

Chapter Seven

Wisdom, Self-Consciousness, and Empire

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Alexandre Kojève once told Iring Fetscher, the German political philosopher and translator of his work, that it was his own fate, woven into the fate of his mother country—meaning the October Revolution and his forced emigration from Russia—that prompted him to study Marx and Hegel: “He wanted to know how this could have happened, and why he as an individual was powerless in the face of events.”¹ Every thinking historian understands that, like everyone else, they are entwined in a process that has its own dynamics and lugs individuals away regardless of their aspirations and goals. Fernand Braudel called this process “unconscious history,” specifying that he meant the “social unconscious,”² but in this kind of historiography, even the most radical political revolutions take place on the shifting surface of “event history.” Philosophy deals only with the brilliance of idea reflected in world history, as Hegel argued when concluding his lectures on the philosophy of history. Kojève interpreted history as something endowed with a hidden meaning and sought it, following the example of German philosophers such as Kant, Fichte, Hegel, in whose concepts, history had a beginning, a middle, and a final goal. Just as in Christianity, where the Incarnation of God is the point at which the movement toward completion begins, in this speculative philosophy of history there is a turning point. Kojève argued that Hegel discovered this turning point in the French Revolution that brought Bonaparte to power; *anima mundi* was visibly revealed in the streets of Jena in October 1806. The storms of our modernity date back to 1789, the archetype of all subsequent revolutions. Witnesses of this archetype, like Joseph de Maistre, had already noticed that the revolution controlled its activists more than they controlled it, people being mere tools of a process that took place through

them. In Kojève's reading of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Mind," it was this original revolution and the Napoleonic First Empire emerging from it that appeared to be the central event of world history. However, what Kojève was interested in was neither the revolution as such, nor the history of thought: the revolution leads to the Empire, the history of philosophy leads to Wisdom. If Herbert Marcuse, who, similarly, interpreted Hegel using Heidegger's ontology, titled his book written about the same time *Reason and Revolution*, Kojève's doctrine of "the end of history" could be titled *Wisdom and Empire*.

Hegel's philosophy gives rise to divergent interpretations; in his *Phenomenology of Mind* we can find the origins of Marxism and Kierkegaard's existentialism (it is enough to compare the section "Pleasure and Necessity" with the Danish thinker's *Either/Or*), Dilthey's *Lebensphilosophie* (cf. the beginning of chapter IV, "The Truth of Self-Certainty") and his theory of *Wirkungszusammenhang*, Cassirer's "Philosophy of Symbolic Forms," and even Dewey and Mead's pragmatism. All these and many other doctrines can be presented as theses "canceled" in the course of the development of mind, for the Hegelian system is such that it incorporates its possible refutations as well. "The Phenomenology of Mind" is written in complex language. Numerous attempts have been made, beginning with K. Fischer, to retell it in a more or less comprehensible way and to clarify some of its unclaritys. This is not at all what Alexandre Kojève was doing in his course of lectures delivered between 1933 and 1939, although formally it was a commentary on this work by Hegel. From the very beginning of Kojève's interpretation, we encounter reservations and indications that Hegel contradicts himself in *Logic* and in *The Philosophy of Nature*. Moreover, after stating that Hegel's phenomenology is "as 'existential' as Heidegger's phenomenology," Kojève goes on to say that "Whatever Hegel himself thinks about it, 'Phenomenology . . . ' is a piece of philosophical anthropology."³ For anyone who has read either *The Phenomenology of Mind* or the later *Philosophy of Mind* with its section on "Anthropology," it is clear that Kojève's was not historical and philosophical research, that is, he was not trying to find out things as accurately as possible *as they really were*. What he was doing was presenting his own teaching in Hegelian terms. In doing so he made Hegel not even the predecessor of Marx, Nietzsche, or Heidegger, but rather the author of their ideas. There are numerous other links between Kojève's course of lectures and the Russian and German intellectual scenes, but Kojève delivered it to French students, who—with a few exceptions such as Raymond Aron—did not have a command of German nor the faintest idea of Hegel or various versions of neo-Hegelianism. Though they had heard something about Marx and Nietzsche, they knew nothing about either Husserl or Heidegger. It was a time when Alexandre Koyré was just beginning his work on the popularization

of German thought through the journal *Recherches philosophiques*, a work in which Kojève also took part by contributing several reviews of German philosophers' works. In France, Hegelian studies would only begin with Jean Hippolyte, at the time one of his students at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. Lacking experts, Kojève was taken at his word by future masters like Bataille and Lacan without questioning the accuracy of his interpretation.

This is why there is no point in reproaching him for distorting the original, as French Hegelologists sometimes did, saying Kojève had mistakenly translated *Knecht* as *esclave* instead of *valet*. In this specific case Kojève was absolutely right, since he understood that the chapter on the "Master and Slave" was undoubtedly written under the influence of Hobbes's *Leviathan*,⁴ and his German was much better than that of his accusers. We are dealing with Kojève's own doctrine but disguised as an interpretation of *The Phenomenology of Mind* and presented in Hegelian idiom.⁵ It has a different starting point, different motivations, a different trajectory and, therefore, a different ending, which is Wisdom: it is not a "System of Science" (the subtitle of *The Phenomenology of Mind*) but *Sophia* that stands at the end of his intellectual journey.

