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REVIEW ESSAY

Alexandre Kojève as Inevitable Philosopher

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Marco Filoni, *The Life and Thought of Alexandre Kojève*, trans. David Broder (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2025)

Boris Groys, *Alexandre Kojève: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Verso, 2025)

In Nick Harkaway's science fiction novel *Gnomon* (2017), the detective protagonist attempts to solve a murder mystery through reliving the memories of others. The task soon recedes into impossibility as the investigator becomes caught in a labyrinth of recursive dream narratives. At last she recognizes that even the memories she thought were her own have been conditioned by some ultimate external force, which dissimulates itself as a being from the end of time in a far distant future: "In the hour when heaven is falling, I will stand." As the strata of simulation unravel, she comes to the nauseating realization that everything she has done and experienced, in every persona she has assumed, has determined and been predetermined by this inevitable algorithmic pattern: "It's in everything, tendrils and fingers, so that it looks as if it was there all along … It possesses that appalling certainty. It is set against the rest of me like a battering ram."[1] This is an apt description of the role of the universal and homogeneous state at the end of history in the philosophy of Alexandre Kojève.

The framing might seem odd to those primarily familiar with the concept of the end of history through Francis Fukuyama, who presented his declaration of the final victory of liberal democracy as a transmission of Kojève's ideas. It is also out of step with Kojève's own latter-day reputation in the English-speaking world as a consummate bureaucrat who helped lay the foundations of the European Union after promoting some unfortunate misreadings of Hegel. Yet there is a similar horrific affect in the first book-length critique of Kojève in English, Barry Cooper's 1984 *The End of History: An Essay on Modern Hegelianism*. Cooper concluded that in Kojève's Hegel it is, in the end, the eschatological reality of the universal state that renders the real rational. Every social fact of modernity, however "exploitative, tyrannic, chaotic, nihilist, self-destructive" it may be, through all "the unexampled horrors of the present," "makes

[1]Nick Harkaway, *Gnomon*, ebook edn (London, 2017).

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possible the creation and preservation of the universal and homogeneous State." To academic philosophers it may seem "an abomination," "shocking and unnatural," yet "perhaps Heidegger was right: only a god can save us."[2]

The second life that Kojève has enjoyed in recent years seems to have reintroduced something of the disconcerting quality of his thought to an era of renewed apocalypticism. In English it has been shaped by a stream of publications and translations beginning with James H. Nichols Jr's *Alexandre Kojève: Wisdom at the End of History* in 2007. Within the last half decade, Nichols has been joined by another biography by Jeff Love, an edited collection on Kojève's philosophy as a whole, as well as a dedicated monograph on Kojève in his Russian context by Trevor Wilson.[3] The books by Marco Filoni and Boris Groys under discussion in this article each form quite distinctive contributions to the current.

Part of this revival has been impelled by the solidly historiographical motive of restoring Kojève's place in the history of French philosophy. Increasingly, however, Kojève has also been restored as an object of philosophical interest in his own right, revived in the context of a reframing of the end of history for the twenty-first century. He has even become a political target, ascribed active responsibility for pushing history towards stagnation: so the venture capitalist Marc Andreessen has declared that his "enemy" is "Kojève's Universal and Homogeneous State."[4] He is, then, a living part of contemporary political thought, and it is well worth understanding what, after all, he was talking about.

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Marco Filoni's *The Life and Thought of Alexandre Kojève* first appeared in Italian in 2021, extending and reworking the conclusions of his earlier *Il filosofo dello domenica* (2008), which had carried the narrative of Kojève's intellectual career to 1945. As a historian of French Hegelianism who has dedicated a large part of his research efforts since the early 2000s to Kojève, Filoni is uniquely well equipped to summarize and contextualize his thought. Notwithstanding the occasional awkward turn of phrase, the book's translator, David Broder, is also broadly successful in setting it into an idiomatic English style. At one point in the book, Filoni tellingly recounts Raymond Aron's assessment of Kojève: "[Aron] knew that Kojève was reading Hegel in a partial way, he knew that there was a trick—moreover, an unveiled and unconcealed one. Yet the result of that trick was so convincing as to be believable. And fascinating" (209). This can be taken as an introduction to Filoni's own method of interpretation, focusing as it does rather more on the mechanics and motivations of Kojève's tricks than on the exact content of his arguments. The book itself is structured largely chronologically as a conventional biography, though with continual forward and backward references that serve to give each of the five chapters thematic cohesion.

