition which counts. Strauss tries to show that the idea of “the end of history” does not do the job that Kojève assigns to it. That is, it does not allow the philosopher to determine reasonably the value of specific historical actions.³⁴

One can see in Strauss’s criticism a theme that has a crucial role in his philosophy as a whole: historicism that divorces itself from a philosophy of nature will result in either incoherence or relativism. Kojève agrees with him on the need for some transhistorical standard of judgment, but he tries to meet Strauss’s objection to historicism without giving up his theory of history by using the “end of history” as the standard. Kojève has to (and does) accept the

33. I found Strauss’s letters scattered among Kojève’s papers and books, and have left copies of them with the Strauss archives at the University of Chicago. Thanks to Professor Joseph Cropsey, I consulted Kojève’s letters in this archive. The major published source thus far on the Strauss/Kojève debate is *De la tyrannie* (Paris, 1954), which includes Kojève’s “Tyrannie et sagesse.” The English edition, which includes Kojève’s essay and Strauss’s “Restatement” is *On Tyranny* (Glencoe, IL, 1963). Kojève’s essay is a revised version of “L’action politique des philosophes,” *Critique* 41, 42 (1950), 46–55, 138–155. My discussion of the Strauss/Kojève correspondence draws extensively on my “Natural Right and the End of History: Leo Strauss and Alexandre Kojève,” forthcoming in *Independent Journal of Philosophy*.

34. Letter of Strauss to Kojève dated New York, 22 August 1948.

complaint that he is advocating the worship of success (although he would want to substitute “honor” for “worship”), since he endorses Hegel’s dictum that *die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*.

Strauss does not confine himself to criticizing Kojève’s criterion of judgment *because* it is the product of historical development. He also denies that the Endstate’s satisfaction of the desire for recognition is really fundamental. In such a state, great deeds will be impossible—since, by Kojève’s account, they will be unmotivated—and the “best among men” will never accept definitive mediocrity. According to Strauss, only if the fundamental (or highest) human desire is for wisdom will an Endstate—ruled by the wise—satisfy what is best in man. By failing to make wisdom a component of the end of history, Strauss claims, Kojève has not provided an idea of universal satisfaction, since philosophers would be satisfied with nothing less than wisdom.³⁵ The mastery of nature that is a crucial component of the realm of freedom is a triumph of technology, but this victory does not show that man has discovered the highest goal in the service of which to employ his *techne*. Indeed, the “progress” that Hegelianism applauds might threaten the possibility of this discovery by destroying the conditions in which philosophy can exist.

Whereas Kojève sees his philosophical labors as a crucial work of political pedagogy (propaganda), Strauss throughout his career underlines what he sees as the irremediable conflict between the political and the philosophical. History, for the latter thinker, can never provide the final proof of a philosophical position, as it does for the former. As we saw above, Kojève rejects the possibility of using a suprahistorical criterion for judging historical development. That is, he chooses what he calls philosophic knowing through a re-collection of history, and rejects “theological” knowing through a suprahistorical Absolute.³⁶ Strauss emphasizes that this choice obliges Kojève to recognize the end of history as “salvation,” even if this result fails to reach man’s highest aspirations. Kojève would accept the obligation since he holds fast to the view that salvation would only come to man from himself.

The dialogue between Strauss and Kojève does not end in reconciliation, which is to be expected since both are philosophers willing to accept the apparently unhappy implications of their respective positions. In response to Kojève’s claim that through Hegelianism we see the completion of history, Strauss asks whether the goal has in fact been worth the effort. Kojève’s only reply can be that the End is the *result* of the effort, and so we have to recognize it as “worth it” or withdraw from historical reality. In constructing his version

35. We should note that for Strauss the philosopher’s dissatisfaction would be particularly grave, since he was among the best of men. Kojève, on the other hand, thinks that the dissatisfied philosopher would be considered “sick,” or “eccentric,” depending on his pedagogic powers.

36. On theological vs. historical knowing in Kojève, see note 27. In Strauss, see, for example, “Jerusalem and Athens: Some Introductory Reflections,” *Commentary* 43 (1967), 45–57; “On the Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 3 (1979), 111–118. In Kojève’s copy of the typescript of Strauss’s lecture, “What is Political Philosophy,” the former wrote “Strauss-Theology,” alongside the latter’s discussion of political theology.

of Hegelianism, he makes such a withdrawal philosophically impossible, for to go “beyond history” for him means learning to live with the results of it. Thus, following the debate with Strauss, Kojève shifts from a concern with historical recognition through struggle and work to a concern with reconciliation—even resignation—via philosophy with the “post-historical” world of ex-slaves.