It is well known how Kojève views the question of Wisdom in his lectures of 1938–1939: there are two criteria for its realization, namely "the achievement of a universal and homogeneous State in which the Wise one lives, and the *circularity* of his Knowledge."⁶ There is no point in retelling these lectures here, nor in repeating the arguments regarding "circular discourse" in the manuscript "Le Concept, le Temps et le Discours" written by Kojève between 1952 and 1956. The point is that this work is preceded by a work written in his native Russian in 1940–1941, in which he attempted to set out his doctrine systematically. It is this Russian text that will be discussed below.

SOPHIA AND PHILO-SOPHY

A large manuscript (almost a thousand pages) was discovered in Georges Bataille's papers; it was not immediately clear to whom it belonged. Bataille worked at the National Library in the 1930s and '40s. In a letter to another employee of the library, J. Bruno, dated August 23, 1945, he wrote about two manuscripts he had saved during the German occupation: one belonged to Walter Benjamin (a version of his famous text, *On the Philosophy of History*), the other to Kojève. While Benjamin's manuscript was quickly found and published, the trace of Kojève's manuscript was lost. Although Kojève and Bataille continued to communicate after the war—indeed, Bataille published

several articles by Kojève in his journal *Critique*—neither of the two ever mentioned that manuscript.

When it became known that Kojève was its author, the problem of deciphering the manuscript arose. Kojève's handwriting was such that only his life companion, Nina Ivanova, could read his writings with relative fluidity. At my request, she taught first N. A. Rutkevich, then O. V. Golova to read Kojève's handwriting, and they began deciphering the manuscript. For a variety of reasons, this work was interrupted, and after the death of Nina Ivanova it is unlikely to be resumed in the near future. As of today, we have at our disposal approximately 150 pages of the text, of which two-thirds have been fully transcribed,⁷ while the remaining fifty contain many gaps and unclaritys.

Before turning to the content of the manuscript, it is worth saying a few words about the circumstances in which it was written.⁸ Judging by the dates inscribed in the manuscript, Kojève began working on it in late October 1940 and completed it on June 8, 1941, in a German-occupied Paris. This work was preceded by a brief period of military service. Kojève became a French citizen in early 1938⁹ and was therefore mobilized in September 1939. In May 1940, with German troops breaking through the front, his unit was moved to the outskirts of Paris. Kojève, like all other residents of the French capital, was given forty-eight hours to visit home. When he returned to his unit's location, it was no longer there: it had been rushed into combat. A couple of days later, the French army was gone. So Kojève had no choice but to return home and take off his uniform. What happened next is well known: on June 14, German troops entered Paris, and a month later Marshal Pétain became head of the French state.

Kojève lived in his small apartment on the outskirts of Paris, where he wrote almost a thousand pages in six months. Nina Ivanova told me that in May 1941, he and Léon Poliakov, who would later become a historian of anti-Semitism, visited the Soviet embassy and that Kojève took a manuscript there.¹⁰ Most likely it was a typescript of some part of the text he was working on at the time, but this is only a hypothesis. It might have been some other text, or it might not have been there at all, as the only evidence is the story told by Nina Ivanova, who spoke about this "fact" as a presumable one. When I asked her whether Kojève was typing any text at that time, or whether he gave something on to the typist, she answered the former question in the negative and the latter with great doubt. In any case, most of the papers were burned on June 22, 1941, before the evacuation of the embassy, making it impossible for us to find out what exactly Kojève had brought there. The speculations of today's "postmodern" writers who claim that it was some kind of "letter to Stalin" testify only to their adherence to the anything-goes principle and their typical speculation *à la baisse*. Kojève gave the completed

manuscript to Bataille before leaving Paris. He went south to the unoccupied zone of France, where he joined the Resistance forces in 1942.

Of all the texts Kojève produced, this manuscript represents the first attempt at a coherent presentation of his own philosophy. The manuscript of 1940–1941 thus occupies a place between the course of lectures he delivered and the numerous works he wrote in French. However, it is only one-third of the lengthy introduction that has been deciphered so far, while the two parts of the book's main body remain entirely inaccessible to us, as do the numerous footnotes referring to the deciphered pages: they are either at the end of the undeciphered manuscript or lost altogether, and Kojève was in the habit of transferring to the footnotes his reflections in which he compared philosophical theses with contemporary social reality.¹¹ Thus, all we have now is a part of the introduction, the outline of which survived. It looks as follows:

“Sophia, Philo-Sophy and Phenomenology

I. Perfect knowledge or ‘wisdom’ (sophia) and philosophy as the pursuit of perfect knowledge.

§1. The ideal of ‘wisdom’ as the ideal of consciousness.

A) ‘Wisdom’ as full self-awareness.

B) ‘Wisdom’ as revolutionary-socialist ‘consciousness.’

C) ‘Wisdom’ as moral perfection.

§2. Perfect knowledge as ‘wisdom,’ i.e., as the completion of consciousness.

A) ‘Wisdom’ as completed self-awareness.

B) ‘Wisdom’ as complete or ‘absolute’ knowledge.

(The idea of a philosophical system).

§3. Philosophy as the pursuit of completed consciousness, i.e., as the path to perfect knowledge.

A) Philosophy as incomplete or imperfect knowledge, i.e., as deficient or fragmentary knowledge.

B) Philosophy as the ability to ask questions.

II. Phenomenology as a dialectical introduction to philosophy.

§1. The goal, the theme, and the subject matter of phenomenology.

