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Alexandre Kojève on Terror

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Abstract

The main point of this essay is to reveal the centrality of violence and criminality to Alexandre Kojève's thought. After a brief historical introduction that associates Mikhail Bakunin with Kojève, the first part of the essay deals with the notion of terror as expressed in Kojève's manuscript, entitled Atheism, from 1931 and in the Hegel lectures from 1936-1937. The essay then broadens its scope beyond terror to address criminality and violence beginning with an "excursus" on crime and punishment located in a large unpublished manuscript in Russian from 1940-1941. The birth of the human in violence and crime is the basic focus of this concluding section of the paper.

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Alexandre Kojève writes in *Atheism* (1931) that the "human being in the world" is "given to herself as a potential suicide, and if she cannot kill the world (as a whole) by killing herself, she can kill the world for herself."[1] My paper investigates the connection between killing the world, negation and freedom with reference to *Atheism*, the Hegel lectures from the 1930s and other texts. Its primary aim is to examine the concept of active negation central not only to Kojève's interpretation of Hegel but also more broadly to his thinking as a whole. I argue that "killing the world," as Kojève puts it in *Atheism*, is a precursor to this concept of negation as the negation of the given, of what is static, in the Hegel lectures: such negation is in fact the creative engine of history understood precisely as the negation of the given terminating in liberation from the given (or the world) in a "tipping point," the end of history. By emphasizing the connection of killing or, rather, "murder," with negation, I seek to address the violence essential to Kojève's thinking as a thinking of what I may call with some irony "productive criminality or terror" since it involves nothing less than the annihilation (*anéantissement*/*уничтожение*) of all barriers to the realization of itself, a "killing of the world" that frees us finally and definitively from being. Kojève's active negation is both a culmination and sophisticated expression of the "nihilism" associated with Russian terrorism and, in particular, with Mikhail Bakunin.

My essay takes up Kojève's thinking first by connecting it to Bakunin and Bakunin's Hegelianism. I then provide a more detailed account of Kojève's concept of negation, adding a few comments on its broader connection with freedom and delivery from the horrors of

[1] Alexandre Kojève, *Atheism,* trans. Jeff Love (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

individualism, chief among which is death—as Kojève notes, death occurs only for individuals, and one could usefully consider individuality as defined by death (thus putting the celebrated liberal praise of individuality in an unaccustomed light). I conclude with Kojeve's discussion of political terror as a parody of θἐωσις (deification) where terror forces citizens to decide their attitude towards individuality and thus towards incarnated being as well.

I.

Mikhail Bakunin is one of the many Russian thinkers who fell under the spell of G. W. F. Hegel in the 1840s. His most active engagement with Hegel's thought seems to have been during the years 1838-1842. Bakunin's development of Hegel's thought deserves more than passing attention or the by now banal claim that Bakunin was a radical left Hegelian whose infatuation with Hegel was short lived. Some critics have thought in fact that Bakunin was initially a conservative or "right" Hegelian who subsequently became radicalized.

The talk of Bakunin's "right" or "left" Hegelianism emerges from a basic ambiguity in Bakunin's thinking itself that Kojève's own thinking reflects as well. The basic issue at question is whether Bakunin's Hegelianism was one of self-abnegation or self-assertion, the former broadly (and perhaps crudely) associated with the "right" orientation, the latter with the "left." Bakunin's intriguing approach to Hegel fuses both — there is no real Hegelianism of the left or right but rather both converge in self-abnegating self-assertion and self-asserting self-abnegation such that neither the one pole nor the other adequately describes the process of development in Hegel's thought. In this specific sense, Bakunin is a Hegelian of left *and* right because he sees in both the selfsame movement, an authentically Hegelian attitude.

He does so based on a relatively simple premise: that each individual holds within herself the universal and comes to express herself most forcefully in the universal or as the universal comes to show itself in the individual. The process of individual self-assertion is at the same time one of universalization whereby the individual becomes universal and the universal becomes individual. The question often asked of whether Bakunin is more Fichtean or Hegelian dissolves when the will is shown not merely to be a forerunner of the will to power in Heidegger's reading, a will to subjugate all things to a narrow (Cartesian) concept of the subject.[2] To the contrary, the will is not one that subjugates the whole to a partial view (and we might indeed wonder how this is possible) but that strives to open up the individual to the whole by the individual's acquiring knowledge of it and, at the same time, of herself. As before, the process is mutually sustaining, for grasping more about the whole is at once grasping more about the part and vice-versa, to use the language of whole and parts first rigorously provided to us by Euclid.

The crucial connection with Kojève is Bakunin's concept of development towards the universal through negation, Bakunin's *Negieren*. The Hegelian origins of the negative as the motor of conceptual development are obvious, for Hegel himself writes famously of the "*ungeheure Macht des Negativen*" (tremendous power of the Negative) in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. More interesting in Bakunin is his quite elegant simplification (or generalization) of the Hegelian negative: for Bakunin negation is above all the negation of attachment to closed individuality itself. If the foremost hindrance to discovery of universality is the stubborn attachment to the individual and the prerogatives of the body or incarnate existence that determine it, the way to break through this hindrance is progressively to reduce

[2] Martin Heidegger, *Der Europäische Nihilismus*, in *Nietzsche* II (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1961), 147.

the primacy of individual existence, to negate our attachment to it. The various interested forms of thought one may assume on the way to the universal are each determined by a specific attitude to finite wants and fears.