[2]Barry Cooper, *The End of History: An Essay on Modern Hegelianism* (Toronto, 1984), 349–50.

[3]James H. Nichols Jr, *Alexandre Kojève: Wisdom at the End of History* (Lanham, 2007); Jeff Love, *The Black Circle: A Life of Alexandre Kojève* (New York, 2018); Luis J. Pedrazuela, ed., *Alexandre Kojève: A Man of Influence* (Lanham, 2022); Trevor Wilson, *Alexandre Kojève and the Specters of Russian Philosophy* (Evanston, 2024).

[4]Marc Andreessen, "The Techno-optimist Manifesto" (16 Oct. 2023), at https://a16z.com/the-techno-optimist-manifesto.

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The first two of these chapters describe the start of Kojève's biography and the early unfolding of his intellectual career as a student. Here Filoni provides a deep contextualization of the European and Russian background that shaped Kojève's thought, as well as a strikingly evocative landscape depiction of the setting and progress of his career as a student in Berlin and amid the "intensive … cultural and intellectual life" of Heidelberg (70). Anecdotes like the story of Kojève's apology to his doctoral adviser, Karl Jaspers, for unauthorized amendments he had made to his academic record at Heidelberg—he had spent too much time in Berlin and fallen below the minimum expectations of lecture attendance—help us visualize him as a real person (95).

Undoubtedly Filoni's major achievement, however, is his tracing of the development of Kojève's politics. Perry Anderson once observed that "Kojève's political itinerary awaits detailed reconstruction": to a large extent this is precisely what Filoni has done.[5] In Chapter 4 of the book, "The Philosopher in Action," Filoni carefully untangles the confusing sequence of Kojève's political engagements during the Second World War: a petitioner of Stalin, an active member of the French Resistance, and a theorist of (or at least about) Pétain's National Revolution. This versatility should not, perhaps, surprise us: after all, for Kojève the characteristic of the accomplished system of knowledge is that it is impossible to contradict because all possible philosophical theses are already expressed within it, rendered noncontradictory precisely by being distributed within time.[6]

Filoni's narrative of Kojève's engagement with the Vichy government will nonetheless give any reader pause. Filoni argues, for instance—recapitulating an argument by Danilo Scholtz—that the *Notion of Authority* (1941–2) was specifically written in line with a program set out by Henri Moysset, a longtime prewar friend of Kojève who served as a functionary for the Vichy regime and later became its minister of propaganda (167–70, 255 n. 47). Filoni overstates the case a little: ultimately the *Notion of Authority* and its "obscene and embarrassing" appendices are descriptive, not a forthright endorsement of Pétainism; indeed, Filoni's problem is precisely the sense of "detachment" they convey (165). The unpublished "Projet Kojevnikov" manuscript (170–75) is more troubling: here, Kojève apparently endorses Pétain as a Robespierre without the terror and concedes the validity of deporting Jews to Madagascar (172, 174). Yet Filoni is probably right to read this manuscript in light of Kojève's consistent irony, his well-attested opposition to fascism, and his concrete Resistance activities, as something of a trick, an attempt to reason through fascism with the final objective of turning it against itself. Filoni finds the evidence for this in a curious, somewhat later, propaganda pamphlet directed to German soldiers which Kojève either wrote or edited. This pamphlet deployed a tested technique of persuasion: conceding that Germany's grievances had been legitimate, it argued along ostensibly Germanophile lines that the war against Russia was inconsistent with the project of German national revival and was in fact a terrible and self-defeating mistake (177). In the end, "Kojève … found his own way of acting politically as a philosopher by resorting to propaganda and double-dealing" (183).

[5]Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement* (London, 1992), 320.