A) The goal of phenomenology.

B) The theme of phenomenology.

§2. The method of phenomenology.

A) Phenomenological description and the real dialectic.

- An excursus on dialectics.

B) Phenomenological ‘deduction a posteriori.’

C) The circularity of phenomenology.

§3. The structure of phenomenology.

A) The place of phenomenology in the System.

B) The three constituent parts of phenomenology.

C) The structural features of phenomenology.
 Vanves. February 22, 1941¹²

In terms of content, this introduction overlaps with one of the appendices to Kojève's course of lectures of the 1930s, namely the first of the three, "The Dialectic of the Real and the Phenomenological Method." Given that much of the 1940–1941 manuscript has not yet been deciphered, it is impossible to say how he developed his interpretation of phenomenology previously presented in French. Judging by the titles, the basic thoughts remained the same: Hegelian phenomenology is converging with the phenomenology of Husserl and, in particular, Heidegger. Kojève writes about the structure of *The Phenomenology of Mind* both in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* and in this manuscript. We can assume that the Russian text is similar in its content to the French, but there may be differences between the two as well. As for the basically deciphered first chapter of "Sophia," there is no French text similar to it. Indeed, similar reflections are scattered throughout *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*; he wrote about Wisdom (as the final goal of philosophizing) afterward as well.

The transcribed part of the manuscript deals primarily with the history of philosophy, describing the way philosophical problems were posed in the past, and tracing the path of thought from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes, and from him to Hegel. Another important topic is the relationship between theistic and atheistic philosophical thought. Philosophy begins with the maxim, "Know thyself." Knowledge of the world is impossible without self-knowledge and self-awareness. Kojève proceeds from the Cartesian "cogito ergo sum" to the Hegelian "concrete concept." The polemic with Descartes is related not only to the fact that Cartesianism relies on the ontological proof of the existence of God, but also to a different understanding of philosophy as a science. Hegel's words that the only true form in which truth can exist is its scientific system and that the goal of his *Phenomenology* . . . is to bring philosophy closer to the form of science should not be interpreted in the spirit of positivism or neo-Kantianism. Philosophy is not some special kind of science, engaged in the search for a method and a justification of other sciences and for a theory of cognition. In this, Kojève's thoughts overlap with those of Heidegger, who stressed the difference between *The Phenomenology of Mind* and the scientific tendencies of modern philosophy.¹³ The critique of empiricism in the manuscript overlaps with three dozen pages of a book on Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire* Kojève started writing in 1937¹⁴: both are about skepticism, criticism, and positivism. Basically, this criticism goes back to Hegel's *Encyclopedia* (Three Attitudes of Thought to Objectivity, §§37–60).

The sciences are preoccupied with abstractions, with abstract objects singled out of context.

Philosophy, on the contrary, is concerned with concrete things and in the sense that it does not separate the thing cognized from the cognition of this thing [. . .], philosophy is not the fantastic theory of cognition (gnoseology) which had such success in the nineteenth century, studying the cognition of things while abstracting from the things themselves and thus being an allegedly particular science. Philosophy studies a concrete thing as a whole, now the thing cognized, now the cognition plus the thing that is cognized, now the thing plus its cognition. And the full knowledge of a given whole concrete thing is perfect knowledge or all-knowledge.¹⁵

Having attained a scientific system as its goal, Hegel wrote, philosophy will give up its name of *love of knowledge* to become *actual knowledge*. To become wisdom, philosophy must move from Descartes's geometrical reason to a dialectical or historical reason. The dialectic developed by Socrates and Plato as a way of posing and solving philosophical questions (discussed in the partially deciphered chapter "Philosophy as the Ability to Pose Questions") has been forgotten in later doctrines.

Kojève considers Spinoza's *Ethics* with its axiomatics as an example of a metaphysical system. With respect to the world of (really and ideally) existing things, a complete system of axioms is quite conceivable. Only there is no possibility of establishing it independently of experience, that is, there is never any guarantee that the system found is really full and comprehensive. But with respect to the human and historical world, such a system is not even conceivable for the reason that there are no definitions or axioms of the mathematical type that pertain to man. "Indeed, since Man is historical, since he changes his qualities, there are no once and for all given definitions that would establish (fix) the properties of man, and there are no eternal laws (axioms) that would once and for all define his interaction with the natural world and other worlds." If a philosophical system is to be comprehensive, and Man cannot fit in Spinoza's geometrical system, then it is necessary to find a special, absolutely nonmathematical type of system. This type of philosophical system was found by Hegel: it is a historical and dialectical system. It has two features: First, Hegel dispenses with the false notion of philosophical axioms or self-evident truths that are allegedly independent of experience. Each provision of the system, taken individually, is in no way obvious, and sometimes even simply implausible. Only the system as a whole is true and obvious, because as a whole it corresponds or should correspond to the real natural or historical world. And its individual provisions are true only because they are inextricably linked to the whole. Therefore, if the system as a whole is true, then all of its constituent provisions are also true, for it necessarily presupposes all of them together and each of them separately. An individual provision is true only because without it a true system cannot exist. Thus, the

system as a whole and it alone guarantees the truth of all its constituent parts. "Second, Hegel's system guarantees (or should guarantee) its exhaustiveness. The system as a whole shows not only that all its constituent provisions are true, that is, they are genuine knowledge, but also that all true provisions in general lie within the system and are thus valid all-knowledge."¹⁶

