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Tripping Over Rhodes: The End of History Reconsidered

by

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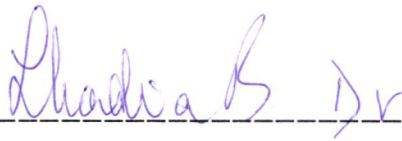
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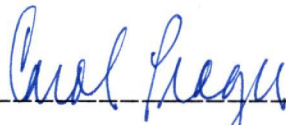
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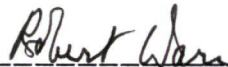
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Tripping Over Rhodes: The End of History Reconsidered" submitted by Len G. Wilson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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Abstract

Alexandre Kojève claims that history has come to an end, that nothing truly new can ever happen again. History can be understood as the process whereby humans have, through fighting and work, created a series of worlds. The modern age is the culmination of this process; it is a precursor to the Universal and Homogeneous State, where human desire is definitively satisfied. Having achieved this, humans cease to change. In so doing, they cease to be fully human, becoming instead post-historical animals.

In this thesis, I attempt to weave the threads of Kojève's work into a coherent whole, and show that Kojève's apparently preposterous ideas are worthy of consideration as an account of our past and our present. However, I also attempt to show that, even if this account is accepted, the future it describes is not inevitable.

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Abbreviations

- END** Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. (New York: Free Press, 1992).
- HMC** Kojève, Alexandre. "Hegel, Marx and Christianity". Hilail Gildin trans. *Interpretation* Vol. I 1970 pp. 21-42.
- HP** Rosen, Stanley. *Hermeneutics as Politics*. (Oxford University Press, 1987).
- ILH** Kojève. *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*. 2nd ed. assembled by Raymond Queneau. (Paris: Gallimard, 1968)
- IRH** Kojève. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Allan Bloom ed. James H. Nichols trans. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).
- OT** Strauss, Leo. *On Tyranny*. Michael S. Roth and Victor Gourevitch eds. Includes Strauss-Kojève correspondence. (New York: Free Press, 1991)
- RE** _____. "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*." in *On Tyranny*.
- TW** Kojève. "Tyranny and Wisdom" in *On Tyranny*.

Introduction

History is over. All the great moral, religious and political questions have been answered, once and for all, and there is nothing new left to be accomplished: no new religions to start or ideologies to create, no great political movements to be led. Historical man, who fought and laboured to create the present world, is being replaced by post-historical man, who simply enjoys, in comfort and security, what has been created. Strictly speaking, post-historical man is not even really human; he has once again become an animal.

These are rather unsettling views which appear preposterous at first reading. Alexandre Kojève, however, makes the argument that this is how we must understand our situation; we live in the post-historical world. In his work, we find a comprehensive account of human history, from the dawn of self-consciousness to the end of history with the achievement of Absolute Wisdom and the establishment of the Universal and Homogeneous State.

Kojève presented his account of history as an interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, so it is necessary for anyone wishing to discuss Kojève to at least consider the problem of

Kojève's relationship to Hegel. His interpretation has been widely criticized. George Armstrong Kelly, for instance, accuses Kojève of "a wilful misreading of Hegel's whole philosophical method,"¹ while Patrick Riley argues that:

...Kojève ignores Hegel's actual theory of the state, and advances in its place what Hegel's theory would have been if Mastery, Slavery, recognition, and satisfaction had been the only political notions which he used.²

Rather than enter into the controversy over whether Kojève accurately interprets Hegel, I will simply state from the outset that this paper is based on the admittedly unargued assumption that Michael S. Roth is correct. Roth writes:

...it would be a complete mistake to try to understand or evaluate Kojève's work on the basis of its faithfulness to Hegel. We shall see, on the contrary, that Kojève found in Hegel a language he could appropriate in order to speak to the philosophical issues which chiefly concerned him.³

This view is supported by Kojève's own words. In the preface to an unpublished work, he wrote, "Finally, the question of knowing if Hegel truly said what I have him say would seem to be puerile."⁴

¹George Armstrong Kelly. *Idealism, Politics and History: Sources of Hegelian Thought*. (Cambridge University Press, 1969) p.338.

²Patrick Riley. "Introduction to the Reading of Alexandre Kojève." *Political Theory* 9(1) February 1981. pp. 18-19.

³Michael S. Roth. "A Problem of Recognition: Alexandre Kojève and the End of History." *History and Theory* Vol. XXIV(3) p.295.

⁴quoted in Roth, p.299n.

Hegel's work is not irrelevant to an understanding of Kojève, but for the purposes of this thesis I will concentrate on what Kojève himself wrote. It is my contention that he is worthy of consideration as a thinker in his own right.

Kojève was not a systematic philosopher; there is no single work which sets out his views. His most important work, originally published in French and entitled *Introduction à la Lecture de Hegel*, is a collection of lecture notes and transcripts assembled by Raymond Queneau. Kojève also expounded and expanded on his views in articles and review essays in a number of French periodicals. There are contradictions and tensions within his work, and in the period following 1948, there was a very definite change in his views. The primary purpose of this thesis is to set out a coherent account of Kojève's view of human history and its end, and explore what were, for Kojève, the consequences of that end. In the process, I hope to show the importance of Kojève's work for those who wish to understand our present situation and our future. At the same time, however, I will argue that we need not accept his conclusions about the fate of humanity at the end of history.

In Chapter One, I will explore the anthropology which underlies Kojève's work, and present an outline of his account of human history, how and why it ends. In Chapter Two, I will attempt to make sense of Kojève's concept of Absolute Knowledge, or Wisdom, which

comes at the end of history, and deal with the question of whether it has been achieved and whether we can know if history is over. Chapter Three deals with the question of whether Kojève's history can be understood as an inevitable progress towards a predetermined end, or whether his account is simply an act of propaganda. I will argue that neither view is appropriate; while Kojève's work contains elements of both, to describe his work as either deterministic or propaganda is a distortion. In Chapter Four, I will examine Kojève's account of the Universal and Homogeneous State which is established at the end of history, and his account of the nature of humanity at the end. This chapter will also deal with the contrast between Kojève's views before and after 1948, and discuss his account of the "reanimalization" of man at the end of history. Kojève's work has spawned a number of varying interpretations and critiques. In Chapter Five, I examine the views of Leo Strauss and Francis Fukuyama, who deal with Kojève from a Nietzschean perspective.

In the final chapter, I will attempt to present some possible alternatives to Kojève's conclusions. While there is much to be learned from Kojève's account of human history, I will argue that it is not necessary to accept his account of our future. Even if we are post-historical humans, by his definition, we need not become the decadent sort of creatures he describes.

Chapter 1: Self-Consciousness and the Historical Process

In Kojève's account, human history is the process by which humans fully realize their nature. The fundamental principle of human nature, for Kojève, is self-consciousness. At the beginning of history, full self-consciousness is but an ideal which is nowhere realized. History is the process by which man creates a series of worlds, changing his surroundings and himself in a continuous effort to realize this ideal. Self-consciousness, for Kojève, cannot be a purely subjective phenomenon. It cannot develop in isolation. If one's consciousness of self is to be realized, if it is to be an objective truth and not simply a subjective delusion, it must be recognized by others, who are themselves recognized as self-conscious. In other words, full self-consciousness, that is, self-consciousness that knows itself as self-consciousness, requires mutual recognition. In Kojève's view, human action is primarily driven by the desire for this recognition. History is the sum of human action in pursuit of this goal. When it is achieved, when all are recognized, and recognize themselves, as free, self-conscious beings, man is satisfied. He ceases to change, and history comes to an end.

At the beginning of history, the dawn of self-consciousness, these conditions do not exist. For Kojève, the early development of self-consciousness splits humanity into two types, Master and Slave. Neither type is completely human, self-conscious and free, because neither type is recognized and hence satisfied. History, for Kojève:

...is nothing but the history of the dialectical - i.e., active - relation between Mastery and Slavery. Hence, History will be completed at the moment when the synthesis of the Master and the Slave is realized, that synthesis that is the whole Man, the citizen of the universal and homogeneous State....⁵

In this chapter, we will first examine Kojève's account of the development of self-consciousness and explore the concept of recognition which is at the heart of his anthropology. Second, we will examine his account of the way this conflict is actualized in the historical process.

Kojève's anthropology, which he claims is derived from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is based on four irreducible premises:

- (1) the existence of the revelation of given Being by Speech, (2) the existence of a Desire engendering an Action that negates, transforms given Being, (3) the existence of several Desires, which can desire one another mutually, and (4) the existence of a possibility

⁵IRH, p.44.

of difference between the Desires of (future) Masters and the Desires of (future) Slaves - by accepting these four premises, we understand the possibility of a historical process, of a History, which is, in its totality, the history of the Fights and the Work that finally ended in the wars of Napoleon and the table on which Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology* in order to understand both those wars and that table.⁶

The first premise is the existence of consciousness in its passive form of contemplation. This is not self-consciousness, and there is no way to reach self-consciousness from this condition alone. The person who contemplates an object is lost in it. He is conscious of the object, but not of himself as observer. He may speak of the object, but he will not be able to say "I". More precisely, he will be able to say "I", or "I think, therefore I am." But he will not be able to say anything beyond this, to begin to answer the question, "What am I?" To achieve self-consciousness, something else is required. This leads to the second premise, the existence of desire.

When a person feels a desire, he becomes conscious of himself. He must say "I want". While he can lose himself in the contemplation of an object, desire for that object brings him "back to himself." He sees the object as something which is separate from something else, which is himself. Kojève characterizes desire as an emptiness

⁶IRH, p.43.

which generates action that it might be filled. Humans are moved by desire to negate the object, to overcome its independence and absorb it. Kojève uses the commonplace example of the person who is hungry. He is conscious of himself as empty (literally) and wishes to be filled. He is moved by this desire (hunger) to transform the object (food) to negate its independence, and to absorb it. In so doing, he obviously changes the food (by preparing and eating it), but also changes himself, from a person who is hungry to one who is not. For Kojève, "Man is negating Action, which transforms given Being, and by transforming it, transforms itself."⁷ Since desire for a thing, which Kojève calls "natural desire", is necessary to the development of self-consciousness, human existence is dependent on biological existence. Without the biologically based ability to feel desire, humans could never attain self-consciousness.

The existence of natural desire is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the development of self-consciousness. Animals feel desires such as hunger, but do not develop anything beyond mere "sentiment of self". They are unable to transcend their given reality. Kojève argues:

The Animal raises itself above the Nature that is negated in its animal Desire only to fall back into it immediately by the satisfaction of this Desire...it does not rise above

⁷IRH, p.38.

itself in order to come back toward itself; it has no distance with respect to itself in order to contemplate itself.⁸

In the satisfaction of a natural, biological desire, a man, like an animal, simply reinforces his dependence on the natural world. Something more is required for the development of self-consciousness and truly human existence.

To go beyond the animal, man must free himself from his merely biological existence. He must desire that which is not given, that is, something that goes beyond the given, natural, reality. He must desire another desire. To act to satisfy the desire for a thing is to enslave oneself to it, and to the natural world. To desire that which is emptiness, which goes beyond the given, natural reality, is to raise oneself above the natural world. Kojève argues that where natural desire directed towards an object is essentially static, desire directed towards a desire is negating action, which creates an "I" different from that of the animal sentiment of self. This human "I" continually transforms itself by action transcending the given.