There is of course nothing surprising from a Christian point of view to this notion of negation that frees us from limited perspectives by negating the needs of the body, its wants and fears, that hold us trapped or "closed up" (закупорен) within our finitude.[3] There is nothing surprising from the Christian view as well in taking the purview of negation to a radical extreme where individuality as a form of en-closure is completely overcome. Yet, it is precisely at the limit of this overcoming that the questions arise. For Christianity, at least orthodox Christianity, does not sing the praises of suicide or literal physical self-destruction as the final moment of liberation. Instead, we are left with the vexed and inconsistent tradition of resurrection and the heresies that attend the question of what it truly means to be free of finite being in God or to separate the two natures that are doctrinally unified in Christ, that is, unified by dogmatic Nicene fiat.

Bakunin is quite free of dogmatic cant as befits a revolutionary, and Bakunin's negation seems to come perilously close to literal self-immolation as the highest and, indeed, most genuinely an-archic act. For freed from physical necessity, the ultimate ἀρχή (archē), one can be finally free, like a god. The cost is ironically a rather great one for every commonsense point of view must look askance at freedom through suicide, though it is, plainly spoken, hard to imagine any other freedom that is not a creature of the imagination or wish fulfillment or infantile illusion. Bakunin should be taken much more seriously, and his Hegelianism is intimately connected to his anarchism if we consider that anarchism from this perspective.

So we come to terror and terrorism as modes of radical negation and liberation. For if the highest form of negation is self-negation, then such may be the proper end of a human life, especially in the political context of other human lives that resist the great, terrible and noble

[3] The term refers to Lev Tolstoy as quoted by Vladimir Bibikhin in his far-reaching lectures on Tolstoy's diaries. The full quote is: "All people are closed up, and this is terrible" ("Все люди закупорены, и это ужасно"). See Vladimir Bibikhin, *Dnevniki L'va Tolstogo* (Saint-Petersburg: Ivan Limbakh, 2012), 5. Another truly remarkable instance of this thinking comes from Tolstoy's *Circle of Reading*:

> Underfoot frozen, hard earth, large trees all around, bleak sky overhead, absorbed in thought I feel my body — and at the same time I know, I feel with all my being, that the trees and the sky and my body and my thoughts — that this is all chance — merely the products of my five senses, my imagination, the world constructed by me, that all of this is such as it is merely because I make up such, and not another, part of the world, that such is my being closed off from the world. I know, that I must die — and all this will not disappear for me but change in appearance just like one has changes of scene in the theater: out of the bushes, rocks castles, towers and the like. Death produces in me such a transformation, if only I am not completely destroyed, but transformed into some other being, differently separated from the world. Now, I consider myself, my body with its senses, to be myself, while something completely different emerges in me. And then the whole world, remaining the same for all who live in it, becomes for me a different one. Indeed, the world is such, and not another merely because I consider myself as such and not another being differently closed off from the world. And there may be an infinite quantity of beings closed off from the world and the same goes for the ways of being closed off.

See L. N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 90 tomakh*, vol. 41 (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1928-1958), 354-355.

truth of self-abnegation by sticking to selfish interests which, by definition, eradicate, if only *in potentia*, the interests of others. Yet, it is not merely this privileging of self over other that is problematic but the mere notion of privileging — for as long as selfish interest may reign in any way, human beings are stuck in hierarchy and structure, in master and slave relations, in inequality and strife — in a word, they are all at war, a war that may be brought to an end only through terror, the ultimate terror of complete self-abnegation.

II.

Enter Kojève and active negation. But before I take a look at Kojève's thinking about active negation in his famed Hegel lectures — and, specifically, the concept of terror he develops briefly in those lectures — I should like to consider a fecund passage from *Atheism*:

> The human being … reminds us of a person in a swamp. She knows that the swamp as a whole can take her away, and if she could find something to hang onto, she would be completely safe. But she cannot. She tries to take hold of as much as possible, lays down boards, etc., but she never knows if she has taken enough. She stands on a small bit of land but does not know if she will hold it for long and fears remaining on it. She looks around, seeks another small bit of land (a closer one?), avoiding the slippery spots (but, perhaps, they are firmer?), jumps onto it and is afraid again, searches again, etc., without end or, more accurately, until the end: she will run until she drowns or for as long as she has not drowned, she will run — such a person is not serene and not secure; she is in terror.
>
> The human being, given to herself in this way, is given to herself in the tonus of terror: she is in terror in the terrible world of killing and death. It is terrible for her to see the destruction of things (is it not terrifying in a fire?); it is terrible to see death and killing. But not only this; she is in terror where there was death, where what was is no longer (is it not terrifying in a "ghost town"?), where she sees the absence of whatever could have been (indeed, it is terrible in the desert where there is so much "unfilled" space), but especially where she sees nothing (how terrible at night!). She is in terror as well where there is no end, but there is finitude where there is still no death or killing, but where they can be (indeed, it is terrible to be around a terminally ill person or one condemned to death; and is it not terrible where it "smells of death"?). And what does it mean that for the "human being in the world" it is always and everywhere terrible or, at the least, that it can be terrible for her always and everywhere?
>
> The givenness to the "human being in the world" of killing and death outside herself (i.e., in the world) is the givenness of the finitude of the world in itself, the givenness of the world in the tonus of terror.[4]