This is achieved by what Hegel called the circularity of his system. Kojève refers to the Hegelian triad (thesis—antithesis—synthesis) and argues that it is possible to complete the movement of concepts: if, advancing in this way, we ever discover that the next synthesis we arrive at is nothing other than that first thesis, which served as the outcome of the entire dialectical process, then we will know that we cannot go any further, that we have exhausted all logical possibilities. Indeed, to go further would mean to go again the way we have just gone, and so on to infinity. Assuming that all concepts are logically connected to each other and constitute a unified system, finding their expression in one coherent speech, the conclusion is inevitable: "The closed dialectical circle contains all concepts and thus all the knowledge the speaking Man can have."¹⁷ If, once begun, reasoned speech in which all meaningful questions have been posed and all rational answers to them have been obtained, returns to its starting point, it can be said that it has exhausted itself. Outside of this coherent speech there is and can be no other. Everything that can be said (both true and false) has already been said in it. Thus, what is expressed by this speech is, therefore, the notion of all-knowledge. And it is true knowledge, because there is and can be no objection to it, there can be no doubt in it, since objections or doubts must be shown by speech-logical means, which are already entirely exhausted by this universal speech. One should not think that the system is all-encompassing because it is circular. On the contrary, it is circular only because it is all-encompassing. The circularity of the system only reveals to us its universality, rather than creating it. In other words, human speech already includes everything that can be expressed in speech so that it can be organized into a circular (dialectical) system. Speech must already reflect by itself and in itself all (real and ideal) existence.

And to this end, in turn, all that can exist must actually exist (in the present or in the past). In other words, there must be an end to world history in knowledge that takes place outside the new and outside the new possibilities of human existence. Comprehensive circular systems are possible only at the "end of time."¹⁸

This means a stoppage of history: humanity will reach a final state someday, the movement will cease because all possibilities will have been exhausted. History will pass from the real world to the history books. It is then and only then that it will be possible both to exhaust all the possibilities of knowledge and to give the comprehensive system of knowledge a circular form. The

fact of the emergence of such circular, and thus universal comprehensive knowledge, shows us that the real historical process of human development is finished and that Man has reached his perfection. But this development is finished not because this knowledge appeared, but on the contrary: this knowledge could appear only because the real development is finished.

Kojève repeats time and again that only full and concrete knowledge of concrete things or people is necessarily universal or perfect knowledge, and that decisively everything that is possible to know is included in the circular system of comprehensive knowledge. It must include knowledge not only of nature but of all history, including all theses that could be conceived: "It must include not only all truths, but also all fallacies, that is, all the theses that have been advanced by mankind during the course of its history."¹⁹ The origin of such a view is clearly Hegel's history of philosophy, showing that none of the great teachings of the past are obsolete, unlike the fickle scientific theories. But in Kojève, this view extends to any statements that claim to be true: all of them are included in the final synthesis. The system as a whole is true; it includes all of humanity's errors made along the path of history. The comprehensive character of knowledge can be established only when knowledge is brought into a circular system, and this system must be dialectical and historical. But it can be dialectical and historical only at the end of time, when the real process of humanity's historical development is completed.²⁰

What Kojève says in this manuscript clearly diverges from what he said in his lectures, where he argued more than once that history ended with Napoleon's deeds and Hegel's thought. In the manuscript he says Hegel correctly defined the tasks of philosophy and its final goal, but he was mistaken when he thought that he had already achieved perfect knowledge. The *end of times* has not yet come and will not come anytime soon, and therefore philosophy knows that it is not yet and cannot be the perfect knowledge; "We do not and cannot now have final 'knowledge' of Man and his true, socio-political world, simply because both this Man and his world themselves are not yet final."²¹ If nature can be viewed largely beyond time, and therefore even an incomplete knowledge of it can still be true, in the case of history we are dealing with shifting opinions, not with knowledge. Historical changes are so important, so essential, that knowledge of the eternal qualities of Man will yield nothing for knowledge of particular persons, and there is no partial, knowledge of men that is perfectly (absolutely) true. Even knowing fully all that people were before, one cannot, for example, say that those are eternal qualities of Man and that knowledge of them is true (though partial) knowledge. Man can still change so radically that what would have been clear concerning men up to that point would cease to be so. And this means that only concrete knowledge of Man is possible, that is, knowledge of the real existing mankind and its history, but not abstract knowledge of Man in

general. This also applies to self-knowledge: "To know fully what my concrete human self means, I must know its historical past from the first Man on Earth to this minute in which questions about him are being answered."²² Philosophy which seeks to know Man must pursue concrete knowledge and thus all-knowledge or "wisdom," since all concrete knowledge is comprehensive. But it is only with the completion of history that philosophy will reach this goal. The manuscript proclaims communist society to be the completion of history, the way to which is paved by revolution.