For this to occur, there must exist a multiplicity of animal desires, and thus a group of people. Self-consciousness cannot

⁸IRH, p.39.

develop in isolation. We saw that desire could be understood as the wish to negate, overcome, and assimilate the object of desire. For it to be human, as opposed to natural desire, "man must act not for the sake of subjugating a thing, but for the sake of subjugating another Desire (for the thing)."⁹ Human desire is thus a desire for recognition of one's right, or one's superiority. It is this specifically human desire that must be satisfied if full self-consciousness is to develop. Why must it be satisfied? Because, while in itself this desire for that which is beyond the natural world creates the conditions for self-consciousness, it can only create a subjective feeling of self-consciousness. This can become an objective truth, as opposed to a purely subjective, possibly delusory sentiment, only if it is recognized by others. While I may think I am a self-conscious, free human, I can only know this if the fact is recognized by others. Conflict becomes inevitable at this early stage. Each man wants the recognition of others in order to validate his own claim to self-consciousness, and he can only show that he is free, not determined by nature, by showing that he values this recognition above his biological life. However, he has no desire to extend this recognition to others. When one man encounters another, he attempts to force the other to recognize him, and is prepared to risk his life to do so. The result is a fight, as each tries to force the other to

⁹IRH, p.40.

recognize him. Each values recognition, or prestige, beyond mere life.

If this were universally true, however, then every fight would end in the death of one or both of the combatants. There would then be no recognition and no satisfaction. (Corpses, obviously, can neither give nor receive recognition.) This leads to the fourth premise. It is necessary that one of the combatants submit to the other, and recognize his superiority. One becomes Master, the other Slave. The Slave proves to be unable to overcome his attachment to his biological identity, and surrenders to save his life. The Master proves his superiority over nature by the risk of his life for the non-vital end of prestige. Animals risk their lives, to be sure, but only in response to biological imperatives such as the need for food or the need to defend the young of the species. Only man is capable of risking his life for a non-biological reason. In so doing, he demonstrates that he is free, that he is not bound by nature.¹⁰ The Master, who is capable of this transcendence of nature, then makes it concrete by his relationship to the Slave. He places the Slave between himself and nature, forcing the slave to transform nature by his labour to meet the demands of the Master. Fully realized humanity requires the realization of self-consciousness (which

¹⁰HMC, p.25.

requires recognition) and freedom.¹¹ At this stage, the Slave, who has by his surrender shown that he values his biological life above all, has realized neither. The Master, on the other hand, has realized freedom, understood as freedom from nature, and has forced the Slave to recognize him as superior.

It might seem that the Master would be satisfied at this point, and history brought to an end. However, the recognition the Master receives is defective and unsatisfying. Kojève explains:

The Master engages in a death struggle in order to make his adversary recognize his exclusive human dignity. But if his adversary is himself a Master, he will be animated by the same desire for "recognition," and he will fight to the death; his or the other's. And if the adversary submits (through fear of death), he shows himself to be a Slave. His "recognition" is then of no value to the victorious Master, in whose eyes the Slave is not a truly human being. The victor in this bloody struggle for pure prestige will not then be "satisfied" by his victory. ¹²

Not only is the Master not satisfied, Kojève argues that he can never be satisfied. The Master is the first incarnation of the human ideal, in that he is the first to transcend his biological nature, but his

¹¹In this account, we will see the word "freedom" used variously to refer to freedom from biological nature, freedom from servitude, and freedom from determinism. All are closely linked. Only by freeing oneself from one's biological nature through the risk of life can one finally free oneself from servitude, either to a Master or to natural determinism.

¹²TW, p.142.

realization of this ideal is incomplete. He is defined by the willingness to risk his life for a non-material end. This defining characteristic, however, places a limit on his development. The only truly human action of which the Master is capable is risking his life. In essence, the risk of life is the same at all times and in all places. For Kojève:

The risk itself is what counts, and it does not matter whether a stone ax or a machine gun is being used. Accordingly, it is not the Fight as such, the risk of life, but Work that one day produces a machine gun, and no longer an ax.¹³

The Master fights but does not work, and is thus not an agent of historical change, for it is work that changes the world and thus drives history. But fighting is all the Master can do, in Kojève's view. By risking his life, the Master realized freedom from nature. His freedom, it is true, is insufficient for satisfaction. Because it is a reality, however, Kojève argues that it cannot be an ideal, a goal to be achieved. And in the absence of an ideal, there is no impetus for change.¹⁴ The Master is at an existential impasse. He risked his life to show himself a Master, but found Mastery unsatisfying because he was recognized only by the "subhuman" Slave. To change this

¹³IRH, p.51.

¹⁴IRH, p.50.

situation, however, would mean to become something other than a Master, and this he is unable to do. Kojève argues:

The Master is fixed in his Mastery. He cannot go beyond himself, change, progress...He has risked his life to be Master. Therefore, Mastery is the supreme given value for him, beyond which he cannot go.¹⁵

Kojève concludes, "His situation is thus essentially tragic since there is no possible way out."¹⁶

Mastery, then, is an impasse, a historical dead end, and it is the lowly Slave who is the true agent of historical development. This is not to say that the Master is historically irrelevant - without Masters there would be no Slaves. And it is the Master who forces the Slave into the path which leads to the end of history, because it is the Master who forces the Slave to work. For it is work, in Kojève's view, that is the driving force that moves history, by changing the world. He writes:

Man who works *transforms* given Nature. Hence, if he repeats his act, he repeats it in *different* conditions, and thus his act itself will be different. After making the first ax, man can use it to make a second one, which, by that very fact, will be another, a better ax....Where there is Work, then, there is necessarily change, progress, historical evolution.¹⁷

¹⁵IRH, p.22.

¹⁶TW, p.142.

¹⁷IRH, p.51.

Unlike the risk of life in a fight, which characterizes Mastery, and which does not change over time, the work of the Slave changes the world.

The Slave became a slave because of his fear of death. He preferred slavery to the potential termination of his biological (natural) existence. He showed that he was not free - that he was determined by nature. Because he is afraid to risk his life, he can be enslaved, and forced to work to satisfy the desires of the Master. However, this defeat at the hands of the Master gives him two advantages over the Master, which are the reason it is the Slave who finally completes history by achieving universal recognition and full self-consciousness.¹⁸

The first advantage is that, in the terror which caused the Slave to submit to the Master, the Slave came to an understanding of himself and of man in general that is superior to that of the Master. This requires some explanation. For Kojève, Man is not a being that is, that simply exists. Rather, he is a being that becomes, that changes himself and his world by constantly negating the given (nature). In essence, Man is negation or nothingness.¹⁹ To fear death is to think about death, about becoming nothing. As Shakespeare put

¹⁸IRH, p.48.

¹⁹IRH, p.48.

it, "Cowards die many times before their deaths". In his fear of death, Kojève argues, the Slave:

...caught a glimpse of himself as nothingness, he understood that his whole existence was but a "surpassed," "overcome" (*aufgehoben*) death - a Nothingness maintained in Being.²⁰

While he recoiled in horror from this prospect, preferring slavery to the risk of death, the Slave yet retained some intuition of this human reality. Kojève argues:

In his mortal terror he understood (without noticing it) that a given, fixed, and stable condition, even though it be the Master's, cannot exhaust the possibilities of human existence...He [the Slave] is ready for change; in his very being, he is change, transcendence, transformation, "education"; he is historical becoming at his origin, in his essence, in his very existence.²¹

This is in contrast to the Master, who, as we have seen, is unable to change or develop.

The second advantage of the Slave comes as a result of his forced servitude. He is forced to work, to transform nature for the pleasure of his Master. In this labour, he is effectively forced to suppress his instincts, which would lead him to himself enjoy what he makes, because of his fearful submission to the Master. The

²⁰IRH, pp.47-48.

²¹IRH, p.22.

threat of death is not always immediately present (the Master is not always standing over the Slave, sword in hand) so the Slave is in effect suppressing his instincts because of an idea, the idea of fear rather than its immediate reality. This, Kojève argues, makes his activity "a specifically human activity, a Work, an Arbeit."²² Kojève writes:

By acting [working], he negates, he transforms the given, Nature, his Nature; and he does it in relation to an idea, to what does not exist in the biological sense of the word, in relation to the idea of a Master - i.e., to an essentially social, human, historical notion.²³

In mastering nature through his work, the Slave accomplishes that which the Master accomplished by risking his life - he overcomes nature. He does this not by accepting the risk of death, as the Master does, but by changing nature to suit his purposes. By working, the Slave creates objects which have not existed before. In effect, he is changing his world. When he becomes conscious of this, when he realizes that he can shape the natural world to conform with his ideas, he conceives the idea of himself as a free and autonomous being. In changing his world, he has changed himself, and he continues to do so. Work is an educative process for Kojève, and it is by his forced work that the Slave educates himself, develops and

²²IRH, p.48.

²³IRH, p.48.

changes. Unlike the Master; then, the Slave develops and changes over time, and it is this process of development which will lead to the synthesis of Master and Slave which ends history. At this point, however, freedom remains only an unrealized ideal, because the Slave still is unable to overcome his fear of the Master. While he can conceive the idea of freedom from servitude, he remains a Slave, more attached to his biological life than to freedom.

In addition to the four premises outlined above, Kojève argues that there is another necessary presupposition that must be made if this account of history is to be accepted as true. If man is to develop and history proceed, it must be that self-consciousness "naturally and necessarily tends to extend itself as much as possible."²⁴ In other words, man (or at least some men) tend to want to understand their historical situation as fully as possible, and to fully understand and explain its changes. As a historical situation is realized, at least some people become conscious of it and understand it, and by their understanding, and their discourse explaining that understanding, they transform the situation into something new. By making men conscious of contradictions, they provide the impetus for efforts to resolve them. For the Slave, there is a contradiction between his idea of freedom and the reality of his slavery. He

²⁴IRH, p.85.

becomes, or is made, conscious of this, but he is still afraid to take the obvious measure to resolve the contradiction, namely, a revolt against the Master. The result, according to Kojève, is that:

...before realizing Freedom, the Slave imagines a series of ideologies, by which he seeks to justify himself, to justify his slavery, to reconcile the ideal of Freedom with the fact of Slavery.²⁵

The first of these "Slave ideologies" is Stoicism.

The Stoic Slave tries to convince himself that the idea of freedom is sufficient in itself, rendering its realization unnecessary. This is ultimately unsatisfactory because it is an ideology of inaction, limited to talking about freedom. Since Man, by Kojève's definition, is essentially an active being, an ideology of inaction leads only to decay, which manifests itself as boredom, forcing the Slave to seek something else.²⁶

The second ideology, skepticism-nihilism, comes from this impulse to action which is natural to Man. To act is to negate the given, but to act to realize freedom would require action to negate the existing state of slavery, which the Slave is still afraid to do. He tries instead to negate the given in thought alone. In Kojève's view:

²⁵IRH, p.53.

²⁶IRH, p.53.