Terror is fundamental to Kojève's understanding of living in the world. And, as we may surmise, there is more than merely a hint of gnostic disdain for the world in the notion of negation Kojève develops as a terroristic "remedy" to the oppressive terror of existence that is, as my account of Bakunin suggests, rooted in our rootedness in existential neediness from which we cannot free ourselves as long as we continue to live.

We are, in Kojève's words, given to ourselves in the "tonus of terror." Here Kojève adapts two basic concepts from Heidegger's thought, that of *Befindlichkeit* or "orientation/situation"

[4] Kojève, *Atheism*, 77.

and that of terror or *Angst*.[5] Yet, I think Kojève broadens the hold that terror has upon us to move quite beyond Heidegger for whom *Angst* is primarily a mood (*Stimmung*/tonus) expressing ineluctable homelessness or *Unheimlichkeit*.[6] While there is no doubt a similar aspect in Kojève what differs is his striking focus not only on living in the world but on the fact that one *dies* in the world and may die violently.[7] As Kojève notes, nobody dies a natural death. It is precisely this terrible fact, that we live not only in a world of living beings pursuing their lives but also of human beings killing and murdering other human beings, that in this world we are completely oppressed by our mortal need at every turn and the violence that must attend us either internally or externally — this fact extends Heidegger's sense of the equation of *Angst* with nothingness, homelessness, a collapse of reality, to the pervasive terror before our mortal wants and fears and of other human beings as the agents of our termination. Terror describes our situatedness in the world, to be sure, in the broadest possible way for we would seem to fear dying in the world far more than living in it. Kojève is preoccupied with want, with fear, with death.

I turn now to two important moments in Kojève's Hegel lectures that, taken together, connect Kojève's notion of negation, so crucial to action in Kojève's account of Hegel, with death. In doing so, I hope to be able to bring together the various strands of my account to align Bakunin with Kojève in a distinctive and provocative interpretation of Hegel but also of a central problem they all address, if in different ways: the mode of deification of a finite being, of what Sergei Bulgakov refers to as "conditional immortality."[8]

The first moment:

> Now, what is the I of Desire — the I of a hungry man, for example — but a void avid for content; a void that wants to be filled by what is full by *voiding* this fullness, to occupy with *its* fullness the void caused by overcoming the fullness that was *not* its own? Therefore, to speak generally: if the true (absolute) philosophy, unlike

[5] The term *Befindlichkeit* in English is rendered as either "state-of-mind" (Macquarrie and Robinson) or "attunement" (Stambaugh), neither of which is quite adequate to the German. Indeed, I am not sure an adequate translation is possible since *Befindlichkeit* suggests a basic orientation to the world, to one's situation or situatedness in the world that is not merely cognitive but affective as well — indeed, the former is dependent in a determinative way on the latter. "State-of-mind" is probably too easily coopted as a "psychological" attitude and "attunement" is somewhat puzzling — both attempt to convey the underlying notion of *Stimmung* (mood/tuning) that Heidegger develops to define this basic orientation. And it is gently ironic that Heidegger's term for orientation should in fact be disorienting to any intrepid translator.

[6] Discussion of homelessness is a staple of Heidegger's texts, emerging both in his large lecture course of 1929/1930, entitled *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* and, especially, in the crucial discussion of Antigone that is central to the 1935 lecture, *Introduction to Metaphysics*. See Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 167-170.

[7] More bluntly put: everyone dies violently, even those who choose death. The violence done us by nature is obvious: we cannot survive a minute without killing other beings in order to live because nature threatens at any moment to kill us. If violence is connected with loss of life — and how could it be otherwise? — life itself is a process of violence in which the notion of non-violent or "natural" life has to raise basic questions.

[8] Sergius Bulgakov, *The Sophiology of Death*, trans. Roberto J. De La Noval (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2021), 40-75.