ALLGEMEINES BEWUSSTSEIN AS REVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS

Kojève delivered his lectures between 1933 and 1939 to French intellectuals who had little knowledge of German philosophy but had a fairly good grasp of French history, as the Lycée at that time offered a relatively satisfactory general education in the humanities, and certainly its graduates knew the events of 1789–1793 and the Napoleonic Empire in detail, for the Third Republic was ideologically grounded in the greatness of the Revolution. Kojève's audience was not at all surprised by him mentioning the pair "Robespierre–Napoleon" along with the pair "Napoleon–Hegel." Back at school, they used to sing "*Le chant du départ*," the Bonaparte Empire's anthem from 1804 until 1814, which they knew was approved by Robespierre, who was even the one to give the song its title. This "Song of Departure" says that the French bring freedoms to other nations and threaten despotic kings, and its refrain repeats time and again that a Frenchman must live for the republic and die for it ("Un Français doit vivre pour elle, pour elle un Français doit mourir"). Taking this into consideration, Kojève's words about the readiness of the rebellious Slave to fight and die overthrowing the Master and about the mortal risk incurred by the one who is a Citizen, a toiler and a soldier at the same time, were perceived against the backdrop of examples from French history. The difference between the empire that emerged as a result of the revolution and all the monarchies that had preceded it was also indisputable for this audience.

However, if history did not end with one revolution, if there are still many transformations ahead, the view of both the French events of the late eighteenth century and the Russian Revolution of 1917 cannot but change. Kojève turns to the Russian experience: he recalls the revolutionary rhetoric of the civil war times (e.g., "conscious proletarian," "conscious woman") and speaks of a single ideal of consciousness that is the same for the philosopher and for the toiler. To be sure, this kind of thesis had been proclaimed for an entire century before him, and not necessarily by Marxists.²³ The

development of philosophical thought, social progress, and revolutionary struggle are inextricably linked.

In the chapter on “Wisdom as Revolutionary Socialist Consciousness” in Kojève’s manuscript, references to communist theory are incorporated in a logic alien to the Marxists of the time:²⁴ a discourse on revolutionary consciousness is followed by the section of “Universal Self-Consciousness” from Hegel’s *The Philosophy of Mind* (§436) retold in simple language. In Hegel, the transition away from lordship and slavery takes place through the elevation of individual consciousnesses “to the consciousness of their *real universality*—the inherent *freedom of them all*—and thereby to the visualization of a *certain identity of them with each other*. The Master confronting the Slave was not yet truly free, for he did not see himself with full clarity in the other. Only through the emancipation of the slave does the master therefore also become free.” It is true that for Hegel this state of universal freedom is still a “violent separation of mind into various selves,” impenetrable and opposing monads. But at this stage there has already been the formation of what is the *moral substance* of family, state, love for fatherland, “and also courage when the latter is expressed in readiness to sacrifice one’s life for the common cause.”²⁵ In Hegel, the transition from self-consciousness to mind takes place at this stage. It is these ideas that Kojève interprets when saying that *revolutionary consciousness* and the corresponding transformation of society are the prerequisites of wisdom. We may say that Kojève—following Hegel—defends the republican understanding of wisdom as opposed to the liberal one (*negative freedom* in Isaiah Berlin’s terms).

His reasoning in the paragraph on “Wisdom as Moral Perfection”²⁶ is also ideologized. Since Socrates and Plato, genuine philosophy relates to the life of the polis, the state, and society. The Stoic sage’s flight from reality, the adherence to church authority, and bourgeois individualism are rejected by Kojève in favor of the philosopher’s openness to societal problems and of his joining the efforts of revolutionary struggle. It is indicative that Kojève does not mention at all here the inevitability of terror which he so often recalls when speaking of revolution.

While Kojève did acknowledge the global significance of both the French and the Russian Revolutions, this did not prevent him from taking a far from enthusiastic look at revolution and revolutionaries. Of course, for him History is “permanent Revolution, because it progresses by means of *negations* of what is socially given”²⁷; therefore, behind the real revolution there is always some philosophical idea of the future society. However, it is not philosophers who make revolutions, but *men of action*, in association with whom Kojève recalls Nietzsche’s *blond beasts*: these people change the world and change themselves, but they do so out of excess animal power, restlessness, and non-conformism. “And experience shows, for example, that people who

made Revolutions proved unable to hold on to power precisely because they remained (or are thought to have remained) the same as they were before the Revolution, namely, non-conformists [. . .]. According to Hegel's definition, such *blond beasts* are swine just like the inert and passive animals, the conformists."²⁸ From the point of view not of the will to power but of values, Kojève argues, there is no difference between such representatives of the *animal kingdom*. The world of values belongs to mind (or spirit, which is the same in Hegel).

The struggle between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries acquires this spiritual dimension when one's values are contrasted with others. In his essay on the phenomenology of right, Kojève writes about the *tragedy of revolution*: the human struggle is tragic when two truths, two ideas of justice, uncompromisingly collide. But for the philosopher, these tragedies repeating themselves in history are a subject of contemplation and reflection. He is obliged to leave his personal preferences aside. Raymond Aron, who was a friend of Kojève's and often met with him in the second half of the 1930s, wrote that although Kojève called himself a "Stalinist," he actually was a White *émigré* as far as his worldview was concerned: "In private, he did not at all deny that Russia repainted in red was ruled by swine, that the Russian language was being debased, that culture was in decline. On the contrary, he occasionally spoke about this as something obvious, which only complete idiots could ignore."²⁹ To him, the figures of Napoleon or Stalin were interesting and significant not in themselves, but only as symbols expressing the Gestalt of Empire.

