Violence and Conflict in Alexandre Kojève's Works

Edited by Luis Javier Pedrazuela

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Foreword

It is an honor for me to present this special issue on Kojève in the *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence*. In it, five international scholars combine their expertise on Kojève's oeuvre to elucidate one of its main themes: the role of conflict and violence. Alongside this purpose, the contributions constituting the special issue may be read as addressing, each in its very own way, a question raised by one of Kojève's most famous interpreters: Does the portrayal of Kojève as "a faithful servant of bourgeois France"[1] hold? As the reader may gather, this special issue offers powerful arguments that substantially qualify Fukuyama's positive answer.

The organization of the essays has taken into account the breadth of interlocutors within which each author situates their respective approach. Accordingly, while the first articles embed Kojève's thinking within a wider set of interlocutors and circumstances, the subsequent pieces tend to narrow their scope, focusing increasingly on endogenous sources.

Kyle Moore's essay "On the Precipice of the Political: a Katechontic Consideration of Kojève's Concept of Empire" thoroughly surveys the relevance of Kojève's concept of empire as expounded in his 1945 memo "Outline of a Doctrine of French Policy." Moore successfully links Kojève's inclination towards the political idea of a 'Latin Empire' and its restraining effects on conflict and violence to the plausible influence of Schmittian concepts such as *Katechon* (a force or figure that restrains the coming of the Antichrist and, by extension, the end of the world) and *Grossräume* (large geopolitical regions dominated by a central power that maintains stability and order within its sphere of influence). Additionally, Moore highlights the contemporaneity of Kojève's memo by bringing it into conversation with a set of contemporary interlocutors, notably Cacciari, Agamben, and Henry-Lévy. Also noteworthy is how Moore relates Kojève's memo to meaningful events that occurred at the time of its writing. These events include the dropping of the atomic-bomb and the Potsdam agreements.

In "Has Kojève Played a Role in the Constitution of the Secret Society "Acéphale"? A Working Hypothesis," Nicola Apicella makes a cutting-edge contribution to the existing literature on Kojève (and Bataille) by thoroughly tracing the former's influence on the latter within the framework of the Bataillean editorial undertakings throughout the 1930s. Apicella argues that under Kojève's influence, Bataille's focus shifted from initial support for outright revolutionary action to a later emphasis on the sacrificial aspects of violence and the notion of sacredness. Moreover, Apicella's suggestive open-ended approach invites the reader to further explore the affinities and divergences between Bataille and Kojève on matters of religion and politics, evoking questions that help discern the nature of the multi-faceted influence exerted by the latter.

Hager Weslati's "Critique of Pure Violence: Weil contra Kojève" is a novel study on Eric Weil's influence on Kojève as a means of elucidating the latter's notion of violence. Its compelling thesis is that Weil's Neo-Kantianism helped Kojève gradually shift his notion of violence away from a sheer 'eruptive moment' in his 1931 work *Atheism* towards its gradual integration into a sustainable discourse. Weslati situates her article within the broader question of whether Kojève's treatment of violence is capable of 'resisting imperial reason' by

[1] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992) n32, 351.

articulating violence in increasingly sophisticated ways, notably due to Weil's influence. Weslati does not only provide the reader with a sound set of arguments supporting an affirmative answer, but she also illustrates it with references to burning political issues.

Jeff Love's "Alexandre Kojève on Terror" is a welcome study delving into Kojève's notions of "negation" and "freedom." Love traces these notions back to Kojève's idea of "killing the world" in *Atheism* while further linking this latter idea to the Russian tradition as embodied in Bakunin. Love's scholarship on Russian sources successfully challenges the widespread accepted affiliation of Kojève with Marx in favor of Kojève's more seminal reception of certain Russian authors. The disturbing thesis of Love's article reads that Kojève's "killing the world" should be taken at its word. Indeed, the body of evidence that Love gathers from both Kojève's own work, and the Russian tradition makes it difficult for the reader to find a way out from "the tremendous power of the negative."

My essay, "Alexandre Kojève on Interaction, Individual Freedom and Suicide," attempts to unravel the implications of Kojève's phrase "Robespierrian Bonapartism." I trace its roots back to Kojève's 1931 work *Atheism* by closely following the interplay of a set of opposing concepts (such as "heterogeneity" vs. "homogeneity"; "from within" vs. "from without"; "consciousness" vs. "self-consciousness"; and "presence" vs. "concreteness") leading to a reflexive convergence in the form of an independent "difference" encompassing being and non-being. The article portrays *Atheism* as the matrix out of which Kojève draws his faith in terror as an educational tool, suggesting additionally that his stance on suicide might not be entirely unrelated to the emergence of the modern free individual as conceptualized by Kant. I further link Kojève's presentation of suicide in 1931 as the philosophical category inaugurating self-consciousness. This links to issues he had already been deeply concerned with since the 1920s.

The five articles of this special issue share a common framework. This framework evolves along an axis constituted by two poles. The initial pole ascribes the restraining power of politics, which secures against the end of the world and history, to Kojève's idea of empire in his 1945 memo *Outline of a Doctrine of French Policy*. The final pole incorporates the potentiality of that end into "the free concrete individual" as Kojève conceives it in his 1931 *Atheism*. The articles reflect this evolution, corresponding with the increasing importance attached to Kojève's work *Atheism*. As this importance grows, a Katechontic exit from the cycle of violence seems less plausible. Consequently, if the second essay builds on Kojève's own detachment from merely transient revolutionary action, while the third and fourth put forth Kantian compromises in which Kojève would have engaged himself more-or-less reluctantly, the final essay interprets *Atheism* as delivering the sacrificial "pathway to God," which Kojève, in essence, would have never abandoned.

Set within this framework and the accompanying contrasting perspectives, this special issue sheds much-needed light on Alexandre Kojève's intricate approach to violence and conflict.

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Luis Javier Pedrazuela