This new attitude culminates in Solipsism: the value, the very reality of all that is not I is denied, and the universality and radicalism of this negation makes up for its purely abstract, verbal character.²⁷

This ideology proves unsustainable, because it so fundamentally contradicts the reality of the daily life of the Slave. To take skepticism seriously is to be unable to act at all. Kojève argues that the skeptic-nihilist Slave eventually becomes aware of this contradiction, and tries to go beyond it. However, he is still afraid to fight against the Master, and creates instead yet another "slavish" ideology, Christianity.

Christianity, for Kojève, is an attempt to justify the contradiction between the ideal of freedom and the reality of slavery by asserting that all are slaves in this world, and freedom is only possible in the next world. This view eliminates the need to fight against the Master, while still allowing for action and change (proselytization, changes in ethical conduct, etc.) in order to attain salvation, thus avoiding the boredom of the Stoic. As well, it is compatible with the denial of the value of this world characteristic of the skeptic, without the paralyzing denial of its reality. Kojève argues:

²⁷IRH, p.54.

Without Fighting, without effort [that is, violent effort to free oneself], therefore, the Christian realizes the Slave's ideal: he obtains - in and through (or for) God - equality with the Master: inequality is but a mirage, like everything in this world of the senses in which Slavery and Mastery hold sway.²⁸

However, this seeming synthesis is ultimately unsatisfactory. The Slave became a slave because he feared death, and can only cease to be a slave when he comes to terms with the idea of his own death. While the experience of primal terror at the time of the fight with the Master gives the Slave a knowledge of death greater than that of the Master, the slavish ideologies he creates are attempts to avoid coming to terms with this knowledge.

At the beginning of history, then, the development of self-consciousness results in a splitting of humanity into two parts, Masters and Slaves. Neither is completely human, fully self-conscious and free. The Master is free from nature, but his self-consciousness is not recognized by those he considers to be human, and so is not a fact. The Slave is neither recognized nor free. Neither is satisfied.

From what has been said so far, we can see that the concept of recognition as it is understood by Kojève is a fundamental

²⁸IRH, p.55.

requirement of self-consciousness. Man is a social being, who can only define himself in relation to others. Or, to put it another way, the criterion of truth is the fact that it is shared. And if this is true, we can see why the desire for recognition would be essentially unlimited. If a truth is that which is believed by others, the truest truth would be that which is believed by all. One's self-consciousness is only a truth if it is recognized by others. A person can only recognize himself, in effect, insofar as he is recognized by others, so he will want to be recognized by as many others as possible. And for recognition to be real and satisfying, it must be the recognition of those he himself recognizes as fully human. In its early, undeveloped form, the desire for recognition takes the form of a desire to dominate. As we have seen from the "tragedy of the Master," this is ultimately self-defeating. When the desire for recognition takes this form, it simply results in the creation of slaves, whose recognition is unsatisfying. In the Slave, the desire for recognition drives the desire for freedom. The Slave can only be recognized when he frees himself from nature. While he accomplishes this in part through his work, the final step requires that he free himself also from the Master. He must risk his life, conquering the attachment to his biological life that made him a Slave.

From this description of human nature, of self-consciousness and the desire for recognition, Kojève is able to explain the process of human historical development as a dialectical progression, driven by the desire for recognition. It should be understood that Kojève does not present a "history of civilization" in any conventional sense. He presents rather a parade of states of consciousness, which follow each other, and develop in reaction to each other. This, as I will argue later, is by no means a necessary or inevitable progression, or even entirely a logical one. There are gaps in the account, and Kojève's interpretation of some historical trends, such as the rise of the bourgeoisie, is, to say the least, idiosyncratic. Kojève's divisions of Western history may baffle some historians, particularly his characterization of the period from the beginnings of Christianity in the Roman Empire to the French Revolution as the "Christian bourgeois era." Kojève was not a systematic historian, and his primary purpose seems to have been to present a broad, very general outline of the working out of the Master-Slave dialectic in history. With this in mind, we will examine Kojève's account of history. In his view, history can be divided into three periods.

The first period of history is dominated by the ethos of the Master. It has been argued that a state of Masters could not exist. As Dennis Goldford has pointed out, Kojève's original description of the Master as one who prefers death to submission would seem to make

the establishment of a state of Masters impossible, since Masters would be unable to coexist peacefully.²⁹ Kojève says that this is a phenomenon which is not explained by Hegel, but he suggests that:

...the state is born from the mutual recognition of the victors of a *collective* fight for recognition. If several men fight together against common adversaries whom they end by enslaving, they can mutually recognize each other as Masters without having fought among themselves. "Fellow citizen" would therefore be at the beginning identical to "brother-in-arms."³⁰

This seems reasonable. In such a state Masters could coexist. Relations could still be asymmetrical, as long as they (at least most of the time) stopped short of combat. This state of Masters is the pagan state. The Masters are citizens, recognized by the city for their risk of life in war. Work is performed by Slaves, and neither the work nor the Slave is recognized at all.

The second period was dominated by slavish ideologies, particularly Christianity. The Christian world replaced the pagan one. This change could not have come about by a revolution, since that would have entailed a fight between Master and Slave, something the Slave was still afraid to attempt. Indeed, Kojève

²⁹Dennis Goldford. "Kojève's Reading of Hegel." *International Philosophic Quarterly* Volume 22 (1982) pp. 287-288.

³⁰HMC, p.32.

argues, Christianity is simply a sublimation of this fear. If a "slave rebellion" had been the occasion of change, Kojève argues:

...the Slave would have become the free Worker who fights and risks his life; hence he would cease to be a Slave and consequently could not realize a Christian, essentially slavish, World.³¹

The transition from the pagan world of the Master to the Christian world of the Slave came about, not from any action of the Slave, but because of contradictions within the Master state. In the pagan state, the Masters are citizens, responsible for making war, and the meaning of the state is expressed in constant wars for prestige, aimed ultimately at forcing the recognition of all other states.

It might seem that a successful state would provide satisfaction to its citizens. Kojève argues that it does not, because it does not resolve the contradiction between the universal and particular elements of human existence. The state of the Masters recognizes its citizens only insofar as they risk their lives in the wars for prestige. This risk is the same for all, and is thus universal and impersonal. The particular element in the existence of the Master is recognized only within the family, where he is loved for his own particular (biological) being. Since the universal value of

³¹IRH, p.57.

the Master is recognized only by the risk of that being, the conflict is irreconcilable. As Kojève explains:

Man cannot renounce his Family, since he cannot renounce the Particularity of his Being; nor can he renounce the State, since he cannot renounce the Universality of his Action. And thus he is always and necessarily criminal, either toward the State or toward the Family.³²

While it is this contradiction which ultimately dooms the pagan state, Kojève argues that it is Woman who is the "immediate agent of its ruin." In this view, Woman represents the family, the sphere of particularity which is necessarily opposed to the state. Her influence is greatest on the young man, who is not yet detached from the family, who, in Kojève's terms, "has not yet completely subordinated his Particularity to the Universality of the State," and who, because of the military nature of the state, must eventually come to power.³³ Kojève writes:

...once he has come to power, this young hero (=Alexander the Great) makes the most of his familial, even feminine, Particularity. He tends to transform the State into his private property, into a family patrimony, and to make the citizens of the State his own subjects.³⁴

³²IRH, p.61.

³³IRH, p.62.

³⁴IRH, p.62.

The "young hero" is able to accomplish this because of the nature of the Master state is such that it must wage perpetual wars for prestige. In this world of perpetual war, it is inevitable that one state will eventually dominate the others and form an empire, as Rome did. Once a city becomes the centre of a large enough empire, its own citizens are too few to defend its borders. (And, often, they prefer in any case to stay home and enjoy the spoils of victory.) This leads to a reliance on mercenaries, with the result that the citizens cease to be soldiers. Power passes to the Emperor and the army, as the Masters, the former citizens of the state, no longer possess the power to resist the "young hero's" attempts to concentrate power into his own hands, in effect turning the state into a patrimony, with himself as patriarch, or absolute ruler. The Masters, the former citizens of the state, no longer risk their lives, and so cease to be Masters, becoming instead subjects of the Emperor. In effect, they become Slaves, which is why, Kojève argues, "they accept the ideology of their Slaves: first Stoicism, then Skepticism, and - finally - Christianity."³⁵ This is how the pagan world could become a Christian world without a fight, without Slaves overcoming their fear of death.

³⁵IRH, p.63.

To put it more precisely, the former Masters become "pseudo-Slaves." They are not Masters, because they no longer fight, but neither are they true Slaves, because they do not work in the service of another. Because they are no longer Masters, they free their slaves. These do not become Masters, because they have not risked their lives. They join their former Masters in pseudo-slavery.³⁶ These pseudo-Slaves do not work in the forced service of another, so they are not true slaves. Yet obviously they must still work to survive. The essential difference between Slave and pseudo-Slave is in the nature of the Master for whom they toil. As we have seen, Kojève argues that work can only be a genuinely human action if it is performed in relation to an abstract idea. He writes:

...work can truly be Work, a specifically human Action, only on the condition that it be carried out in relation to an idea (a "project") - that is, in relation to something other than the given, and, in particular, other than the given that the worker himself is.³⁷

The pseudo-Slave is one who works, not for a Master, but for an abstract idea. In effect, he creates his own Master. And in so doing, he becomes something new, a Bourgeois. Kojève writes:

The Bourgeois does not work for another. But he does not work for himself, taken as a biological entity, either. He works for himself taken as a "legal *person*," as a private

³⁶IRH, p.63.

³⁷IRH, p.64.

Property-owner: he works for Property taken as such - i.e., Property that has now become *money*; he works for Capital.³⁸

Even the emperor, Kojève argues, "is but a Bourgeois, a private property-owner, whose Empire is his patrimony."³⁹ For the same reasons that Christianity was attractive to the Slave, it attracts the bourgeois, who, while he is not a Slave, is not yet free. This second period, or historical world, is the Christian bourgeois world.

The pagan ethos of the Masters gave way to the "slavish" ideology of Christianity. The ethos of the Master recognized only the universal aspect of human existence, made concrete by the risk of life in war, and was doomed to decline because it could not recognize the particular in man. Christianity recognizes the particular aspect of being, shown by the immediate relation of God to each person. However, Christianity avoids an impasse similar to that which destroyed the world of the Masters, because it also includes the possibility of a synthesis of particular and universal in the idea of individuality: the value, universally recognized, of each person. It thus contains, in ideal form, the possibility of definitive satisfaction and an end to history. However, in Christian theology, this synthesis is only achieved in the afterlife, in the Kingdom of

³⁸IRH, p.65.

³⁹IRH, p.63.

God. For it to be realized, it must be made concrete here on earth, in the perfect state. The idea of a heavenly kingdom must be replaced by an atheistic conception of an earthly utopia. In Kojève's words:

...the evolution of the Christian World is dual: on the one hand there is the *real* evolution, which prepares the social and political conditions for the coming of the "absolute" State; and on the other, an *ideal* evolution, which eliminates the *transcendent* idea, which brings Heaven back to Earth.⁴⁰

This ideal evolution is brought about by the Intellectual.