THE EMPIRE

As an orientalist by training, Kojève was well aware that the term "empire" is widely used by historians for such states as Rome and Byzantium, but also for China from the time of Qin Shi Huang on, for ancient Assyria and for early modern Turkey and so on, but he did not care about that. He cared even less about European nations' colonies and all that is associated with imperialism in the twentieth century. What he calls an empire is a "universal and homogeneous State" that completes history and is the condition for achieving "all-knowledge." Philosophy can reach its goal, that is, turn into wisdom, only when special sociopolitical historical conditions are provided in the world. Therefore, the pursuit of wisdom in the broad sense, along with philosophy in the narrow sense, that is, along with the ideological development of theoretical knowledge, must also include the "effective" development of the historical conditions of its existence. Thus, History, taken as a whole, consists of two parallel processes of a real and effective sociopolitical

process leading to the establishment of an ideal and conscious sociopolitical order throughout the world, and of an ideal-cognitive process corresponding to the former one and dependent on it. The latter also includes philosophy, as an expression of self-consciousness for humanity itself, which the former process "realizes." Therefore, the completion of history is simultaneously the completion of these two processes; hence the achievement of the social and political ideal is simultaneously the achievement of the cognitive and philosophical ideal, that is, the achievement of "wisdom." Thus, one cannot consciously aspire to wisdom, that is, be a philosopher, without simultaneously aspiring to the sociopolitical ideal, just as one cannot quite consciously aspire to this ideal without aspiring to wisdom, that is, without being to some extent a philosopher.

Kojève ignores all the terminology of historical materialism (mode of production, formation, base and superstructure, etc.). Marxism is praised, but at the same time it is not seen as a true doctrine because it belongs to today's time, far from the end of history.

We must assume that humanity in its historical development "judges" the state in the same way that the state judges its citizens and the theories they put forward. Only a theory that will be recognized by humanity "at the end of time" and by that final (absolute, ideal) state which will exist alone, forever, and unchanging, can be considered finally (absolutely) true. In other words, we come again to the conviction that the absolute knowledge of Man can only be the all-knowledge verified by the all-encompassing state, i.e., by a communist society.³⁰

In other words, Kojève did not recognize Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism of his time as the finally true theory. The completeness of self-knowledge and self-consciousness is also possible only with the completion of history. Today's ideologue of the proletariat does not possess such completeness. Moreover, revolutionary ideology, which changes the sociopolitical order and acts as the antithesis to the pre-revolutionary ideology, is "canceled" in synthesis: the observation of historical dialectics shows that the revolutionary idea is never wholly incorporated into postrevolutionary ideology. The people who made the revolution are usually almost as hostile to its final result as the supporters of the former sociopolitical order, precisely because the new state does not accept entirely what it does not consider finally true. In fact, what a revolution results in, it is never a choice between a prerevolutionary "thesis" and a revolutionary "antithesis" but a certain "synthesis" in which the "thesis" and the "antithesis" neutralize each other as it were, entering into a "chemical compound" to form a new body sociopolitic. "Pure" revolutionaries may see this as a "betrayal" of the revolutionary idea. "The philosopher, however, shall consider only those aspects of it that are preserved in this synthesis to

be true knowledge. What perishes in the process of revolution he will regard as 'revolutionary ideology,' i.e., an *opinion*, revolutionary but already false, just as that pre-revolutionary opinion opposite to it, which, too, perishes in the process of the revolutionary struggle." Nor is the resulting synthesis final, since it generates new social contradictions, a new political struggle, and thus a new revolutionary "antithesis."

Kojève's view of modernity is defined by his historiosophical scheme: History, which began with the "struggle for recognition" and with the emergence of lordship and slavery, comes to an end. It is only in this manuscript that this scheme is identified with the prophecies of the "Manifesto of the Communist Party."³¹ Two years later, in *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right* the kind of society which is the goal of history is described in a way that diverges from communist dogma³²; suffice it to say that private property still exists in this society, and so do employment relations and surplus value (i.e., all the things communists termed the exploitation of Man by man). Here Kojève develops the optimistic socialist view of a universal and homogeneous state and its citizens outlined in the manuscript of 1940–1941: "Far from being beasts, nihilists or even playful snobs, the inhabitants of the final order will be citizens, workers and members of families, with reciprocal rights and duties appropriate to these human roles, whose distinctively human needs are met through the recognition in work and love in the family."³³ In a footnote to the 1959 edition of his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Kojève wrote that the communist revolutions in Russia and China, the accession of Togoland to independence, and the self-determination of the Papuans were but an extension in space of the universal revolutionary force actualized in France ("Robespierrian Bonapartism") to backward nations, while this universal movement toward a "universal homogenous state" was headed by the United States; the USSR and the People's Republic of China, Kojève went on to argue, aspired to the same goals but were still poor; in other words, "the Americans give the appearance of rich Sino-Soviets," whereas "the Russians and the Chinese are only Americans who are still poor but are rapidly proceeding to get richer."³⁴ Around 1949, Kojève's view of this movement toward the *end of history* becomes pessimistic, for it is a movement toward the Nietzschean *last man* realm, indeed, even a return to the animal realm, whereas previously he had rather shared the utopian projects of all European leftists (not only Marxists). For him, communist revolutions were a direct continuation of bourgeois ones, all being part of a single movement toward a universal and homogeneous state.