> Kantian and pre-Kantian philosophy, is not a philosophy of *Consciousness*, but rather a philosophy of *Self*-Consciousness, a philosophy *conscious* of itself, taking account of itself, justifying itself, *knowing* itself to be absolute and revealed by itself to itself as such, then the Philosopher must — Man must — in the very foundation of his being not only be passive and positive *contemplation*, but also be active and negating *Desire*. Now, if he is to be so, he cannot be a *Being* that *is*, that is eternally *identical* to itself, that is self-*sufficient*. Man must be a void, a nothingness, which is not a pure nothingness (*reines Nichts*), but something that *is* to the extent that it *annihilates* Being, in order to realize itself at the expense of Being and to nihilate *in* Being. Man is negating *Action*, which transforms given *Being* and, by transforming it, transforms itself.[9]

Human beings *are* to the extent they negate. In other words, the human aspect of human being is profoundly *negative*, a void (*un vide*) that can never fill itself with anything other than itself — that is, negation should continually express itself by negating whatever resists it until there is nothing left to resist it. Negation is a pure energy of movement, pure action, that cannot result in the construction of any positive "thing" as an end, for to do so would be to reify, and thus eradicate, the pure energy understood as negation. The crucial aspect to Kojève's negation is that it is movement, destructive or transformative — but ultimately destructive — that cannot come to a halt. Anything that is static resists negation, thwarts it. By destroying the given and therewith all restrictive ties to the given, negation liberates the void that is the human being from its "content," that is, from the restrictions on its free movement. Like Bakunin's liberation of the self from the ἀρχή of present wants and needs, Kojève's negation attempts to liberate the void that is the human being from any and all content since content limits and ties the human being to conditioned mortal life — there can be no conditional immortality for the human being. To the extent nature retains its hold on us, to the extent nature dominates us through the terror we feel and perceive at the thought of our mortal dependence, the human being remains trapped in the cycle of want and fear, the cycle of nature. I use this term on purpose with its echo of the Buddhist *samsāra* because Kojève's own clearest attempt to explain our servitude comes from his account of what is most dishonorable or deceptive about Buddhist ascetic practice — as long as we continue to eat, to affirm our attachment to this world, we are enslaved.[10] The deceptively free ascetic is corrupt because he claims freedom while continuing to live in selfish servitude to the body. The ascetic who does not go far enough is a deceiver. The undeceived is utterly free of fear, is no longer in terror, and rids herself of terror through the negation of the ties to the given that hold her in such terror. Rather than clinging to the boards floating in the swamp in the

[9] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 38.

[10] Alexandre Kojève, *Kant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 47. This text was written in 1952 and remained among Kojève's papers after his death in 1968. The text provides an important counterpoint to the Hegel lectures, but it also contains a discussion of Buddhism highlighting one crucial point: that the "holy" or "saintly" figure cannot claim to have overcome the pull of attachment (and desire) while remaining alive. More radically put, the desire to remain alive is itself ignoble and undignified (*indigne*) because it masks the true nature of the selfish attachment that remains at the core of anyone who continues to live. As we will see, this selfish attachment retains in human beings their essential *criminality*. And it reveals that terror is only terror for those attached to living, attached to selfish occupations, and thus unable to be truly free. All that religion promises is frustration of the desire for freedom.

vain hope of temporary peace, the truly free human being gladly drowns having first freed herself of any need to hold onto any board or anything at all. Freedom and negation are like death — they are death.[11]

The second moment:

> That is to say that thought and speech, revealing the Real, are born from negating Action that realizes Nothingness [*le Néant*] in annihilating Being: the givenness of Man — in Struggle, and the givenness of Nature —through Work (that results, besides, from real contact with death in Struggle). That is to say, therefore, that human being is nothing more than this Action: it is death that lives a human life.[12]

The "death that lives a human life" — this is a phrase that hangs over all of Kojève's work and gives a clear sense of the connection of active negation with death. The response to the terror of our existence in the world is *action*, negating action — terror — that aims to free us of the wretched terror of our existence, one marked, as Kojève notes, by the murder we call simply "natural." We engage in terror, that is, the elimination of the attachments that cause us terror in the world as a way of liberation.

Is this way really one of terror? Is it terrorism to want to free us from the interest in existence that causes us such suffering in our lives? Kojève, supposedly so detached and ironical, shows his clear perception of our plight, murdered by human beings or nature, what matters the difference — we die always before our time. How do we miss this simple point: no one dies on time! We may say, for example, that someone dies well because to continue living is only to suffer terribly. Death is, then, a comfort because life has become intolerable. But we would do better to ask why we have to endure such suffering? There is, plainly said, no way to die well, and Kojève is very clear — we live in terror as long as we live. This is the correlate to the freedom I mentioned above. The free human being is the one who no longer needs to eat or engage in any of the other basic bodily functions in order to continue living. As long as wants and fears prevail in our everyday existence, no matter how disguised or alleviated by illusion or palliative fiction, we live in terror and can only respond to such terror with terror — the willingness to negate our existence, rather to live in terror (and humiliation) in it.

> In these moans there is expressed, first, all the futility of our pain, so humiliating for our consciousness, and all the lawfulness of nature, on which, to be sure, you spit, but from which you suffer all the same, while it does not. There is expressed the consciousness that your enemy is nowhere to be found, and yet there is pain; the consciousness that, despite all possible Wagenheims, you are wholly the slave of your teeth; that if someone wishes, your teeth will stop aching, and if not, they will go on aching for another three months; and that, finally, if you still do not agree, and protest even so, then the only consolation you have left is to whip yourself, or give your wall a painful beating with your fist, and decidedly nothing else.[13]

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[11] Here the famous line is quite applicable: "man is the death that lives a human life."