[6]See, for example, Alexandre Kojève, *Essai d'une histoire raisonnée de la philosophie païenne*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1968–73), 1: 254.

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The last full chapter of the book is in some respects the most interesting. Here, in Chapter 5, Filoni sketches a vivid narrative of Kojève's postwar work as a diplomat, drawing partly on the records of those who sat opposite him at the negotiating table. The extended account that Filoni reproduces from Rodney Grey, a Canadian diplomat who dealt with Kojève during the 1964–7 "Kennedy round" of GATT tariff reduction negotiations, is particularly interesting (206–8). Diplomats from other countries, Grey recounts, found Kojève an unpredictable and difficult figure: where they were forced "to stick to detailed instructions," Kojève could extemporize at leisure, and often manipulated the negotiations through clever stratagems that earned him the nickname, among the Americans, of a "snake in the grass." In one case, Kojève circumvented the EEC delegation at the talks by engineering the publication of an article on prospective French tariff policy in a newspaper that he knew the various delegates would read. "I asked Kojève if this was France's policy. 'No,' he replied, 'but it will be soon'" (208). Kojève the diplomat was, then, a similar sort of magician to Kojève the philosopher, however much the audience of the performance may have changed.

Grey is only one example of a great number of Kojève's contemporaries whose reflections Filoni draws upon throughout the book to construct a compelling and surprisingly coherent picture of Kojève as he was perceived in his time. The diversity of these testimonies already indicates the scope of the personal influence that Kojève exercised. They range from philosophers like Aron and Bataille, through personal friends like the photographer Eugene Rubin, even to statesmen like the subsequent French prime minister Raymond Barre. Indefatigable and acutely intelligent, Kojève always seems to remain just beyond the grasp of his interlocutors. "He had the extraordinary gift," Barre recalled, "of presenting arguments that pitched everyone else into chaos" (202). Filoni does occasionally find flashes of the mundane personality behind the elaborate games, particularly in Kojève's early career. Thus we learn, for instance, that Kojève immersed himself in the cultural scene of 1920s Berlin and appears to have taken a personal financial stake in the development of expressionist cinema there (88). In this respect, Filoni brings Kojève down to earth.

The Life and Thought of Alexandre Kojève marshals a wealth of detail about both Kojève himself and his broader intellectual setting, and will doubtless be a touchstone of future scholarship on Kojève's place in history as both a thinker and a political actor. The one important criticism that might be raised is that Filoni does not focus on the content of Kojève's thought enough. The promise in the Preface that the book will "deal with the philosopher's work as a whole" (vii) is never quite fulfilled, because Filoni does not engage textually in any detail with more than a narrow selection of Kojève's extended works. This is in part a methodological choice and is perhaps well advised in the case of the *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* itself, which has already received an immense and sometimes tiresome number of expositions, as Filoni himself observes (133). There are also exceptions: a few texts, like *The Idea of Determinism* and the unfinished study on Pierre Bayle, are treated at length. But many less familiar parts of Kojève's *oeuvre* could have benefited from more direct description. To give one example, the *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*, which Filoni acknowledges is "one of Kojève's most accomplished works" (52), is otherwise cited only in passing to prove the influence on Kojève of Carl Schmitt (192) and Marcel Mauss (196–7). Filoni, indeed, is at his best in tracing the lines that connect Kojève to his evolving political, social, and

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intellectual context, drawing on evidence in his writings and the varied corpus of his manuscripts, diaries, and letters, as well as the witness of his interlocutors. Yet often the actual content of the works that expressed that thought most fully, whether published in Kojève's lifetime, posthumously, or not at all, remains curiously absent.

* * *

Boris Groys presents a rather different figure to Filoni. Where Filoni's background is that of an academic historian of political philosophy and a period specialist, Groys is an aesthetic theoretician who began his career in the Soviet art world. After emigrating to West Germany in 1981, Groys first came to prominence in the West with a radical and controversial reevaluation of socialist realism, *The Total Art of Stalinism* (1988).[7] Today, he has perhaps the best claim to carrying on the intellectual legacy of Kojève out of any contemporary theorist. Kojève has saturated Groys's work since at least *The Communist Postscript* (2006), and his influence is often supremely apparent to those familiar with him even where Groys does not cite him explicitly. Groys has previously curated an exhibition of Kojève's photography, and his 2020 *Introduction to Antiphilosophy* is substantially an application of Kojèvean theory. *Alexandre Kojève: An Intellectual Biography* is, then, a long-awaited book. It is a notable contribution to the ongoing intellectual rediscovery of Kojève, and also a milestone in Groys's articulation of his own philosophy.