As was noted above, Cooper’s discussion of the “end of history” refers only to the meaning that this concept has in Kojève’s later work. He is concerned neither with the militant function that the idea has through the late 1940s, nor with the transformation that it undergoes. Instead, he adopts the perspective that animates the second edition (1962) of the commentary on Hegel. In a note to that work, Kojève writes:

If Man becomes an animal again, his arts, his loves, and his play must also become purely “natural” again. . . . But one cannot then say that all this “makes Man *happy*.” One would have to say that post-historical animals of the species *Homo sapiens* (which will live amidst abundance and complete security) will be *content* as a result of their artistic, erotic and playful behavior, inasmuch as, by definition, they will be contented with it. But there is “more.” “The definitive annihilation of Man *properly so-called*” also means the definitive disappearance of human discourse (*Logos*) in the strict sense.³⁷

Kojève goes on to say that this era is the one we live in. The end of history has already arrived, but it appears as merely form without content, rituals without faith, and the absence of action, properly so-called. The final stage of world history, and the end of philosophy that coincides with it, make possible universal satisfaction, as they signal the death of all properly human Desire.

Thus, Kojève transforms his portrayal of the Endstate as the triumphant ascension of humanity into the end of history as a final decadence in which man is distinguished from other animals only by his pretentiousness. Kojève’s early Marxo-Hegelian vision is joined to what we can call a Weberian perspective on the routinization of life: the closure of the end of history is an iron cage in which “specialists without spirit and sensualists without heart” can peacefully coexist. Kojève would add that the noises they make—even if called “social science”—should not be confused with coherent discourse.

Cooper’s study is, on the whole, very faithful to Kojève’s late, bleak vision of modernity, although he does not attempt to do justice to, or explain the function of, the ironic form of Kojève’s later work. Instead, he uses the “end of history” as a vehicle for coming to terms with the impossibility of politics—of meaningful action and discourse—in the contemporary world. Kojève’s earlier efforts to find the meaning in history, and thus *give* history a meaning, seem *dépassé* in comparison with his post-modern (because post-historical) attitude of playful detachment from questions about the significance of change over time. But Kojève himself has helped make these kinds of efforts *dépassé*.

37. *ILH*, 436n. I have used Nichols’s translation, 159n–160n. The quotations within this passage refer to a statement Kojève made in the first edition.

Kojève’s discussion of the “definitive annihilation of man” might be usefully compared with Foucault’s 1964 declaration of the imminent “disappearance of man” in *Les mots et les choses*. In this regard see Descombes, *Le même et l’autre*, 131–139.

We are now in a position to grasp some of the components of Kojève's work that have been crucial for the development of twentieth-century French theory. Given the evolution of his thought, Kojève can be read as either the source of "engagement" and "existential Marxism," or as an early exponent of the post-modern rejection of the attempt to make meaning out of historical directionality in favor of an analysis of how history or discourse is constructed. Those who have considered Kojève as more than a commentator on Hegel have tended to emphasize one or the other sides of his thought. By grasping the development of his philosophy, however, we can decipher the connections between these two confrontations with modernity, and thus better understand or reopen the possibilities for significant thought and action in the contemporary world.

Kojève's late work was concerned to show that (1) all significant philosophical roads lead to Hegel, and (2) all post-Hegelian philosophy has been a repetition of some portion of the Hegelian System. But why should he even bother to point this out "after the end"? Kojève writes as follows:

But these diverse, so-called "philosophical" attempts to advance and retreat have had practically no influence on the ("profane") mass of those who are content to be where they are. But where they are (me and you included in this situation) is in the midst of "Hegelianism." It certainly matters very little whether this situation is called "Marxist," "Leninist," "Stalinian [?]," etc., or the legacies of Hegel. What matters is that each of us today needs to know what Hegel said in order to achieve self-consciousness in his own situation such as it is.³⁸

Kojève writes then, after the end of history, to facilitate our understanding of Hegel, and hence to promote self-consciousness. But how can we make sense of this action after action, properly so-called, no longer makes any sense?