[12] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris : Gallimard, 1962), 550. See also, Alexandre Kojève, "The Idea of Death in the Philosophy of Hegel," *Interpretation* 3/ 2,3 (1973): 133-134.

[13] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1994), 14-15.

Is Kojève's response truly "terror"? It is only terror if one remains within the very fears that perceive any rejection of the basic will to life, the tyrannical will to live, as terror — as disturbing. We are supposed to accept our lot as blessed are we not?

Kojève does address political terror, ominously in his Hegel lectures for 1936-1937.

> In the state of "absolute" Freedom, everyone wants to become dictator and impose his will on all others. Everyone then can be dictator; but he is then only a pseudo-dictator because the other wills remain particular and thus impenetrable to his. The *idea* of dictatorship is abstract. In order to realize it, one must actually suppress the particular wills: – by death (and Terror). Since there is no longer a universal will, there are only particular wills that one can only get to [*atteindre*] in their biological existence, not in their works, their actions, because they *do* nothing (they only oppose each other). Such a process could come to an end only through the extermination of all members of Society and through the suicide of the (pseudo) dictator. Terror is in fact nothing more than the suicide of Society itself.[14]

Here Kojève takes his point to the extreme: terror is self-annihilation. Thus, the opposition elicited by the terror of life ends up as a rejection of life, as a form of revenge against life because of the terror it unleashes against us. The only way to peace is extermination — killing the world in the "suicide of society" appears to be the only truly adequate solution to the terror of life. It is the only adequate solution because Kojève does not think that the terror of life can be overcome otherwise. Although he praises the technological transformation of the earth as a reflection of the essentially negative energy that distinguishes genuine human activity, he never associates that activity with a beneficial end in the sense one might attribute to the Marxian utopia. This is not the place to discuss Kojève's complex relation to Marxism: it may suffice to note that a static utopia or end of history is a terminal point of the human being that is very much akin to the "suicide of society." One may come to the promised end or culmination of history, but one may not enjoy the fruits of that end as a human being because what is human in us, according to Kojève is *negation*. There is only a human or truly human being as long as there is negation of the given, and it stands to reason that the completion of that negation, the negation of the given, is self-annihilation since the self is also a given to the extent it has a static identity or, indeed, any identity at all. There is no human utopia, and utopia is the end of human striving in a sense far more final than anyone might care to imagine.

It bears repeating that the given is worth negating because it strikes us in the "tonus of terror" — the given in Kojève is virtually by definition not desirable or only desirable as a given to be negated. Kojève views desire entirely in this negative light, as an expression of the pure flame of negation that burns away the given as terrible and unbearable. While Kojève does not always express this seemingly dark view with full frankness, he is sometimes quite frank as in the final Hegel lecture from 1939 where he writes:

> It must be said that Man as such, that is Man *opposed* to single and homogeneous spatial Being, or the historical free individual whom Hegel calls "Selbst," "Personal-me," is necessarily Error and not Truth. For a Thought that does not coincide with Being is false. Thus, when the specifically human error is finally transformed into the truth of absolute Science, Man ceases to exist as Man and History comes to an end. The suppression of Man (that is, of Time, that is, of Action) in favor of static-

[14] Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 143. My translation.

> Being (that is, of Space, that is, of Nature) is therefore the suppression of Error in favor of Truth. And if History is with certainty the history of human errors, Man himself is perhaps an error of Nature that "by chance" (freedom?) was not immediately eliminated.[15]

Human being is an error that through negation corrects itself. Nowhere is that error more powerfully expressed than in its opposition to terror. And this terror of being turns back on any notion of a benevolent deity. In a rather striking way, however, Kojève, though abandoning the notion of a benevolent deity, retains a relative of sin through error and negation. Both seem to express an approving attitude to St. Augustine's notion of sin as an expression of willfulness or *voluntas* that is nothing else but the capacity to counter God, a capacity that is itself paradoxical for a theist who believes not only in God's benevolence but in His omnipotence too. Kojève's attitude implies that the creation is inherently terror-ridden or terrible and harsh, and that the only properly human choice is to reject it and existence.

III.

Bakunin and Kojève both affirm the rejection of existence as the truly liberating path — *Freitod tut gut* (suicide does good). One becomes like God by freeing oneself from the fear of death, from terror, and operates another terror on life by doing so. This divinity is scant comfort because it does not offer what the terrorized creature might truly want — immortality itself. Simple or Stoic indifference is not immortality. Indifference can be felt only by a being for which indifference can matter, thus a being incapable of indifference. We cannot imagine immortality effectively as it is in itself because immortality is the creation of a mortal being. Immortality is above all *interested*, it is the profound wish of the slave, the being subject to terror. A truly divine, unperturbed being, would presumably not have any of the concerns we do, it would not have any concerns at all.