Groys's *Intellectual Biography* is as different from Filoni's *Life and Thought of Alexandre Kojève* as we might expect. For one thing, it is considerably shorter. It is also not, in fact, a biography in any conventional sense. It is organized instead as a series of brief, relatively independent thematic essays that afford Groys the opportunity to explore particular points of interest in a disjointed way, and at his own characteristically brisk pace. Chapters 5 and 6 are each less than two pages long. There is a coherent narrative that is developed across these essays, but it follows Kojève's mature intellectual architecture more than it does any concrete sense of chronology, proceeding, broadly, from the basic content of Kojève's universal history through its political development and his concepts of empire to the ultimate figure of the Sage and the end of history. Accordingly, after only a brief biographical scene-setting in the Introduction, the first chapter opens entirely *in medias res* with a commentary on the struggle for recognition in the *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.

The picture of Kojève that emerges from his book is a rather alien one. In Kojève, Groys writes, "history … has something magical about it" (73). Magical in the strict sense: "magic [is] a belief in the possibility of transforming things into each other … Magical processes are dialectical … they negate the usual states of things and transform them into something extraordinary" (73–4). Mauss's *The Gift* (1925) had explained the economy of gift giving through the Polynesian concept of *mana*, the obscure and efficient power exercised by the implicit presence of the giver in the gift. On Mauss's account, this *mana* will turn, inevitably, from a positive to a negative influence upon the recipient, and thus demand the vengeance of a reciprocal gift, driving this economy forward. Kojève projects this transformative reciprocity onto the plane of political history:

[7]Groys has featured as an object of intellectual history in his own right: for example, Josephine von Zitzewitz, *Poetry and the Leningrad Religious–Philosophical Seminar 1974–1980: Music for a Deaf Age* (Cambridge and Oxford, 2016), 19–25, 45 n. 29.

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the "Hegelian narrative of the shifts of history from thesis to antithesis" is itself a diagram of *mana* circulation. "Kojève," then, "reads Hegel's *Phenomenology* as a magical seance" (77). Indeed, as Groys goes on to observe, the theme of gift giving is embedded deep in Kojève's later political thought; Kojève's call in his 1958 lecture on "Colonialism from a European Perspective" for European imperialism to be reoriented towards giving "sounds like a direct reference to Mauss," less a call for authentic self-sacrifice than a means to reestablish through *mana* the prestige of the timeless sphere of the "Imperium Romanum" (123).

The universal and homogeneous state remains the summoned spirit of history's planetary seance, though Groys gives the specter a new aspect. There is still its character of unreckonable inevitability, but also a thaumaturgical function that exceeds the summary conclusion of Perry Anderson that "the state that brings history to an end is universal because it admits of no further expansion, and homogeneous since it is exempt from contradiction."[8] For Kojève, Groys observes, the "universality" of the universal and homogeneous state is prefigured in the empire of Alexander the Great, a novel entity conceived as entirely transcending the ethnic antithesis between Greeks and Persians: not the "mere expansion" of an "original realm," but a "new whole" that completely transformed and replaced existing political relations. Its "homogeneity," on the other hand, is prefigured in the call to conversion and negation of differences preached by the Pauline Christian Church (84). In each of these aspects, Groys explains, the pivotal act is precisely a conscious "magical" negation and transformation: the cancellation of all inherited ethnic or class identities and their intentional replacement by some rationally constructed idea, embodied in the state itself. Thus Kojève's universal homogeneous state is not simply a state that has expanded as far as it can go and manages to resolve its contradictions: it is the manifestation of the intentional and authentically miraculous transformation of social reality.