Now, it is obvious to anyone who has read Hegel that Kojève's interpretation has as little in common with the original regarding the philosophy of history as in any other respect. Even if one doesn't consider Hegel a "Prussian reactionary," as liberals from Rudolph Haym to Karl Popper did (they would

be surprised to learn that Stalin held the same opinion of Hegel), one cannot write him off as an unqualified admirer of Napoleon, for it was with great joy that he said, concluding his lectures on the philosophy of history, that the fiction of an Empire has utterly vanished, and welcomed its breaking up into sovereign states. His *Philosophy of Right* clearly indicates that it is not Napoleon's empire that ends history. Kojève's interpretation of individual stages of historical formation differs greatly from Hegel's, too. While Hegel's chapter VI of *Phenomenology* outlines complex dialectical transitions between *Gestalten*, Kojève is essentially speaking about one and the same character, the bourgeois Intellectual. While Hegel extols Protestantism, Kojève sees the Catholic Church as the precursor of the universal and homogeneous state.³⁵ Indeed, the entire history of Christianity is presented differently in Hegel than in his interpreter's work, beginning with the *Unhappy Consciousness*, which Kojève sees through the prism of Nietzsche's double world ideas. Obviously, Hegel did not identify scientific cognition with the labor of the slave, nor did he attribute stoicism and skepticism to "Slave Consciousness." To see just how far away from Hegel Kojève moves in his interpretation of the history of thought, it is enough to compare the first volume of Hegel's *History of Philosophy* with Kojève's three-volume *Attempt at a Reasoned History of Pagan Philosophy*.

The main difference between the two thinkers, however, is that Hegel was heir to the optimistic philosophy of the Enlightenment, with history declared to be the realization of reason and freedom, whereas in Kojève's dualistic ontology Man is nothing, which nullifies, dialectically canceling what exists and creating that which does not yet exist. It is dissatisfaction that holds this nothing in being. This is why, while history lasts, it is the history of struggle and labor.³⁶ It would seem that Kojève asserts a thought close to the ideas of young Hegelians in general (and partly to those of Marxists as well): "The Man who is completely satisfied with his existence and thus completes the historical evolution of mankind is the Citizen of the universal and homogeneous State, that is, according to Hegel, the toiler-soldier of the revolutionary and Napoleonic armies. War (for recognition) therefore completes History and leads Man to his perfection (=satisfaction)."³⁷ But, by saying this, he sets the main themes of the French atheistic existentialism, which, as Stefanos Geroulanos rightly pointed out, is not humanist, for the anthropotheism it proclaims denies both god and the image of man that prevailed in European humanism, and then man himself. Throughout history, "nothingness annihilates," while self-consciousness strives for recognition but never achieves it, and therefore it cannot become "something" or does so in an inauthentic way. At the end of the path, with the attainment of universal recognition, this nonbeing passes into being and disappears.

Given that Kojève's philosophical trajectory began with an interest in Buddhism, one might say that his interpretation of self-consciousness reminds of the *Yogachara* "concept of store-consciousness (*alaya-vidjñana*)" [AQ10]: the story ends not with the stilled ocean of the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, not with the network of consciousnesses reflected in each other—the crystals of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*—but with "negation of negation" that transforms being-in-the-world simply into a kind of stilled being. People who love to talk today of technological singularity or Yuval Noah Harari's admirers who are fond of imagining such a singularity as inhabited by impassioned science fiction cyborgs should be reminded that, since the late 1940s, Kojève spoke of the time of the kingdom of "the last Man" turned animal, the time of *homo ludens* aesthetically playing with pure forms. The difference between him and all previous humanism is also clearly visible in the way Kojève describes the humanists as intellectuals of the *Republique des Lettres*, poor bourgeois yearning to become rich, a "spiritual bestiary."³⁸ Liberal humanism, according to him, is the ideology of *Slaves without Master*, but the transition from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom proclaimed by Socialists turns out to be an illusion and only prepares the transition to the realm of Nietzsche's *last man*.

In *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*, Kojève wrote that all history, which began with the anthropogenic desire for recognition, contains only the possibility of Man, Man in act appears only with complete satisfaction (*Befriedigung*) through the action generated by this desire,³⁹ and this is feasible only at the end of history with the disappearance of he who toiled, fought, and died in battle. If it is true that, by arguing that only in the perspective of its own death a finite being discovers Being, Kojève follows Heidegger's thought, is no less true that, in contrast to the German thinker, for him, "Notion is Time," and therefore Being is open to dialectical conceptual comprehension. Hegel's "canceling" (*Aufheben*) refers to finite being, "and therefore History itself must be essentially finite; the collective Man (humanity) must die, just as the human individual dies; universal History must have a certain end."⁴⁰ This end comes with absolute Knowledge, a Book written by the Sage. This absolute Knowledge is the last moment of time, after it there is no future. If even some events are still taking place in the human world, this is no longer history, because nothing new is born either in social life or in philosophy; instead, there is only a whirligig of doctrines that have already been "canceled" in the history of thought. Even the saying that with much wisdom comes much sorrow is too optimistic in the case of Kojève's teachings: Wisdom attained is murderous for thought, and therefore, rather than increasing sorrow, knowledge "cancels" it along with the thinker himself.