The Christian or bourgeois Intellectual is a human type peculiar to the Christian era, because it is only in this era that a man could not be a Master without necessarily becoming a Slave. He is not a Master, because he does not fight, but he is not a Slave, either, because he does no work. Being neither, Kojève argues that he is able to conceive the synthesis of Master and Slave. However, because he neither fights nor works, he does not act in a historical sense. That is to say, he does not change the world. He is unable to realize the synthesis he conceives; it remains purely verbal.⁴¹ His contribution is the secularization of the Christian ideal of the Individual, which provides the ideology of the final state. By his discourse he transforms the religious ideal of the Kingdom of

⁴⁰IRH, p.67.

⁴¹IRH, p.68.

Heaven, where all are recognized as individuals, into a political ideal, to be realized here on earth.

To realize the synthesis conceived by the Intellectual, "the ideal process must rejoin the real process; the social and historical conditions must be such that the ideology of the Intellectual can be realized."⁴² There is one final requirement. In order for the final synthesis to be realized, there must be conflict. Kojève argues:

Since the idea to be realized is the idea of a synthesis of Mastery and Slavery, it can be realized only if the slavish element of Work is associated with the element of Fighting for life and death, which characterizes the Master: the working-Bourgeois, to become a - "satisfied" - Citizen of the "absolute" State, *must* become a Warrior - that is, he must introduce death into his existence, by consciously and voluntarily risking his life, while knowing he is mortal.⁴³

Since, in the bourgeois era, there are no true Masters or Slaves, this cannot take the simple form of a slave revolt or class war. The bourgeois, Kojève argues, is the slave of capital, a concept he has himself created. In effect, he is his own slave. Hence, he must himself create the conditions in which he risks his life. Kojève argues that this is what took place during the French Revolution, in the form of Robespierre's Terror. In the Terror, Kojève argues:

⁴²IRH, p.68.

⁴³IRH, p.69.

The working Bourgeois, turned Revolutionary, himself creates the situation that introduces into him the element of death. And it is only thanks to the Terror that the idea of the final Synthesis, which definitively "satisfies" Man, is realized.⁴⁴

For Kojève, the French Revolution, and particularly Robespierre's Terror, served two necessary functions. In risking his life, the bourgeois becomes one who both fights and works, who embodies the synthesis of Mastery and Slavery. In fighting, he realizes the universal aspect of human existence (freedom from nature through the risk of life), while in his work he realizes the particular. The second essential function performed by Terror was the creation of the conditions which led to the rise of Napoleon. Napoleon, in Kojève's view, is the first to realize the human ideal. He writes:

...Napoleon himself is the wholly "satisfied" Man, who in and by his definitive Satisfaction, completes the course of the historical evolution of humanity. He is the human *Individual* in the proper and full sense of the word; because it is through *him*, through *this* particular man, that the "common cause," the truly universal cause, is realized; and because this particular man is recognized, in his very particularity, by all men, universally.⁴⁵

In the state created by Napoleon, Kojève argues, the ideals of the French Revolution are realized, and the conditions created in which

⁴⁴IRH, p.69.

⁴⁵IRH, p.69.

all can be satisfied. The citizens of this state combine the human activities of fighting and work, the universal and particular aspects of human existence. All are recognized mutually and universally in their individuality.

If man is to be finally satisfied, however, he must *know* that he is satisfied. He must be made conscious of his satisfaction. This, Kojève argues, was accomplished by Hegel, who explained and revealed Napoleon's satisfaction in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This necessary explanation is the culmination of the (short) third and final period of history, the period of German philosophy.⁴⁶

History ends, then, when man is satisfied and so ceases to change. For Kojève, this was accomplished (at least in principle) with the establishment of the Napoleonic Empire. With Napoleon's victory at Jena, he argues:

...the vanguard of humanity virtually attained the limit and the aim, that is, the end, of Man's historical evolution. What has happened since then was but an extension in space of the universal revolutionary force actualized in France by Robespierre-Napoleon.⁴⁷

History, then, was completed by Napoleon and explained by Hegel. The final synthesis is realized in the Universal and Homogeneous State,

⁴⁶IRH, p.70.

⁴⁷IRH, p.160n.

which satisfies man's desire for recognition. Self-consciousness reaches its highest development in the conscious understanding of the historical process and its end. The end of history is in fact a precondition for this development; since all history is change, it is only at the end that man ceases to change and can be definitively understood. This understanding, or perfect self-consciousness, is what Kojève calls Absolute Wisdom, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

It must be repeated that this account of the historical process is Kojève's interpretation (or appropriation) of Hegel. For the most part, Kojève agreed with what he presented as Hegel's view. During the pre-war period, however, Kojève believed that Hegel, while essentially correct, was wrong by 150 years about the date. At that time, Kojève says, he thought that history had not yet ended. While he agreed with Hegel on the question of *how* history would end, he believed that:

The ending of history was not Napoleon, it was Stalin, and it was I who would be responsible for announcing it, with the difference that I would not have the chance to see Stalin pass on horseback beneath my window....⁴⁸

⁴⁸Kojève, interview in *La Quinzaine Littéraire* 53 July 1-15, 1968. p.19. (my translation).

In the post-war period, however, Kojève writes that he came to realize that Hegel had indeed been correct, that history had ended, at least in principle, with the battle of Jena.⁴⁹ Kojève's change of mind on this point is important, as it was accompanied by a drastic change in his attitude, from anticipation to resignation at the end of history.

⁴⁹IRH, p.160n.

Chapter 2: Wisdom at the End of History

The end of history, for Kojève, is marked by two things: the coming of the Universal and Homogeneous State and the advent of the Wise Man, or Sage. This chapter will deal with Kojève's account of Absolute Knowledge or Wisdom, and the Wise Man who realizes it. If, as the word implies, philosophy is the love of wisdom, or the aspiration to wisdom as Kojève says, the Wise Man is not a philosopher. He does not need to aspire to wisdom, because he possesses it. He is not a philosopher, but the "Messiah" of philosophy, its culmination and completion.⁵⁰ Indeed, he can be seen as the culmination of human existence.

For Kojève, there are three possible definitions of the Wise Man, which are apparently different but are in fact strictly equivalent. First, the Wise Man is the person who is fully and completely self-conscious. In this definition, which Kojève argues is accepted by all philosophers:

⁵⁰Kojève. "Les Romans de la Sagesse" *Critique* VIII (60) May 1952, pp. 387-397. Page references to this article are from my appended translation, "Novels of Wisdom."

...that man is Wise who is capable of answering in a comprehensive or satisfactory manner all questions that can be asked him concerning his acts, and capable of answering in such a fashion that the entirety of his answers forms a coherent discourse.⁵¹

Kojève's Wise Man, then, always knows how and why he acts; he possesses perfect self-knowledge. And he is able to speak of this knowledge, explaining himself and his actions in a manner that is consistent and coherent, without contradiction or error. His knowledge contains both the mundane and the profound, and they are intimately related. Kojève argues:

...one can ask any question at all about any of our acts - that of washing, for example, or of paying taxes - with the result that, after several answers that call forth each time a new "why," one comes to the problems of the relationship between the soul and the body, between the individual and the State; to questions relating to the finite and the infinite, to death and immortality, to God and the World; and finally to the problem of *knowledge* itself, of this coherent and meaningful language that permits us to ask questions and to answer them.⁵²

A different series of questions, perhaps "how" rather than "why", could produce a series of answers, Kojève argues, that would finish by:

⁵¹IRH, p.75.

⁵²IRH, p.76.

...surveying all the Sciences taught in modern Universities. And perhaps one will discover still others, not yet in existence.⁵³

It would seem that the Wise Man is virtually all-knowing. If he could not answer some question in this series, his self-consciousness would not be perfect, and he would not be truly a Wise Man. The knowledge of the Wise Man is then virtually encyclopaedic.

It can be argued that the ability to answer any question in such a way that one's answers form a coherent and comprehensive discourse is not one that is possessed only by the Kojévian Wise Man who appears at the end of history. Any philosophical or religious system which reaches a certain level of sophistication would seem to give a similar ability to its adherents. Later in this chapter we will explore Kojève's response to this objection. For the moment, however, we will turn to the second definition of Wisdom.

This second definition of wisdom is one which was accepted by, among others, the Stoics. In this definition, the Wise Man is "that man who is perfectly *satisfied* by what he *is*."⁵⁴ Because he is satisfied, he has no reason to change. In this view, Kojève argues, the Wise Man "simply *is* and does not *become*; he maintains himself

⁵³IRH, p.76.

⁵⁴IRH, p.76.

in *identity* to himself and he is *satisfied* in and by this identity."⁵⁵ Kojève then argues that this definition of the Wise Man is in fact identical to the first. To be satisfied, one must be conscious of one's satisfaction, that is, self-conscious. Kojève argues:

...we believe in vain that we are satisfied; if someone comes and asks us the question "why" concerning our satisfaction and we cannot answer, [because we are not sufficiently self-conscious] this is enough to make the *satisfaction* disappear as if by enchantment (even if the sensation of *pleasure*, or of *happiness*, or of joy, or of simple well-being resists the test for a while).⁵⁶

If one is to be perfectly satisfied, it follows that one must be perfectly self-conscious, and we are back at the first definition.

Those who, mistakenly in Kojève's opinion, reject satisfaction as too easily attainable to be evidence of Wisdom, and who reject perfect self-consciousness as unattainable, may arrive at a third definition. Kojève writes that "they identify Wisdom with *moral* perfection. Hence the Wise Man would be the *morally* perfect man."⁵⁷ Again, Kojève argues, this definition can be shown to be identical to the first. The morally perfect man is satisfied by what he is. By definition, he must be satisfied. To be dissatisfied with one's moral perfection would be immoral and hence imperfect. For Kojève, the

⁵⁵IRH, p.77.

⁵⁶IRH, p.77.

⁵⁷IRH, p.78.

particular content of the Wise Man's moral perfection is unimportant. What matters is that the morality which is perfectly realized in and by the Wise Man must be a universal morality. Kojève argues:

...either the concept of moral perfection has no meaning, or else it must be understood as a human existence that serves as the model for *all* men, the final end and motive of their actions being conformity to this model.⁵⁸

To reject the idea of a universal moral standard is to accept ethical relativism. In its most radical form, moral "perfection" then becomes indistinguishable from purely subjective satisfaction, or, as Kojève puts it:

...one need only *believe oneself* perfect in order to *be* perfect...to believe that one is perfect is obviously to be *satisfied* by what one is.⁵⁹

Used in this way, Kojève argues, the concept of perfection becomes meaningless. If we are to speak of moral perfection in any meaningful way, then, it is necessary to speak of a universal standard. For Kojève, the Wise Man is:

...the man who realizes moral perfection by his existence, or in other words, who serves as the model for himself and for *all* others.⁶⁰

⁵⁸IRH, pp.78-79.

⁵⁹IRH, p.79.

⁶⁰IRH, p.80.

It can be argued that these two propositions are not equivalent, that one may be a model for others, even many others, without being morally perfect. Kojève's identification of these two ideas is clearer if we consider his definition of morality (which he attributes to Hegel).