This transformation is accomplished through the figure of the philosopher. For Kojève, Groys writes, "the philosopher needs to be recognized," and "this recognition should be collective, social and, above all, given by the state." This is not to argue that philosophers should win recognition by conforming themselves to the state. Rather, the philosopher must construct the state that gives them this recognition: "the philosopher has to fight for their moral ideal and change society in accordance with it" (58). Their recognition is the judgment of their success. Where the Christian theologian was bound to confess before a priest, the philosopher must submit themselves to the "court of History"—thus the philosopher–leader of a communist state must make their own confessions in the specific form of reports to the Party (59).

Yet if Kojève expected the philosopher to serve as a conductor on the road to the universal and homogeneous state, the lay of that road in real politics remained unclear. Kojève's late concept of the Latin Empire served, on one level, as an attempt to conceive an intermediate entity between the nation-state and the universal state which would give this process definite form. Resuming Solovyov's great project for the unification of the Christian churches, Groys argues, Kojève saw the Latin Empire as a necessary Catholic counterpart to Orthodox Russia and Protestant Anglo-America

[8] Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement*, 312.

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(115). The realization of the end of history would, then, consist concretely in the unification of this secularized ecclesiastical trinity. It was also his proposed means for the preservation of a specifically European cultural form in an era of dominant Anglo-American and Soviet imperialisms. The problem for Groys is that these two motivations are self-contradictory. Such particular, less-than-universal empires may demand free assent, but when the shared conditions that determine their particular cultural and historical forms themselves become subject to critique—by new nationalist movements, for instance—they can only ultimately justify themselves through force (117). This leads Groys to an uncommonly direct critique of Kojève: "in fact, the universal state," grounded ultimately on the assent of reason alone, "seems to be a more realistic solution compared to the empires [that] coincide with the territories in which certain cultural values had acquired historical recognition" (118). Better the "universal socialist empire" of the *Outline of the Phenomenology of Right*, then, than a Latin Empire.

An important contribution of Groys's *Intellectual Biography* is the light that it throws on the influence of Nietzsche on Kojève. Stefanos Geroulanos previously observed the importance of this connection, but it has still not been treated in much depth.[9] It is impossible, for example, not to see Nietzsche's shadow lying heavy on the page when reading the passage of the *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*—in a course excluded from Nichols's classic English translation—in which Kojève describes the culmination of history in the "Man-God" figure of Napoleon, that singular "human perfected by the total integration of History," "God manifest," as "the incarnation of Sin (Antichrist) … for [whom] there is no morality universally applicable except for *others*; he himself is 'beyond good and evil.'"[10] Groys makes a crucial observation: Kojève's theanthropy, though responding to Solovyov, is expressly Nietzschean. "In the Russian philosophical literature of the time," and in particular in Nikolai Berdyaev, with whom Kojève engaged directly, "'God-man' referred to Christ, whereas 'man-god' referred to Nietzsche's *Übermensch* … Kojève takes the side of Nietzsche" (68). Groys reiterates that the now widespread terminology of Hegel's "master–slave dialectic" was itself popularized by Kojève and is unknown to the nineteenth century: Hegel himself speaks of servants or bondsmen (*Knecht*), not slaves (12). His conclusion is startlingly direct: "the overcoming of man," with all its Nietzschean implications, "is the negation of the negation—and thus, the end of history" (69).

It is not Groys's objective to describe the full contours of Kojève's historical setting. But apart from Nietzsche, there are two sources who feature repeatedly in his book as references for understanding Kojève's thought: the theologian Vladimir Solovyov and the Eurasianist political theorist Nikolai Trubetzkoy. Solovyov's influence on Kojève is well known, but Groys excavates it in two novel directions: first by glossing Kojève's figure of the citizen worker–soldier as the "androgynous" political realization

[9] Stefanous Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford, 2010), 131, 156. See also Alexey M. Rutkevich, "Alexandre Kojève: Revolution and Terror," *Studies in Eastern European Thought* 76 (2024), 25–39.

[10] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Raymond Queneau (Paris, 1968), 153, original emphasis. On Napoleon's role in Nietzsche's thought for comparison see Don Dombowski, *Nietzsche and Napoleon: The Dionysian Conspiracy* (Cardiff, 2014).