Hence, Kojève's politics is essentially insincere or skeptical. Politics for a truly divine being is a squared circle or mere nonsense — it must be. Hence, if Kojève talks a politics of liberation as a politics of liberation from terror requiring, as its basic condition of possibility, the liberation from the living self, he means an all too finite solution (and what is an infinite solution?) to a problem that supposedly exceeds the finite being — or might do so. A finite solution to an infinite problem is a failure or an illusion. Does Kojève provide such an illusion?

We may speak of the end of history or the final state, the universal and homogeneous state, in this way. Yet, as should be obvious, genuine liberation requires no state. The state is rather the purgatorial realm of indecision between a conviction to remain with the flesh or to desert it. Here we come to the question that lurks in our discussions regarding the proper way of life for human beings — is it animal or material life, divine life or some combination of the two, the *animal rationale* or the being with two natures? Here we are quite obviously in the midst of the Christological question, arguably the greatest question to afflict Christianity, source of many "heresies" — the question regarding the "true" nature of Christ as human or God or both or neither.

There is likely no more vexed doctrinal question in Christian thought from Arius onward. What lies at the heart of this thinking, regardless of the endless complication or obfuscation of theological speculation, is a simple question: Are we an animal or a God or both, and, if both, which prevails or can prevail? For why should a God suffer in terror as we do without

[15] Kojève, *IRH*, 155-156 (translation modified).

salvation other than in an afterlife or in a realm of fancy from which no one has ever reported back to us accurately?

To begin to close off my essay, I would like to open up the Christological debates reflected in it because they run — as a red thread — through so much of Western thought and are particularly relevant to the possibilities made available to us by the current technological revolution.

Let us suppose (suitably enough) a triad implicit within the notion of two natures, which together create a third, the human being:

First, "hell": the wholly animal or becoming animal, an attempt to consider ourselves as animals among other animals with no "spiritual" component, a form of materialism and hedonism and a variant of Epicureanism — in Kojève's own words "bodies without spirit" (see below in section IV).

Second, "heaven": the wholly divine, a being freed entirely of limits understood as resulting from our rootedness in or dependence on a material world, i.e., in time and space.

Third, "purgatory": the hybrid being, neither wholly animal, nor wholly "divine," a being unable to balance itself or able to balance itself only by dogmatic fiat or metaphor, like the notion of θἐωσις.

Kojève's choice is to collapse the irresolvable tension inherent in the third option; he suggests thereby the impossibility of overcoming the hybrid being other than through its own elimination of itself. The proper aim of life is death.

IV.

Yet, is this really the case? Does Kojève seek to overcome or eliminate the "hybrid" being? Here is a frank text from another unpublished treatise:

> The human being first appears in the natural World as a real, though not natural being, i.e., the human being in the proper meaning of the word, in the process of the first bloody struggle for Recognition. In other words, the human being is first born in murder, or at least in attempted murder: he is born as a real or potential murderer, and "senseless" murder, not at all "justified" from a biological point of view. Does this not mean that Crime lies "at the foundation" of the human being, that specifically human being is criminal in its "essence"?[16]

This probing question takes us to the heart of my essay. For if Kojève rejects the being in

[16] Unpublished ms., *Sofia, philo-sophia, and phenomeno-logia,* in the transcription prepared by Rambert Nicolas at p. 320 and checked against the autograph ms. in the Fonds Kojève at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, designated NAF-28320-20-2, at p. 568. I thank Rambert Nicolas for allowing me to use his transcription:

> Человек «впервые» появляется в природном Мире к<а>к реальное, но не-природное существо, т.е. к<а>к Человек в собственном смысле слова, в процессе «первой» кровавой Борьбы за Признание. Иными словами, Человек зарождается в убийстве, или по крайней мере попытке убийства: он рождается к<а>к реальный или потенциальный убийца, и убийца «бессмысленный», с биологической точки зрения нисколько не «оправданный». Не значит ли это, что «в основе» Человека лежит Преступление, что специфически человеческое существование преступно в своей «сущности»?

terror on the one hand, he embraces it on the other, and this embrace has to do with recognition because recognition is in fact an expression of the terror against terror that cannot be satisfied by the creation of a universal and homogeneous state. Kojève turns us away both from the final state and from suicide as a solution to a being in perpetual terror and dissatisfaction. The Kojève encountered in the context of recognition recalls Carl Schmitt in his violence and perhaps even surpasses Schmitt in that respect. For Kojève, criminality and crime are central to human beings who are not human without it, and crime takes on many masks. Crime may be the revolt against nature itself that leads to suicide or the creation of an immensely coercive state, or it can be the need to coerce others to accept one's desires as their own and to extend that coercion to nature itself — the "great" human criminal seeks to impose his desire on others and on nature at any cost in order to secure his existence as one recognized not only by other human beings but by what passes for God as creator of the natural world of terror.