In his book, *Modern French Philosophy*, Vincent Descombes quotes Kojève:

What then is the morality of Hegel?...What exists is good inasmuch as it exists. All action, being a negation of the existing given, is therefore bad, or sinful. But sin may be forgiven. How? By its success. Success absolves the crime because success is a new reality that *exists*. But how can success be estimated? Before this can be done, History must have come to an end.⁶¹

Morality is what is successful, the given reality. And at the end of history, humans have ceased to negate the given. What is successful at this point is the moral order. It will remain unchanged because the world has ceased to change. The Wise Man, because he understands this, perfectly understands the moral order. This moral order is universal, moreover, because the given reality is the Universal and Homogeneous State. The Wise Man is then the moral exemplar for all.

⁶¹Descombes, pp.15-16.

Neither can it be argued that there might be differences on any other issue among a plurality of Wise Men. For the Wise Man to be recognized universally, as he is by definition, there can only be one possible standard of Wisdom, and this is what Kojève argues:

...the Wise Man's knowledge is *total*, the Wise Man reveals the *totality* of Being through the *entirety* of his thought. Now, since Being obeys the principle of *identity* to itself, there is only one unique *totality* of Being, and consequently only one unique knowledge that reveals it entirely. Therefore there is only one unique possible type of (conscious) Wisdom.⁶²

There could be no competing truths; that which did not correspond to Wisdom would simply be error. It is here that we see the difference between Kojève's Wise Man and a person who is simply an adherent to some other philosophical or religious system. Not only is the discourse of the Wise Man coherent and consistent, it is finally and completely *true*. Other systems are simply particularly complicated errors. Kojève goes so far as to suggest that the Wise Man is "*omniscient*, at least potentially."⁶³ This qualification is important, and its significance must be understood if Kojève's view is to be taken at all seriously. Kojève is not making the patently silly claim that the Wise Man is *actually* omniscient. Later in this chapter we will explore the meaning of potential omniscience for Kojève.

⁶²IRH, p.81.

⁶³IRH, p.76.

For Kojève, then, the three possible definitions of the Wise Man are identical. This view can be accepted, however, only if we accept the premises upon which it is based. Kojève argues that if we accept the definition of man as "Self-Consciousness in his very 'essence' and being," and the view that "Self-Consciousness naturally, spontaneously, tends to *extend* itself," which were discussed in the previous chapter, we must conclude that:

...there *must* be an ideal of the Wise Man, that there *can* be only *one* type of Wise Man, and that the Wise Man answers to the threefold Hegelian definition.⁶⁴

Kojève recognizes, however, that this argument, even if accepted, does no more than establish the possibility of the existence of a Wise Man. And even this can be questioned. Kojève examines several of the possible objections.

The most fundamental of these possible counter-arguments is the denial of the view that self-consciousness is the basis of human life. Kojève writes:

...one can say: *either* that Self-Consciousness is a sort of sickness that man must, and can, surmount; or that, alongside of conscious men, there are *unconscious* men, who are nevertheless just as *human* - although in a different way.⁶⁵

⁶⁴IRH, pp.81-82.

⁶⁵IRH, p.83.

This view amounts as well to a denial of the proposition that there is one unique and universal type of Wisdom. And Kojève admits that there have been those, such as some Hindu and Buddhist thinkers, who have denied that self-consciousness was the essence of humanity, and lived according to this denial. There have been those who have sought to escape self-consciousness rather than develop it, seeing Nirvana or the unconscious "fourth state" as the ideal, rather than full self-consciousness, and Kojève admits that:

...there is no doubt that men have been *satisfied* in unconsciousness, since they have *voluntarily* remained in identity to themselves until their death. And...one can say that they have realized "moral *perfection*" (or a moral perfection), since there have been men who took them as the model.⁶⁶

Obviously, then, the definition of humanity in terms of self-consciousness, and the definition of Wisdom that is developed from it, do not necessarily apply to all humans. It can be argued that those who do not accept this definition are not truly human, but Kojève concedes that this would be purely arbitrary. He is forced to conclude, then, that:

...Hegelian Wisdom is a necessary ideal only for a definite type of human being, namely, for the man who puts the

⁶⁶IRH, p.84.

supreme value in Self-Consciousness; and only this man can realize this ideal.⁶⁷

Nor can the Wise Man attempt to convert others to his ideal through speech. The "unconscious" Wise Man, if he is consistent, will refuse to engage in argument. To speak or to listen to discussion, Kojève argues, is to accept self-consciousness as the ideal. In Kojève's view, a true "unconscious Wise Man":

...will refuse all *discussion*. And then one could refute him only as one "refutes" a fact, a thing, or a beast: by physically destroying him.⁶⁸

It may not, however, be necessary to refute the unconscious "Wise Man." Often he can simply be ignored.

Kojève's Absolute Knowledge, then, has meaning only for those who accept the definition of human nature on which it is based. And even among these, only a few can hope to approach or realize it. These are the people who are concerned to extend their self-consciousness at all times.. We saw in the first chapter that for the historical process to advance, at each "dialectical turning point" in history there must be some who recognize that their world has changed, and by their discourse make others aware of their

⁶⁷IRH, p.84.

⁶⁸IRH, p.84.

situation, thus providing the impetus for further change. These are the philosophers. Kojève writes:

...it is the Philosopher, and only he, who wants to *know* at all costs where he is, to *become aware* of what he is, and who does not go on any further before he has become aware of it.⁶⁹

The rest of humanity tends to remain within the horizons of that which they already know. Passively or actively, they resist awareness of change or the need to change. Kojève argues:

...it is not by themselves, but through the *Philosopher* that they become aware - and even so, reluctantly - of an *essential* change in the "situation" - that is, in the World in which they live and, consequently, in themselves.⁷⁰

History, as we have seen, is driven by the basic human need for recognition. But it is understood, described, and thus advanced at each turning point by the Philosopher. Kojève's ideal of Wisdom, then, is realizable only by the Philosopher.

It is also necessary to recognize that Kojève is using the term "Philosopher" in a narrower sense than that of a lover of or aspirant to Wisdom. Kojève's Philosopher is necessarily an atheist, as well. For Kojève, philosophy must be understood as the path to Wisdom. If

⁶⁹IRH, p.85.

⁷⁰IRH, p.85.

this is not to be a futile pastime, it must be accepted that Wisdom is attainable. If not, then:

...the Philosopher is simply a madman, who claims or wants to be what one can *not* be and (what is worse) what he *knows* to be impossible.⁷¹

If one holds that Wisdom is attainable, but not by a human being within a human lifetime, one must argue that God exists, and Wisdom is realized in God. In that case, however, Kojève argues that such a person is a theologian, rather than a philosopher.⁷² Conversely, if one holds, with Kojève, that Wisdom is realizable within a human lifetime, it is necessary either to deny the existence of God, or to claim to be God.⁷³ In the face of the absurdity of the latter claim, the Philosopher becomes an atheist. The Wise Man, as defined by Kojève, is then the ideal, not for all humanity, but for atheist philosophers.

What, then, do we know of the Wise Man so far? He is necessarily the ideal for all atheist philosophers, and only an atheist philosopher can become a Wise Man. Beyond this, only at the end of history can a Wise Man come into being, because only at the

⁷¹IRH, p.89.

⁷²IRH, 88-92.

⁷³That is, God understood in something like the Christian sense, as immortal, omniscient, and omnipotent. This should not be confused with Kojève's occasional references to the Wise Man as a "mortal god."

end of history does humanity cease to change itself and its world. While history is still going on, the world is changing, and the discourse of even the greatest philosopher can reveal only a moment in the flux. What is true at one point in history may be false at another. Thus, it is only the citizen of the Universal and Homogeneous, that is to say, final State, the person who lives at the end of history, who can be a Wise Man.⁷⁴ And the Wise Man, while he embodies the culmination of philosophy, also, by his existence, marks its end. When Wisdom is achieved, the search for wisdom (philosophy) obviously ends. All truths are included and reconciled in the Wisdom of the Wise Man; what is excluded can only be error. In the Universal and Homogeneous State, the Wise Man will be universally recognized. Not all citizens of the final state will be Wise Men, because to become a Wise Man requires not just self-consciousness, but the will to extend it at all costs. However, all citizens of the Universal and Homogeneous State will be self-conscious (potential Wise Men) and thus able to recognize the person who actually possesses Wisdom. Those who would persist in error, such as those who embrace traditional religions, or reject self-consciousness in favour of an unconscious state, will be, if they cannot be converted, destroyed in the process of establishing the

⁷⁴IRH, pp. 94-96.

Universal and Homogeneous State. (Witness the effects of modernization on traditional societies and beliefs.)

What is the content of the Wise Man's wisdom? If we limit the possible content to what a mortal human being can learn within the limits of his lifetime, it becomes obvious that true omniscience is not possible. While the Wise Man could *in principle* answer all questions concerning his actions, and this line of questioning could *in principle* lead through all the sciences known to man, it is obvious that the reality would be somewhat different. Kojève argues that the philosopher can not also be an active politician because he simply does not have enough time for both roles.⁷⁵ It would seem reasonable to suppose that the Wise Man, who for all his wisdom remains a human being, is no more likely to have the time to learn all that he is capable of learning. Real omniscience, then, would seem to be beyond the grasp of any single human. With a few exceptions, Kojève himself tends to qualify his claim, usually referring to the Wise Man as "virtually," "potentially," or "in principle" omniscient.⁷⁶ What, then, is "virtual" omniscience? All it can mean, I would argue, is that the Wise Man can learn whatever he wants to or needs to. And all that means is that the world, including humanity, is rational and can be understood, and statements can be made about the world that

⁷⁵TW, p.150.

⁷⁶IRH, pp.78-85.

are true now and forever. This is why there can be Wise Men only at the end of history, because it is only at the end of history that humans cease to change, and a discourse about humanity can be considered true, complete, and final.

If this is true, then it must be that at the end of history, all humans are at least potentially Wise Men. If the concept is to have any significance, however, it would seem that there must be something that the Wise Man actually (as opposed to potentially) knows, and it is this knowledge that sets him apart. What, then, is the content of Wisdom? For Kojève, "the Wise Man's knowledge reveals nothing other than Man in the World."⁷⁷ That is to say, the Wise Man's knowledge reveals History, understood as the process of the development of human self-consciousness. "Revealing" here means to explain historical events in terms of "their human *meaning* and their *necessity*," as opposed to merely describing a series of events.⁷⁸ It is a reconstruction of history *a priori* by deduction from the premises of human anthropology, which is then applied to explain the significance of actual events. This can only be done after history has been completed, as we have seen, because only then has man ceased to change and only then can he be completely understood. Kojève writes:

⁷⁷IRH, p.90.

⁷⁸IRH, p.166.

It is first necessary that *real* History be completed; next, it must be *narrated* to Man; and only then can the Philosopher, becoming a Wise man, *understand* it by reconstructing it "*a priori*" in the *Phenomenology*. And this same phenomenological understanding of History is what transforms the Philosopher into a Wise man....⁷⁹

The Wise Man, then, is one who understands History as the process of the development of self-consciousness, driven by the desire for recognition. He is the person who could write or understand a description of history like the one outlined in the previous chapter.