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of Solovyov's concept of erotic union (50), and later, as we have seen, by situating the project of the Latin Empire as a realization of Solovyov's project of the reunification of the Christian churches (115–17). Trubetzkoy is a more idiosyncratic choice. One of the classical theorists of twentieth-century Russian Eurasianism, he cuts a far less familiar figure than Solovyov, and some of Groys's book is accordingly a contribution to the recovery of Trubetzkoy's own political philosophy: Chapter 12 is substantially an outline of his thought with no direct reference to Kojève at all. The result of Groys's use of these two figures is again to defamiliarize Kojève: if the Latin Empire is a secular development of Solovyov's geopolitical theology and a conscious response to Trubetzkoy's Eurasia, for instance, it is not simply the contemporary European Union *avant la lettre*.

Any biography of Kojève must finally attempt an explanation of what it is that Kojève thought he was doing with his career. In his epilogue, Groys provides one of the most succinct and acute answers to this question that has yet been given. On the one hand, Kojève categorically rejected all forms of theory that would ground philosophy in subjective experience. He was radically antielitist. Yet paradoxically he refused to share his philosophy more widely by becoming a genuinely public intellectual. This, Groys observes, was because "he was irritated by the fight for public attention and commercial success in which the intellectuals of his time—like intellectuals today—were involved," a "struggle [that] did not lead to any real result, any real change in society and its laws" (153). In the 1930s, Kojève had hoped that the Soviet project would create a society in which every citizen could act as a self-conscious, self-reflective philosopher: in this context, philosophical expression would at last assume a meaningful social role. But he abandoned this hope. The only remaining chance "to create a society of universal self-awareness," then, was not through philosophical writing but through mobilizing the power of institutions (155). And so Kojève became a bureaucrat.

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There is an important lacuna that Groys and Filoni share: neither deals at any length with the published content of Kojève's incomplete *Introduction to the Hegelian System of Knowledge*. This project was intended as something like a *summa* of Kojève's thought, conveyed in the form, or pretense, of an immense commentary on Hegel. The published texts that originated in the *System of Knowledge* demonstrate, at the end of Kojève's career, a remarkable intellectual consistency that stretches back to his doctoral studies on Solovyov; they also furnish some of the most detailed explanations of his guiding concepts. They do not feature in Groys's citations. In Filoni, despite his acknowledgment of the critical and continuing importance for Kojève of this "uncompleted work of a lifetime," they make only a momentary appearance in the *Life and Thought* (59–61), after which the reader is referred to a 1985 doctoral dissertation by Bernard Hesbois for a "comprehensive presentation" of the project (232 n. 111). Hesbois's exegesis is sound, and well worth reading for an overview of the scheme of the history of philosophy in the *System*, but it is explicitly not comprehensive, and Filoni risks overstating particular aspects of the project by taking Hesbois's outline as a sufficient summary.[11]

[11] See Bernard Hesbois, "Le livre et la mort: Essai sur Kojève" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Louvain, 1985), 5.

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To take a prominent example of the concepts on which the *System of Knowledge* sheds light, Kojève's idea of the end of history has generally been understood through the lens of the 1962 "note to the note" on the subject inserted into the second edition of his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (discussed by Filoni at 215–21).[12] This note has all too often been tortuously misinterpreted. At face value, the point of the passage is relatively limited and straightforward. For a time, Kojève says, he had suspected that the end of history would entail the end of humanity as such, since with the accomplishment of human transformative effort there would no longer be any opposition between the human subject and its object. All specifically human endeavor would accordingly cease: the animal way of life of America. The example of Japanese "snobbery" demonstrates, however, that the opposition of subject to object can in fact be preserved without any determinate process of negation. The recursive structure of this argument has proven a source of hopeless confusion: the passage "almost mockingly … contain[s] two different responses" that stand "in contradiction to one another" (Filoni, 218). Kojève's statement that "the actual presence of the United States in the World prefigur[es] the 'eternal present' future of all humanity" has routinely been quoted without its explicitly conditional framing (even by Groys, 20–21, 63), or inflated far beyond its contextual importance into a self-standing summary of Kojève's philosophy.[13]