As the connections between "heroic Hegelianism" and the development of post-modern thinking are brought to light, Kojève's "pedagogic" efforts to establish an Hegelian self-consciousness for our time must be read *against* his nihilistic description of the animalization of man. These efforts make no sense if the description is definitive. On the contrary, "self-consciousness" has a specific function in the Kojèveian schema of historical change. In order to have progressed from one stage to the next, it is necessary to have self-consciousness of the earlier epoch, or, as Kojève put it: "it was necessary that at each dialectical turn there was a *Philosopher* ready to take consciousness of the newly constituted reality."³⁹ Without the stimulus provided by philosophy, man tends naturally toward stasis, toward withdrawal into what he is already sure of, and to reject even the possibility of the new. The self-consciousness provided through philosophy has been a necessary condition of historical progress, as historical progress has nourished self-consciousness.

38. Kojève, "Le Concept, le Temps et le Discours: Essai d'une mise à jour du *Système du Savoir* hégélien," (Unpublished, dated "1952-19."), 3-4. It should be noted that this manuscript, and that of the second introduction to the system of knowledge, were recovered and made presentable by M. Bernard Hesbois.

39. *ILH*, 279.

Neither Kojève nor his interpreters have explicitly addressed the question of *why it should matter* if we, after the End, know that Hegel succeeded in closing the circles of history and philosophy. It “matters” to the philosophy of Kojève because that philosophy has a profound commitment to self-consciousness and the extension of it. This commitment makes sense, *according to the Kojèveian reading of Hegel*, only if self-consciousness is tied to progress. Thus, his very effort to open the path of self-consciousness to an understanding of our contemporary situation counts against his claim that this situation can lead nowhere. The effort to close the circle of Hegelian wisdom and to communicate that closure to others allows for an opening as wide, or as narrow, as the self-consciousness to which this effort is addressed.

Here, then, is the irony in the form of Kojève’s late works: The “discursive solipsism”⁴⁰ of his introduction to Hegelian wisdom is willfully disconnected from any discussion of historical development, but it makes sense—according to a Kojèveian analysis—only in light of its connection to self-consciousness; self-consciousness—again, according to Kojève—is inseparable from historical development. Without the dialectical tension provided by the latter, the former tends toward dissolution. Thus, the commitment to the possibilities of self-consciousness reveals a commitment to the possibilities of history. It is not the task of philosophy to enumerate these possibilities, but the effort of the owl of Minerva to take flight again points to their existence in a night that will know another dawn.

It may seem that this discussion of the possibilities of history is merely an attempt to avoid the “*dure parole*” of Kojève’s Hegel that “history is dead,” or to appropriate the philosopher for a “progressivist” vision that Kojève himself finally rejected. Although the latter would be fully in keeping with the spirit of Kojève’s own style of commentary, this is not exactly my purpose here. Instead, I have tried to offer a view of Kojève’s philosophy that keeps alive the dialectical tension in its development. By doing so, we can see how his work can be appropriated by either a militant modernism or a playful post-modernism. Through this perspective, we may be able to work out the connections between these two ways of confronting and evading the possibilities for change in the contemporary world. If we give up this search for connections, we have merely added the “End of History,” one and complete, to the long list of suprahistorical Absolutes that all of Kojève’s philosophy and politics work against.

The commitment to self-consciousness evidenced by Kojève’s late philosophy works against this substitution. It does so not by providing an alternative program for historical development, nor by trying to escape the burden of history altogether by tuning the ears of an elect to the call of Being, nor by dreaming of a sect of philosophers which will keep alive the “essential questions.” None

40. I borrow “discursive solipsism” from Stanley Rosen’s review of volume I of *Essai d’une histoire raisonnée*, in *Man and World* 3 (1970), 120–125.

of these options are possible for post-Hegelian philosophy, insofar as its discourse can no longer be separated from time, and as its knowledge is dependent on, and posterior to, historical development. The theme that runs through all of Kojève's work is that without this development philosophy will disappear, and that without the self-consciousness provided through philosophy the dialectical turns of history will be stalled. The "*dure parole*" of Kojève remains a parole—participation in the conversation of philosophy. His work to continue that conversation remains a sign of his struggle against the last Master, History.

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⁵ **Introduction to the Reading of Alexandre Kojève**

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