If this is the knowledge that defines the Wise Man, how does this relate to Kojève's claim that the Wise Man is virtually omniscient? Wisdom is fundamentally knowledge of oneself in particular and humanity in general. If we return to the idea that Wisdom consists in being able to answer any question about any of our acts, we can see that, in any such series, we will eventually come to a question about human nature. A series of questions relating to science, for instance, would eventually come to questions about the human whose observations or actions are at the basis of science. The Wise Man would be able, if he chose, to answer *all* these questions, although he might have to spend considerable time learning the answers. Once the line of questioning arrived at the human element, however, the Wise Man would be able to answer

⁷⁹IRH, p.166.

immediately, out of his knowledge of himself and humanity. And this is essentially what Kojève argues. He writes:

To ask any question whatsoever leads sooner or later, after a longer or shorter series of answers-questions, to one of the questions found within the...Knowledge that the Wise Man possesses.⁸⁰

If not quite omniscience as it is normally understood, this seems to be as close as mortal humans can come. And for those who hold self-consciousness to be the essence of humanity and its fullest possible development the goal of human history (the Philosophers), the achievement of Kojévian Wisdom is the culmination of human existence. It is not surprising then that Kojève writes:

...by seeing in the Wise Man the human ideal in general, the Philosopher attributes to himself as Philosopher a human value without equal (since, according to him, only the Philosopher can become a Wise Man).⁸¹

Assuming that we accept this view, we are left with the question of how the Wise Man can know that his knowledge is true and complete.

Kojève argues that there are two criteria by which a would-be Wise Man could judge whether he had indeed achieved Wisdom. One criterion was whether in fact history had ended, since, as we have seen, Wisdom is only possible at the end of history. The second

⁸⁰IRH, p.94.

⁸¹IRH, p.88.

criterion, which we will examine first, was the circularity of the Wise Man's knowledge. Kojève argues that Hegel's philosophy begins with the simplest, most elementary description of reality, which reduces to the statement that "Being *is*." Hegel then shows that this is incomplete, only an aspect of reality, a thesis which engenders an antithesis. These combine to produce a synthesis, which becomes in turn a new thesis.⁸² Continuing in this fashion through the history of philosophy (and Kojève contends that all history can be reduced to the history of philosophy⁸³), Kojève argues that :

Hegel finally comes to a point that is none other than his point of departure: the *final* synthesis is also the *initial* thesis. Thus he establishes that he has gone around or described a *circle*, and that if he wants to continue, he can only *go around again*: it is impossible to *extend* his description; one can only *make it again* as it has already been made once.⁸⁴

Kojève argues that Hegel's final truth is thus non-negatable, in that any philosophical arguments which could be brought up in opposition would prove to be already contained in the whole. He concludes that:

...the circularity of the Hegelian description proves that it is complete and hence correct: for an erroneous or incomplete description, which stopped at a lacuna or

⁸²IRH, p.193.

⁸³HMC, p.35.

⁸⁴IRH, p.194.

ended in an impasse, would never come back upon itself.⁸⁵

This is not an entirely convincing argument. While it is true that a comprehensive knowledge would be circular, since all knowledge is contained within it, it does not follow that all circular knowledge is true and complete. It seems that circularity is a guarantee only of a certain internal coherence. While Kojève appears in the above passages to accept Hegel's view (or what he presents as Hegel's view), he contradicts this elsewhere in the same chapter. Kojève argues that Hegel's circular system contains:

...a dialectical metaphysic and a dialectical phenomenology of Nature, both clearly unacceptable, which should, [according to Hegel], replace "vulgar science" (ancient, Newtonian, and hence our own science too).⁸⁶

If nature is dialectical, Kojève argues, then it must be understood as itself "creative or historical", that is, constantly changing itself. It follows then that natural science must be historically bound. Kojève argues that this would make history impossible to understand. He writes:

If stones and trees, and also the bodies and the animal "psychism" of the men of the time of Pericles, were as different from ours as the citizens of the ancient city

⁸⁵IRH, p.194.

⁸⁶IRH, p.213n.

are from us, we would be able to understand neither a Greek treatise on agriculture and architecture nor Thucydides' history, nor Plato's philosophy.⁸⁷

And Hegel, we might add, could never have written the *Phenomenology*. Kojève suggests that it is necessary to replace Hegel's view of nature with a dualistic ontology, which recognizes the difference between natural Being, characterized by identity with itself, and human Being, which creates itself in History.⁸⁸ He writes:

...on the metaphysical level, two Worlds must be distinguished, which are inseparable but essentially different: the natural World and the historical or human World.⁸⁹

Of the development of this dualistic ontology, Kojève writes:

...it seems to be the principal philosophic task of the future. Almost nothing has yet been done.⁹⁰

For Kojève, then, the edifice of Wisdom is not yet complete.

If Hegel's system is indeed circular, and it contains errors, then it follows that circularity is not a guarantee of truth. Kojève adds to the confusion when he states elsewhere that Hegel's system

⁸⁷IRH, p.214n.

⁸⁸This would not necessarily mean that nature never changes. I doubt that Kojève means to deny evolutionary theory or cosmological theories. Changes in nature occur, but they are governed by the laws of nature, which are immutable.

⁸⁹IRH, p.216.

⁹⁰IRH, p.215n.

is obviously not circular.⁹¹ Kojève's view is not entirely clear, but it seems that it can be expressed as follows: the knowledge of the Wise Man, if it is true and complete, will be circular. However, Hegel did not accomplish this. While Wisdom is possible, for Kojève, it was not attained by Hegel. Hegel outlined the form which Wisdom would have to take, but did not succeed in completing the structure. The details, however, could be filled in by future Wise Men.

From this, then, we can conclude that Wisdom in its final form has yet to be achieved, and it is impossible, from this standpoint, to declare that history is over. In his later work, however, this is precisely what Kojève did. While he never articulated a replacement for the Hegelian circle, Kojève did declare that history had in fact come to an end. Kojève himself never explicitly justified this conclusion in terms of his earlier arguments about Wisdom, but we can find an indirect explanation of this in a review of three novels by Raymond Queneau. There, Kojève suggests that, at the present time, Wisdom can be compared to a building which is essentially completed, but still hidden in part by scaffolding. Those who are truly discerning can see its structure, even if details remain hidden.⁹² We will return to this point in the concluding chapter. The second criterion, the question of whether history has in fact ended,

⁹¹IRH, p.98n.

⁹²"Novels of Wisdom," p.149.

and the Universal and Homogeneous State is a reality, will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Determinism or Propaganda?

Has history already ended? Is the Universal and Homogeneous State a reality at present? Kojève admits that "we are indeed far from it."⁹³ However, he argues, it cannot be proven that it is impossible. It remains an ideal which may yet be realized. In the absence of the final state, it cannot be proven that the account of history given by Kojève is true. However, neither can it be proven false. It, too, remains an ideal. These ideals, Kojève argues:

...can be transformed into *truth* only by negating *action*, which will destroy the World that does not correspond to the idea and will create by this very destruction the World in conformity with the ideal.⁹⁴

We saw earlier that, for Kojève, the definition of Wisdom he outlines is valid only for those who accept its premises. Those who do not cannot be refuted or convinced, only destroyed. For Kojève, then, the definition of Wisdom, the anthropological premises on which it is based, and the world in which it may be realized, do not constitute a description of reality as it is. Rather, they are parts of

⁹³IRH, p.97.

⁹⁴IRH, p.98.

a philosophical and political project which amounts to an attempt to remake the world. If we assume that history has not yet ended, and the Wise Man has not yet appeared, Kojève argues, we can accept his anthropology and his account of history:

...only on the condition that one wants to *act* with a view to the realization of the Hegelian state that is indispensable to the existence of [the Wise Man] - to act, or at least to *accept* and "justify" such an action, if it is done by someone, somewhere.⁹⁵

If we accept the definition of man in terms of self-consciousness, we must, if we are to be consistent, hold self-consciousness as the highest human value. Logically it then follows that we must work toward the establishment of the Universal and Homogeneous State, where self-consciousness can be fully realized in the person of the Wise Man.

For Kojève, then, the progress of human history towards the establishment of the Universal and Homogeneous State and the realization of Wisdom is not an inevitable process dictated by the basic elements of human nature. It is a project which may be realized if it is supported or advanced by enough people. And Kojève's account of History and Wisdom can best be understood as propaganda supporting this project. It is not truth, but an idea which

⁹⁵IRH, p.98.

may become true if realized. If it is to become truth, it must win out over other, competing ideals. Kojève mentions, as one example of an alternative, what Nietzsche called the "Chinese" ideal of the:

..."citizen" (in the non-Hegelian sense of the term) who is made completely "brutish" in and by the *security* of his *well-being* ... Nietzsche seriously envisaged the possibility that the ideal that he called "Chinese" might become *universal*. And this does not seem to be absurd: it is possible, if it is not opposed.⁹⁶

Elsewhere, Kojève writes of the possibility that, rather than a progress to complete satisfaction and the end of history, there might be "a stopping along the way." Man might cease to change and progress and descend into animality, without achieving Wisdom or satisfaction.⁹⁷ Kojève's project is an alternative to these and other possible paths. Kojève presents himself as an interpreter of Hegel, and it must be understood that, for him, this role has a special meaning. Kojève writes:

...every interpretation of Hegel, if it is more than idle talk, is nothing but a program of struggle and one of work (and one of these "programs" is called *Marxism*). And this means that the work of an interpreter of Hegel takes on the meaning of a work of political propaganda.⁹⁸

⁹⁶IRH, p.84.

⁹⁷IRH, p.220.

⁹⁸HMC, pp. 41-42.

Kojève saw himself, not as a scholarly interpreter interested in philological accuracy, but as an activist, even a propagandist, and it is, at least partially, as a work of propaganda designed to advance a philosophical and political project that his account of Wisdom should be understood.

For Kojève, then, at least in the pre-war period, the end of history was yet to be realized. It was a project to be completed. And he saw himself as working for its completion. Stanley Rosen goes so far as to suggest that Kojève saw himself as a god:

It was Kojève's intention to go as far as possible toward the overcoming of the separation between theory and practice and thus to bring about what he called the universal and homogeneous world-state. If a proper definition of a god is one who creates a world, then Kojève's intentions were divine.⁹⁹

In Rosen's view, Kojève's account of history appears as simply an arbitrary construction, "a revolutionary project of Kojève's will, designed to keep history moving in its development towards completion."¹⁰⁰ I am inclined to argue, however, that this overstates the importance of propaganda for Kojève.

⁹⁹HP, p.92.

¹⁰⁰HP, p.103.

While it is obvious from Kojève's writings that he saw the Universal and Homogeneous State as a project to be advanced, and that he saw his own function, at least in part, as that of a propagandist for this project, I do not think that Kojève's anthropology and the theory of history he derives from it can be regarded as simply constructions intended to provide "philosophical" propaganda for the Universal and Homogeneous State. The fact that Kojève never repudiated his views, even after he grew disenchanted with the result they implied, is compelling evidence of that. For Kojève, only in the Universal and Homogeneous State could humanity's essential nature be realized, and only there could humanity be definitively satisfied.

If we argue that Kojève's account of history is not simply a construction, it is necessary to account for the importance of propaganda for Kojève. This brings us into confrontation with an opposite interpretation of Kojève. There are elements in Kojève's anthropology which could be understood as leading to a deterministic view of history. If the end of history is inevitable, determined from the beginning by the fundamental facts of human nature, why is propaganda necessary? Would history not end in the Universal and Homogeneous State even if Kojève never wrote a word?