To reconstruct Kojève's concept of the end of history we must set the "note to the note" in its proper theoretical context by taking stock of the full variety of the discussions of this topic in his corpus. There are other relevant passages in the *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, generally now well trodden, as well as the *Sophia* manuscript discussed by Groys. But the *System of Knowledge* also discusses the topic repeatedly. One volume, nominally on Plato and Aristotle, offers one of Kojève's most remarkable summaries of the concept:

> [The] Concept … is NEITHER essence NOR sense; for *it was* (in the prehistoric epoch in the strict sense) *only* essence; it *has been* then "progressively" transformed … into sense … [and] *will be* "finally" (and "indefinitely") *only* sense (which no longer *negates* Essence, but conserves it as something negated in and through the uni-total or "synthetic" discourse which is the Hegelian System of Knowledge and which is the *only* history recounted as one …)[14]

On this account, the end of history is the definitive transformation in time of pure essence—that is, the given reality that signs refer to—into pure linguistic sense, with all the "magical" indefiniteness and mutability that this realm of signs implies. It is, in other words, the overthrow of given reality itself.

This definition aligns with the analysis of communism as a regime of language previously developed by Groys in *The Communist Postscript*. "Stalinist communism," he writes there, was "a revival of the Platonic dream of the kingdom of philosophers, those

[12]Reproduced in Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Arthur Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols Jr (Ithaca, 1980), 158–62.

[13]For example, Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, trans. Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono (Minneapolis, 2009), 66–9.

[14]Kojève, *Essai d'une histoire raisonnée*, 2: 268, my translation, original emphasis.

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who operate by means of language alone"; communism, in fact, is "the total linguistification of social being."[15] Groys indicates the source of his thinking in one of the book's few footnoted passages. The process by which this linguistification is accomplished is through the Communist Party's seizing the power of capital's "demonic" subject and its self-installation as a governing conspiracy at the center of society which commands this power through articulate reason. If the suspicion of capital's subjectivity is "paranoid, unfounded, unprovable," then "every revolution begins with a lie, as Alexandre Kojève justly remarks in his commentaries on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*."[16] The argument recalls the role of the philosopher–bureaucrat in the *Intellectual History*: with the collapse of the Stalinist ideal of a society of philosophers attained through linguistic expression, we are told there, it falls to the state bureaucracy to lead humanity towards "the state of enlightened anarchy" in which "the population consists of philosophers who have reached the truth of self-reflection" (Groys, 155). In the *Intellectual History*, to be sure, the argument is put in Kojève's mouth and in the *Postscript* it is mostly not, but the precise boundary between Kojève and Groys himself is always difficult to determine.

Groys remains relatively circumspect towards the prospect of the outward linguistic transformation of reality in the *Intellectual History*, however. His account of Kojève explicitly removes the given reality of Nature as such from the sphere of dialectics: nature is "self-identical and described by science while humanity is dialectical, or magical" (Groys, 74). The vision of the *System of Knowledge* is, at points, altogether more radical. In the volume on *Kant*, for example, Kojève argues that Kant's signal contribution to the history of philosophy was to concentrate all the givenness of reality in the vanishing point of the thing-in-itself—allowing Hegel to abolish it.[17] He gives us an indicative hint as to what the abolition of given reality might mean concretely by drawing a connection between the "terrestrial satisfaction" that will be attained under the universal and homogeneous state and the technical progress of medical science in eliminating all suffering caused by disease.[18] Human species-nature, then, is not as immutable as the image of Nature as an impenetrable golden ring may make it seem; Kojève is in this sense a transhumanist. This is more than merely the transformation of "social" reality: what is given can be changed, and humanity can be satisfied and surpassed.