We should review the main points of recognition in order to identify the inherent and enduring violence in recognition and the criminality that is also essential to human identity. Recognition is articulated through a narrative which begins with a dispute over some object. The dispute leads to a fight in which the master defeats the slave. The master does not defeat the slave by force, however. To the contrary, the master defeats the slave precisely because the slave refuses to fight. The master is prepared to die whereas the slave is not — the slave in effect invents servitude by choosing life over death.

The fight takes place because of human desire. Whence this desire as distinctly human? We do not know.[17] For Kojève, desire is negation. But it is negation of a specific kind. Kojève describes animal desire as simple appetite, the desire for food to satisfy hunger. Kojève claims that this desire negates its object by ingesting and thereby transforming it. A plant or other animal is assimilated by the animal as nutrients which maintain the animal's existence. All animal desire is transformative in this way; the animal negates by transforming other beings in order to remain alive — to survive. Human desire is radically different from animal desire because human desire, though based in some animal materiality as a pretext, is specifically oriented neither to material beings nor to survival. The animal takes for an object whatever can satisfy its hunger — the animal's desire is thus clearly material. Human desire is distinguished by the fact that it is the desire of the *desire* of another. Human desire does not relate directly to a material object but to another human being as a being with its own desires for certain material objects. The desire is the primary object of human desire and not the underlying material object. Consequently, human desire is distinguished by the qualitative difference in the negation involved. Rather than negating the material object in an act of ingestion, human desire negates another desire by supplanting it or, as Kojève emphasizes, by compelling one party to recognize the desire of the other by adopting it as its own: I negate your desire by compelling you to recognize my own in its stead on pain of death. Moreover, human desire is totalizing and tyrannical: it cannot be satisfied until it has become uniform so that all other human varieties of desire have been transformed into one uniform variety, the full and finally true desire having been recognized by all on pain of death — or terror. If we put this into the terms of the negative, human desire as negation does not become final until all varieties of human desire other than one have been conclusively negated.

[17] The problem of the origin of human desire: How can I have an "I" that desires if desire is in fact the first expression of that I? It must be a situation where the I *as* desire is born at the same moment as the desire that is supposed to belong to it or be it.

Two possibilities present themselves at this point. There is the finality of the "suicide" or self-annihilation that has been the primary kind of finality discussed hitherto in this essay, a finality that is precisely the product of desire having become uniform, and thus trans-individual and inert, in all human beings. But there is also the other finality Kojève broaches briefly and cryptically in the Hegel lectures: that of the "body without spirit."[18] This "body without spirit" seems to be a return to the state Kojève identifies with the animal, a state that has nothing to do with the human since negation understood as the "desire for desire" or the desire to negate the desire of the other has been extinguished. The "body without spirit" is in fact the product of desire having reached its goal of complete, tyrannical hegemony. In other words, uniform desire is the extinguishment of desire itself for uniformity is the end of all striving, change and freedom. The human being becomes animal.

Both of these states are "limit" states that mutually define each other as animal and human or flesh and spirit within the Christological context that is one of the shadows in Kojève's apparently atheistic account. Thus, I return again to the "hybrid," the *animal rationale*, or the body with spirit, the unstable compound that is the living human being on its way to an end but not having yet achieved it. As Kojève notes, this hybrid being is born in murder or, at least, the threat of murder: this being is thus born into terror, the terror of immanent death, a terror inflicted upon it not directly by nature but by another human being without any natural purpose.[19] Like murder, this terror is senseless.

Terror is thus intimately connected to a lack of sense. If we return to Kojève's metaphor of the swamp, we can see that the various supports that protect a person from drowning act as defenses against the question as to why there must be terror in the first place. This question, 'Why must we live in terror or suffer ?,' lies at the core of the problem as one of sense or meaning. For is a world in which we suffer for no apparent reason or suffer such that we do not recover from it — and does anyone? — a world of sense and meaning? Most galling and intriguing of all is that Kojève also indicates through his recognition narrative of struggle to the death that terror as produced by this struggle (as are all other human things) is distinctively human — terror is not a product of natural processes but of human *action*.

This conclusion may appear puzzling at first for both suffering and death are impossible without our frailty as material or natural beings. We may say that it is nature that terrorizes us. But for Kojève, there is no "raw" nature as such —suffering and death as negative, as sources of terror, are creations of the one who loses in the struggle for recognition: the slave. The tonus of terror and desire to rid ourselves of terror, to commit terror against terror, are both distinctive of the being of the slave. The master, as Kojève notes, is an impasse or "dead end." Masters do not experience terror because they do not experience the fear of death, and they are masters precisely on account of their lack of fear. Only the slave experiences fear and constructs nature as the realm of terror and fear. It follows, then, that the criminal and the criminal impulse can only exist for the slave as well. For the masters there is no criminality at all. Only the slave, as a slave, grasps criminality as such and is compelled to grasp the criminal as the one who acts as a master in the society of the slave, the only society of any kind since society is the invention of the slave.

[18] Kojève, *ILH*, 388.