If we reject the view that Kojève's account of history is purely a construction, are we then left with the view that it describes an inexorable progress towards a predetermined end? While there are elements of Kojève's work which could be read as leading to a deterministic account of history, they are incompatible with his emphasis on human freedom. While Kojève's views are firmly rooted, as we have seen, in a particular conception of human nature, they need not be understood as leading to any sort of historical determinism.

A deterministic reading of Kojève's account of history would be based on some elements of his anthropology, most particularly on the desire for recognition. In Kojève's account of human nature, the fundamental characteristic of humanity is self-consciousness, which can only reach its fullest development when the basic human desire for recognition is satisfied. When this finally occurs, history ends, as humans have no more desire to change their world.

The desire for recognition is, for Kojève, the driving force behind the historical process. More than that, it is the fundamental drive behind all human behaviour. Humans behave as they do, Kojève argues, because they desire recognition. It may be objected that humans act for many reasons, not just for the recognition of others. One might, for example, act in a certain way for religious reasons, heedless of the opinions of others. Kojève argues, however, that in

such a case the person would be seeking the "recognition" of God. He writes, "in fact 'God' is only the 'social milieu' substantialized and projected into the beyond."¹⁰¹ And for Kojève, the social milieu is constituted by relations of recognition among its members. The religious person is then acting, consciously or not, to satisfy his desire for recognition. A similar argument applies to those who act, or seem to act, "in order not to fall in one's own esteem." This, Kojève argues, "is only an illusion." He writes:

In this case there is a division of individuality into its two components: the one which acts represents the Particularity of the agent; the one which judges him "morally" represents his Universality - that is, the *social* aspect of his existence; the man judges his own "particular" actions in terms of the "universal" values accepted by the society of which he is a part.¹⁰²

Or, if he does not judge his behaviour by the values of his society, he judges it by values which he wishes to have recognized by that society. Whether conscious or unconscious, direct or mediated, Kojève holds that the desire for recognition is the fundamental force driving human action.

It might seem that this would lead to a deterministic conception of human action, and hence a view of the historical

¹⁰¹IRH, p.223n.

¹⁰²IRH, p.223n.

process as something predetermined, heading to an inevitable end. This would seem to contradict Kojève's contention that history "is a free (*frei*) series of contingent (*zufällig*) events."¹⁰³ However, this is not necessarily true. While the desire for recognition will tend to incline humans to behave in certain ways, and thus impart a certain very general direction to historical development, this does not mean that historical events are determined. Humans may pursue satisfaction of this desire in a number of ways. Even if we accept Kojève's view that mutual recognition is the only way that this desire can be universally and definitively satisfied, and that the pursuit of mutual recognition is therefore the most rational course for humans to follow, we are in no way forced to accept determinism. It is obvious from even a cursory study of the past or present that humans do not always act rationally.

Argument from analogy is often misleading, but it may be useful here. Human existence, and hence the development of human societies, is conditioned by the facts of human biology. For example, the fact that human children are born helpless and mature slowly requires that a society, if it is to be viable, create some sort of institution for their care. This fact, however, in no way determines human action; the need has been satisfied in many different ways. At

¹⁰³IRH, p.154.

most, it gives human development a very general direction. I would argue that the desire for recognition has a similar effect. It gives a broad general direction to history, without in any way determining events or outcomes.

If we apply this view to Kojève's early account of the coming of the end of history, we arrive at the conclusion that it is not *necessarily* a truth. It may be made true, if history is brought to an end, by, as Kojève says, the destruction of all worlds which do not conform. At this stage, however, it remains simply a project whose realization may be part of the future. It is not the case that history was inevitably driven to this result, but that it may be steered in this direction. And, if we take the position, as Kojève later did, that history has in fact ended, we still do not have to accept the view that it was determined. On this view, Kojève's account is a simple description of the final truth. It is not that history *had* to happen this way, but simply that it *did* end, or is in the process of ending, in this way. Man at the end of history ceases to change himself and his world, not because he cannot change further, but simply because, being essentially satisfied, he does not want to change. And history only ends if humanity reaches this point. The desire for recognition is sufficient to provide an impetus to move history in a certain general direction, which, in Kojève's view, will mean that history will reach some sort of end if and when it is definitively satisfied,

but it does not determine events. The march of history could conceivably be (or have been) stopped, or diverted in another direction.

It must be admitted that this interpretation stresses some of Kojève's expressed views over others. There is a certain tension within Kojève's work on this issue. In a letter to Leo Strauss, written in 1950, Kojève appears to accept a degree of determinism when he writes, "Historical action necessarily leads to a specific result," and implies that, while particular events are contingent, the end result (the "End-State") is pre-determined.¹⁰⁴ This is difficult to reconcile with his other, earlier statements about the possibility of a "stopping along the way" or the possibility of Nietzsche's "Chinese" ideal becoming universal "if it is not opposed."¹⁰⁵ I am not sure that it is entirely possible to explain away this tension. We can note, however, that the letter to Strauss was written after Kojève had reached the conclusion that history, in essence, had ended in 1806. If history has indeed ended, it may be that it is appropriate to speak of it as having been inevitable. Since man has ceased to change, he can be fully understood, and it can be seen that his nature had to lead him to such an end. Even in 1950, moreover, Kojève

¹⁰⁴letter to Strauss, September 19, 1950 in OT p.256.

¹⁰⁵IRH, pp.220n, 84.

acknowledges that the final form of the Universal and Homogeneous State remains to be decided.¹⁰⁶

This view gives us an explanation of Kojève's propaganda that is somewhat different from that offered by Rosen. What we see now is not the hubris of a would-be god, but action that accords with Kojève's view of the necessary role played by philosophers in shaping political history, which he outlined in his review of Leo Strauss's *On Tyranny*. In "Tyranny and Wisdom," Kojève admits that the direct political action of philosophers is limited, for the simple reason that by Kojève's definition, a philosopher is one who devotes *all* his time to philosophy. Since political action also requires time, the dilemma is insoluble. Kojève writes:

Faced with the impossibility of *acting* politically without giving up philosophy, the philosopher gives up political action.¹⁰⁷

However, while the philosopher does not act directly, his ideas inspire and direct others (statesmen or tyrants) to act to realize them. Kojève argues, for example, that Alexander the Great, who in Kojève's view was the first to attempt to found a universal state (i.e. one based on a common humanity, rather than race or caste), was guided by "Socratic-Platonic" philosophical ideals. And it is this

¹⁰⁶letter to Strauss, September 19, 1950 in OT p.256.

¹⁰⁷TW, p.166.

idea that is still at the root of all attempts to create a universal state.¹⁰⁸ Kojève concludes from this that:

...it is exclusively the *philosophical* idea going all the way back to Socrates that acts *politically* on earth, and that continues in our time to guide the political actions and entities striving to actualize the *universal* State or Empire.¹⁰⁹

Alexander aimed at an empire that would be universal, but not homogeneous. While the ideal of homogeneity had its roots in religion (primarily Christianity), Kojève argues that:

...the religious Christian idea of human homogeneity could achieve real *political* import only once modern philosophy succeeded in *secularizing* it (=rationalizing it, transforming it into coherent discourse).¹¹⁰

Once secularized by the philosophers, the ideal is transformed further by the intellectuals, so that it ceases to be "utopian" and becomes instead the basis for concrete political action, which is in turn carried out by tyrants and statesmen.¹¹¹

We have described history as a process by which humans seek satisfaction of their desire for recognition. As well, however, Kojève describes it as a progressive unfolding of philosophy, and

¹⁰⁸TW, pp. 170-171.

¹⁰⁹TW, p.172.

¹¹⁰TW, p.173.

¹¹¹TW, p.173.

describes the goal of history as the attainment of Wisdom. In effect, it seems, we have two processes acting at the same time. For Kojève, both are necessary. It is the philosopher who understands and describes in his discourse a particular historical epoch, and it is this discourse which, directly or through the mediation of intellectuals, moves the tyrant or statesman to negate the given situation and create a new one, which is itself in turn understood and explained by the philosophers, bringing them a step closer to Wisdom. The two progressions are thus interdependent. While the philosopher usually provides the ideals which move the tyrants to act, it would be an oversimplification to say that history is just the realization of philosophy, or that statesmen are just tools of philosophers. Without the changes brought about by statesmen, there would be no new situations for the philosophers to describe, and thus no philosophical progress. As Kojève writes:

...if philosophers gave Statesmen no political "advice" at all, in the sense that no political teaching whatsoever could (directly or indirectly) be drawn from their ideas, there would be no historical *progress*, and hence no History properly so called. But if the Statesmen did not eventually *actualize* the philosophically based "advice" by their day-to-day political action, there would be no philosophical *progress* (toward Wisdom or Truth) and hence no Philosophy in the strict sense of the term...One may therefore conclude that while the emergence of a reforming tyrant [or statesman] is not conceivable without the prior existence of the philosopher, the coming of the wise man must necessarily be preceded by

the revolutionary political action of the tyrant (who will realize the universal and homogeneous State).¹¹²

The search for mutual recognition and satisfaction and the search for Wisdom are necessary to each other. They coexist in a dialectical relationship in which each reacts to and advances the other. We should note here that the notion of philosophical "progress" does not imply that all philosophers have simply been links in a linear development towards Kojévian Wisdom. That would again imply some sort of determinism. There have no doubt been philosophers, in the generally accepted sense of the term, whose political influence has been minimal, or whose ideas have led in different directions than that leading towards the Universal and Homogeneous State. Kojève often appears to only consider as "true" philosophers those whose thought has led towards his goal.

Given this view of the political role played by philosophers, we can better understand Kojève's own role as a "philosophical propagandist." In his early period, when he thought that the end of history was yet to come, Kojève apparently believed that history had advanced to the point that some sort of Universal and Homogeneous State was, if not inevitable, at least the most likely prospect. All that remained was to speed its coming and determine its final form.

¹¹²TW, pp.174-175.

In Kojève's view, this form would be decided by the outcome of the struggle between Russia and the West (a struggle which he finally decided had been won by the West, specifically by America).¹¹³ His own philosophical efforts can be seen as attempts to articulate the philosophical justification for the Universal and Homogeneous State, while his work as a bureaucrat can be understood as an attempt to help create the material conditions for its formation.¹¹⁴ His work may indeed be called propaganda, but I would argue that it should be understood as propaganda in the strictest sense, defined as "a systematic effort to persuade a body of people to support or adopt a particular opinion, attitude, or course of action," rather than in the more often used sense of "a body of distortions and half-truths calculated to bias one's judgment or opinions."¹¹⁵ He was not attempting to create the Universal and Homogeneous State *ex nihilo*, but to steer events, which were already moving in a general direction, towards a particular version of their goal. Having described Kojève's efforts as being directed towards a particular goal, the establishment of the Universal and Homogeneous State, it is now necessary to examine that goal.

¹¹³IRH, p.161n.