There are other aspects of Kojève's thought illuminated by his fragmentary *System of Knowledge* which deserve further study. Filoni observes Kojève's deep engagement as a student with both the Chinese and Indian textual traditions, for instance: at Heidelberg Kojève studied Sanskrit and Chinese (85–6), and he heard lectures on sinology in Berlin (91). Yet he does not follow this thread beyond Kojève's early career. Kojève occasionally has recourse to these alternative philosophical traditions in his *System of Knowledge* through the conceptual figures of Buddhism and Daoism, nominally in order to demonstrate that they are completely assimilable within the parameters of

[15]Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript*, trans. Thomas H. Ford (London, 2009), 72.

[16]Ibid., 25.

[17]Alexandre Kojève, *Kant* (Paris, 1973), 17.

[18]Ibid., 35 n. 1.

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the Hegelian system. To give one example that stands apart from the *System*, however, China makes an important and—from a twenty-first-century standpoint—quite striking appearance in Kojève's lecture on "Colonialism from a European Perspective," where he states, "The industrialization of the backward countries has become a world-myth nowadays … this myth is being realized in a spectacular way only outside the Western world, by which I mean in China."[19] Future research could do more to outline the sources, context, and content of Kojève's encounter with the further East.

* * *

Through the currency given to it by Fukuyama, the end of history is without doubt Kojève's most influential conceptual legacy. Filoni recognizes this importance by dedicating an epilogue entirely to the concept; Groys comments that it is, after all, the idea of the end of history that "made Kojève famous in the first place" (18), and returns to it throughout his book. The end of history, in fact, seems to loom unbidden over all the political theory of the twenty-first century. There have been innumerable declarations of the "end of the end of history," going back at least to 2001; there are sophisticated theories like Agamben's that posit the end of history as an existing condition of stasis that must be actively overcome, as well as contrary attempts to vindicate Fukuyama by defending the finality of liberal democracy. It is an inherently inflammatory concept: to affirm the end of history is seemingly to foreclose the possibility of future progress, to conclude that in the final analysis no other politics is possible and nothing meaningful remains to be done or said. Hence it is apt to provoke dismissive or, as with Andreessen, angry dissent. Yet it lives on.

The continued salience and impasse of the end of history invite a theoretical and a historical response. The most obvious question is what Kojève originally meant to say, and there is a growing recognition that this was something rather different to the end of history of 1989. For Filoni, that difference is inherent to the "note to the note" in the *Introduction*'s second edition: the eternal animal present of universal Americanism that supplies Fukuyama's material is counterposed to the "essential otherness between humanity and nature" and, ultimately, the critique of "domination" itself (218–20). Indeed—in a response that Kojève himself anticipated—Filoni suggests that by historicizing Kojève we might hope to historicize the end of history: "one cycle closes so that another might begin" (220).[20]

Groys's strategy is rather different: by retracing the architecture of Kojève's philosophy he recovers an alternative end of history. Filoni is prepared to concede that Kojève's thought was in some sense surpassed through its mobilization by Fukuyama as an operative myth of Western democracy. For Groys, by contrast, Kojève's thought is a path not traveled, an obscure and inevitable exit. Far from being embodied by the infinite reproduction of capitalist liberal democracy, the end of history is the final project that surpasses it: the theanthropic event of human self-overcoming and liberation.

Groys and Filoni both provide excellent and complementary reference points for the ongoing rediscovery of Kojève—Groys as a theoretician informed by history, deeply

[19] Alexandre Kojève, "Colonialism from a European Perspective" (1957), trans. Erik de Vries, *Interpretation* 29/1 (2001), 91–130, at 125.

[20] Compare Kojève, *Essai d'une histoire raisonnée*, 1: 49–56.

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and constructively engaged with the development of Kojève's thought; Filoni as a historian informed by theory, seeking to reevaluate the time-bound episode of Kojève's intellectual career. Both, in a sense, hope that we can escape Fukuyama through Kojève. Yet in the shadow of the end of history neither is wholly satisfactory. The sharp edge of Filoni's historicism is blunted by an overly summary treatment of Kojève's thought, while Groys shrinks back from the full radicalism of Kojève's philosophical project. In both cases, as the unmapped continent of the *System of Knowledge* indicates, there is far more to be said about Kojève's conceptual system and its development. The task remains, then, to fill in the gaps.

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