NOTES

1. Iring Fetscher, *Vorwort des Herausgebers zur deutschen Ausgabe // Alexandre Kojève, Hegel* (F.a.M., Suhrkamp, 1975), 7.
2. Fernand Braudel, *Ecrits sur l'histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969), 62–63.
3. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 39.
4. Shortly after meeting Kojève, Leo Strauss pointed out that it was Kojève who discovered this influence. Cf. Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936). Hobbes did not distinguish between Slave and Bondsman: for him, both are *servus*.
5. Kojève indirectly admitted this in his correspondence with Trần Đức Thảo.
6. Kojève, *Introduction . . .*, 289.
7. This part of the manuscript was published in A. Kojève, *Sofiya, filo-sofiya i fenomenologiya [Sophia, Philo-Sophy, and Phenomenology]* (Moscow: Praxis, 2021).
8. See Marco Filoni, *Le philosophe du dimanche. La vie et la pensée d'Alexandre Kojève* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 253–256, for details.
9. Although he did not change his last name, remaining Kojevnikoff officially, the nickname Kojève given to him by his students at the École Pratique des Hautes Études took hold. Soon he would sign his French texts “A. Kojève.”
10. This visit was likely the reason that Kojève ended up on the so-called “Mitrokhin list,”—he was listed as a Soviet intelligence agent. This is a possibility that cannot be ruled out completely: in addition to the fact that Kojève was an adventurer by nature and had sympathies for the Soviet Union at the time, he could have given consent to cooperate at that time because of his mother who remained in Moscow. However, it is just as likely that he was put on this list without being asked for consent. The totally implausible version put forward by the French counterintelligence says he was recruited in 1953 and became a liaison person of Charles Hernu (the future defense minister of France and a friend of Mitterrand). Constantin Melnik, a well-informed member of the French intelligence community, who supervised all these services under De Gaulle (and, by the way, strongly disliked Hernu, who hampered his career), described this version as “absolute nonsense” put forth by someone who was just settling scores with Hernu. Suffice it to say that after Hernu was accused of cooperation with the communist bloc (Bulgarian and Romanian intelligence), there were publications in the media saying that he was a CIA agent since the late ‘40s! Just as we have every reason to discard the version according to which Kojève was a “liaison man,” his being an agent is unlikely if only for the lack of motive: in those years he was already completely disappointed by the “Communist experiment,” and money meant almost nothing to him.
11. This is manifest in the *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* as well as in subsequent manuscripts. Kojève preserved this habit later in life, too: in his three-volume history of ancient (“pagan”) philosophy, footnotes make up about a quarter of the text.
12. A. Kojève, *Sophia . . .*, 23–24.

13. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Hegels Phaenomenologie des Geistes* // M. Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, Bd.32, Vittorio Klostermann, F.a.M.
14. Cf. Alexandre Kojève, *Identité et Réalité dans le "Dictionnaire" de Pierre Bayle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 40–75.
15. Unpublished part of the manuscript, 78
16. Unpublished . . . , 86–87.
17. A.Kojève, *Sophia* . . . , 148.
18. A.Kojève, *Sophia* . . . , 149–150.
19. *Ibid.*, 152.
20. *Ibid.*, 155.
21. Unpublished . . . , 152.
22. A. Kojève, *Sophia* . . . , 133.
23. Suffice it to recall Saint-Simon and his followers. Auguste Comte, who emerged from this school, devoted a third of *The Spirit of Positive Philosophy* to a discussion of the "conditions of the triumph of the positive school," the main condition being "the union of proletarians and philosophers."
24. Kojève was hardly familiar with György Lukács's early work, *History and Class Consciousness*, which was also considered "revisionist" (including by Lukács himself, who was in Moscow at the time).
25. G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grun- drisse Dritter Teil. Die Philosophie des Geistes* (Berlin: Dunker und Humblot), 1845, 284.
26. Unpublished, 27–38.
27. A.Kojève, *Introduction* . . . , 404.
28. *Ibid.*, 402.
29. Raymond Aron, *Mémoires. 50 ans des réflexion politique* (Paris: Julliard, 1983), 131.
30. Unpublished . . . , 131.
31. In fact, Kojève was not a Marxist in any strict sense of the word either before or afterward. Stefanos Geroulanos writes extensively on this subject (Cf. Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010], 167–172). He only became a Marxist in the opinion of the French leftists in the postwar decades when they conflated Hegel and Marx with Nietzsche and Heidegger: Kojève had a considerable influence on these "synthesizers."
32. The French term *fin de l'histoire* can be translated as both "the end of history" and "the goal of history."
33. R. Howse and B.-P. Frost, *Introductory Essay. The Plausibility of the Universal and Homogenous State//Alexandre Kojève, Outline of a Phenomenology of Right* (New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 3.
34. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 436–7.
35. Moreover, in a letter to Leo Strauss (12.11.1936) he compared the struggle between communism and fascism of that time with the struggle between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He himself sympathized with the "Reds" and not the "Browns," but the historical analogy had to do with the

fact that Protestantism was associated with “bourgeois” individualism, while the Catholic Church, in Kojève’s opinion, was preparing the Empire on earth. One can also think of the high praise for Catholicism in his sketch of the “Latin Empire.” Cf. Alexandre Kojève, *L’Empire Latine. Esquisse d’une doctrine de la politique française*, *La Règle de jeu* 1, no. 1 (1990).

36. A. Kojève, *Introduction*, 474–5.

37. *Ibid.*, 563.

38. Kojève also considered the community of French writers who pretended to be philosophers such a “bestiary.” They either reproduced old theses without reference or threw out sets of “fashionable ideas” composed for the sake of fame. If one “original” book is superseded by another, say, when “L’être et le néant” gives way to “Les mots et les choses,” this does not add to knowledge, he argued.

39. Alexandre Kojève, *Esquisse d’une phénoménologie du droit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 237.

40. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 380.

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