[19] By "indirectly" I note Kojève's location of terror in human agency while also acknowledging that terror is inherent in human vulnerability, our "natural" constitution that is only discovered by the being, the slave, who refuses to fight because it fears its vulnerability and recognizes it at the moment of potential death.

V.

There is at once no criminality and criminality in Kojève's thinking. The criminality Kojève has in mind is indeed what we may refer to as "great criminality" alluding at once to both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. This criminality consists in the desire not only for self-annihilation but for the expansion of that desire, consistent with the master-slave narrative, to all human beings: the ultimate criminality is then the expansion of the desire to self-annihilation to all human beings and to the world that is their product. "Killing the world" never reaches its true potential in an individual suicide but in the mass suicide of all human beings, the "suicide of Society itself." Kojève's "logic" is eminently clear: an individual suicide cannot be an act of absolute freedom until it has been expanded to all other human beings. Indeed, individual suicide is the despairing act of the slave in terror and not the bold emancipating act of the great criminal who transcends servitude by becoming the agent of the final annihilation of human beings and their world. "Killing the world" is thus false or mendacious when it applies only to the individual's ability to kill the world for itself — obviously the world is not thereby destroyed. Hence, all that is left is the complete annihilation of the world.

If this is so, and complete annihilation is the final goal of history, what then is the universal and homogeneous state? There is a tension between the sheer radicality of Kojève's apocalyptic view of the world as a project of self-annihilation and the curious gesture of incompletion represented by the universal and homogeneous state. Within the context of the Hegel lectures, this final state seems to play a largely propagandistic role as a utopia (for some a dystopia) achieved at the end of history, Yet, a mere four years later Kojève completed a long and detailed treatise on the legal structures appropriate to such a state as well as a revised account of the narrative of recognition.[20] Hence, we are not allowed to dismiss the universal and homogeneous state and, if we look to my categorization of stages from section III above, we may identify the universal and homogeneous state with purgatory, albeit a purgatory where there is likely no chance that its denizens may ascent to heaven or paradise. Rather than constituting an end state or the state that emerges at the end of history, the universal and homogeneous state effects the frustration of the end of history or is an admission of the impossibility of the radical project of emancipation that features the total killing of the world. Terror, far from being vanquished, becomes a necessary tool of the universal and homogeneous state; necessary because the failure to reach the end means that the specter of rebellion or renewed criminality — a return of the politics that the universal and homogeneous state seeks finally to suppress — cannot be achieved without coercion of the most radical kind. Terror is thus a perpetual feature of the universal and homogeneous state that begins to resemble the Stalinist state of perpetual terror.

There is little irony to this if we consider that terror does not originate directly in nature but in human fear itself, a fear awakened by primal violence among human beings. The slave, while afraid, is not content and the attempt to create placid slaves in the universal and homogeneous state — automata as Kojève may have referred to them later[21] — cannot rest

[20] Allan Bloom, for example, follows Leo Strauss in considering Kojève's final state one suited for the Nietzschean "last man," the most decayed form of human being. See Allen Bloom, "Responses to Fukuyama," *The National Interest* (1989): 19-21. The state Kojève imagines is given fairly detailed form in the treatise on law entitled *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*, written in 1943 and first published in French in 1981.

[21] In a letter to Leo Strauss, dated September 19, 1950. Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, eds. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 255.

content with success until it is absolutely clear that no threat to the universal and homogeneous state may exist. But, given the potential criminality in all human beings, this threat cannot be eradicated while there are human beings still alive and continuing to hold onto their lives. For we have to face the fact that the universal and homogeneous state is an admission of *failure*; namely, the failure to attain genuine emancipation. While Kojève labors to suggest that the "citizen" is no longer a slave, it is hard to square this claim with the continued existence of terror and the sophisticated legal apparatus that constitutes the universal and homogeneous state. One would expect it neither to be necessary or useful in a final state where servitude had been overcome once and for all. It is well to recall that servitude means fear, whereas emancipation of servitude banishes fear. Terror cannot have an effect on truly emancipated beings; nor can the threat of legal sanction. These are forms of coercion that admit the failure of the universal and homogeneous state to achieve the full emancipation of its citizens — they are no more masters than any slave could ever be. The discourse of the end of history as emancipatory in the universal and homogeneous state is mendacious — not a noble but rather an ignoble lie for an ignoble being, the slave.

Hence, terror remains; the tonus of terror cannot be vanquished by a being that perceives terror as long as it lives. This being, the "hybrid," values survival more than dignity and, by doing so, by enshrining life, must live in the perpetual fear of losing it, of falling into the swamp. This being runs from one ideology to another to conceal its lack of courage from itself — it is the cowardly being par excellence because it is governed by fear and thus incapable of genuine risk or freedom. At every stop, however, this being loses faith in the masks it creates for itself and comes face to face with the fear that constitutes it, a fear that reveals the essence of cowardice as perseverance in servitude. For this being terror is truly terrible and effective, all the more effective where the fear leads to voluntary submission to coercion. Animals are unaware of such coercion; masters no less so — it is the slave that keeps itself in fearful coercion, that cannot be free, not now or ever.

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