¹¹⁴Kojève wrote to Strauss that he considered it essential that the West become economically and politically integrated if it was to defeat Russia and provide the model for the Universal and Homogeneous State, and it in these areas (EEC, GATT) that he worked. He seems by 1950 to have lost his earlier admiration for Stalin. (letter to Strauss, September 19, 1950 OT p.256).

¹¹⁵*Funk & Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary* 1982 p.1080.

Chapter 4: The Universal and Homogeneous State

For Kojève, as we have seen, history is completed in and by the Universal and Homogeneous State. It is the state in which humanity's deepest desire, the desire for recognition, is satisfied. Kojève argues that the final state is homogeneous in that differences of class and race are overcome, so that each citizen recognizes others, and is recognized in turn, not as a representative of a particular group (i.e., as a worker, or a white man, or a capitalist), but as an individual. And he or she is recognized universally, because the final state is itself universal. Kojève writes:

...recognition is truly universal, for, by definition, the State embraces the whole of the human race (even in its past, through the total historical tradition which this State perpetuates in the present; and in its future, since henceforth the future no longer differs from the present in which Man is already fully satisfied).¹¹⁶

This state, Kojève admits, does not exist as yet, at least not in its final form, and he argues that Hegel knew this as well. Hegel, says Kojève:

¹¹⁶IRH, p.237.

...only asserted that the germ of this State was present in the World and that the necessary and sufficient conditions for its growth were in existence.¹¹⁷

In actualizing the ideals of the French Revolution, Napoleon established the basis from which the Universal and Homogeneous State could develop. In his early period, Kojève saw this development as both necessary and good. As we have seen, he did not regard it as inevitable, but he saw it as necessary as the way to allow human nature to reach its highest potential in complete self-consciousness. And Kojève saw the coming of the Universal and Homogeneous State as good, in two senses of the term. Specifically, as we have seen, what is good for Kojève is what succeeds. And the Universal and Homogeneous State, as the final state, is the best state, because it will not, can not, be superseded.¹¹⁸ It seems as well that Kojève saw the Universal and Homogeneous State as good in a more generally accepted sense of the word. If history, as Hegel said, was a "slaughter-bench," the end of history would be radically different. The coming of the Universal and Homogeneous State, Kojève wrote, would mean the end of "wars and bloody revolutions," those two great evils that have plagued humanity throughout history. Post-historical man would no longer work, or would work as little

¹¹⁷IRH, p.97.

¹¹⁸letter to Strauss September 19,1950 OT p.255.

as possible, because nature would have been definitively conquered. Philosophy, it is true, would disappear, but only because it had succeeded. The *search* for Wisdom would be replaced by the contemplation of achieved Wisdom. Beyond this, Kojève writes:

...all the rest can be preserved indefinitely; art, love, play, etc., etc.; in short, everything that makes Man *happy*.¹¹⁹

It is true that man, understood as a historical (that is, one who changes the given through fighting and work) individual, would disappear. For Kojève, however, this is not a catastrophe. Man would remain as an "animal in *harmony* with Nature or given Being."¹²⁰ Kojève is not, in this instance, using the word "animal" in a pejorative sense. Post-historical man, in this formulation, is an animal only in the sense that he is no longer driven to negate the given, to change his circumstances, in order to satisfy his desire for recognition. As Cooper points out, Kojève also thought that he could be regarded as a (mortal) "god."¹²¹ The name matters little; whether he was called a god or an animal, post-historical man would live in a state that satisfied his most fundamental desire, enjoying the activities that make him happy, while remaining free of the hardships of history. While not all of us would agree that this is a

¹¹⁹IRH, p.159n.

¹²⁰IRH, p. 158n.

¹²¹Cooper, p.274.

perfect state, it appears that, for Kojève, it was a goal worth pursuing.

Thus far we have dealt with Kojève's early views. In the post-war period, however, his ideas changed considerably. While he did not abandon his philosophical anthropology or his account of the historical process, his views changed in some very important aspects. In a footnote to the second edition of *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, published in 1962, Kojève retracts several of his previous statements. Previously he had believed, in disagreement with Hegel, that history had not ended, but was in the process of ending. By 1948 he had changed his mind. Kojève writes:

....I understood that the Hegelian-Marxist end of History was not yet to come, but was already a present, here and now. Observing what was taking place around me and reflecting on what had taken place in the world since the Battle of Jena, I understood that Hegel was right to see in this battle the end of History properly so-called.¹²²

In effect, history ended with the establishment of the Napoleonic Empire.¹²³ Events since that time, including the world wars and numerous revolutions, had simply been a matter of tidying up the details and bringing the less advanced areas of the world into the

¹²²IRH, p.160n.

¹²³While Napoleon was defeated and his empire dismantled, the ideas that underlay it remained. In Kojève's grand scheme, Waterloo is irrelevant.

Universal and Homogeneous State. Kojève writes, for example, that since 1806, nothing has happened except:

...the alignment of the provinces. The Chinese Revolution is nothing more than the introduction of the Napoleonic Code to China.¹²⁴

Related to Kojève's change of mind about the date of the end of history was a major change in his attitude towards it.

As we saw, in his earlier view, Kojève argued that what would disappear would be primarily the violent aspects of history, such as wars and revolutions. Things like art, love, and play would remain. In his later version, however, Kojève argues that these would no longer be *human* activities. Man's animalization would be complete. In his footnote to the second edition of *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, published in 1962, Kojève writes:

If Man becomes an animal again, his arts, his loves, and his play must also become purely "natural" again. Hence it would have to be admitted that after the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas, would play like young animals, and would indulge in love like adult beasts.¹²⁵

¹²⁴Kojève, interview in *La Quinzaine Littéraire* 53 July 1-15, 1968. p.19. (my translation).

¹²⁵IRH, p.159n.

The happiness Kojève predicted at the end of history becomes merely the contentment of the well-fed animal. As well, while Kojève earlier argued that philosophy would disappear, because its task had been successfully completed and it had been replaced by Wisdom, he now argues that Wisdom itself will disappear. He writes:

Animals of the species *Homo sapiens* would react by conditioned reflexes to vocal signals or sign "language," and thus their so-called discourses would be like what is supposed to be the "language" of bees. What would disappear, then, is not only Philosophy or the search for discursive Wisdom, but also that Wisdom itself. For in these post-historical animals, there would no longer be any "[discursive] *understanding* of the World and of self."¹²⁶

It is not immediately clear from this passage why Wisdom must disappear. Kojève offers a second explanation for this in his article "Les Romans de la Sagesse" a review of three novels by Raymond Queneau. Kojève argues that Queneau's work can be understood in Hegelian terms, and that, specifically:

...the three novels in question deal with Wisdom. Queneau describes three versions of the Wise Man, that is to say three of his aspects, or "constitutive moments," each different and complementary.¹²⁷

On first reading, Queneau's characters do not correspond to what we would normally think of as wise men. Neither do they appear to

¹²⁶IRH, p.160n.

¹²⁷"Novels of Wisdom", p.136.

correspond to Kojève's description. Valentin Brù, for example, the protagonist of *The Sunday of Life*, is a rather unimpressive figure. He has no real goals, no ambitions, and no apparent talents. He drifts through life, not caring too much about anything. Kojève, however, argues that he is a Wise Man. Kojève argues that Brù is, at least insofar as Queneau reveals him to us, satisfied. He compares him to a god, serene and "untouchable amidst catastrophes"¹²⁸, and argues further that there is no reason to suppose that he is not fully self-conscious, as well. Thus, he fits the twofold definition of the Wise Man. Valentin Brù, Kojève tells us, has achieved "the Wisdom which allows the concrete totality of the completed Universe to be embraced in a discursive glance."¹²⁹ Since history is essentially over, however, even this pastime becomes boring, a "sterile game" that Wisdom plays with itself. We can see how this might be possible. Since the Wise Man's Wisdom is by definition unchanging and unchangeable, mere contemplation would be repetitive and eventually boring. The truly Wise Man abandons this, plunging into "contact with the concrete reality of the senses" which brings him (and his wife Julia) only "pleasure and joy."¹³⁰ As an example, Kojève refers us to the final lines of *The Sunday of Life*, where a crowd is attempting to force its way onto a train:

¹²⁸ "Novels of Wisdom", p.144.

¹²⁹"Novels of Wisdom", p.150.

¹³⁰"Novels of Wisdom", p.151.

Three girls, inexplicably dressed as mountaineers, were taking advantage of the respectability of this costume to try and climb into a compartment through the window. Valentin had gone up to them and was courteously helping them in this enterprise.

Julia choked with laughter; it was so as to get his hand on their behinds.¹³¹

This, apparently, is the appropriate way for a Wise Man to spend his time. This is the life of "tranquil happiness in perfect satisfaction" that has been the goal of the historical process. And it is, Kojève tells us, the only life to which we can "reasonably aspire."¹³² Wisdom, then, does not so much disappear as it is abandoned. Because everything has been said, the discourse of the Wise Man, if he is not to just endlessly repeat himself, must lapse into silence.

Kojève's later view of the state of humanity at the end of history appears to be much bleaker than his earlier view. The long progress to full realization of the human potential ends in a reanimalization of Man. The long search for Wisdom ends in its loss. Man's struggle to rise above Nature ends in his return to it. This is all quite clear. What is less clear is what exactly Kojève means by the "reanimalization" of Man. In the terms of his anthropology, man

¹³¹ Raymond Queneau. *The Sunday of Life*. Barbara Wright trans. (London: John Calder Ltd., 1976). p.198.

¹³²"Novels of Wisdom", p.152.

is defined as the being who negates the given through fighting and work. If, at the end of history, a being neither fights nor works, he cannot, by Kojève's terms, be called human. Kojève calls him an animal, or alternatively, an "automaton." Those who attain Wisdom through contemplation can become "gods."¹³³ But even they get bored, and lapse into silence. This, too, is quite clear. But what does it mean for us, who are supposedly living at the end of history? Kojève does express this in more concrete terms. He saw very little difference between the communist and capitalist worlds, regarding each as a manifestation of the development of the Universal and Homogeneous State. While they were in competition with each other, in the end it would matter little which triumphed. He wrote in 1962 that "the Russians and Chinese are only Americans who are still poor but are rapidly proceeding to get richer." And from this, he concluded that:

...the "American way of life" was the type of life specific to the post-historical period, the actual presence of the United States in the World prefiguring the "eternal present" future of all of humanity. Thus, Man's return to animality appeared no longer as a possibility that was yet to come, but as a certainty that was already present.¹³⁴

¹³³letter to Strauss, Sept.19,1950. in OT p.255.

¹³⁴IRH, p.161n.

Post-historical man, then, is typified by Americans, or more precisely, Americans as seen through the eyes of a European intellectual. Post-historical man is a mindless consumer, concerned only with security and pleasure. Kojève has seen the future and it is George Babbitt.¹³⁵

Kojève did, however, see one possible alternative to this vision of post-historical man, one that was suggested to him by his travels to Japan. Kojève argued that, in Japan, one could see a society that had, since its isolation under the Togukawa shogunate in the early seventeenth century, experienced life at the end of history, with no wars to fight, where the nobility "ceased to risk their lives (even in duel) and yet did not for that begin to work."¹³⁶ In the absence of opportunity for meaningful, that is, historical, activity, the Japanese developed arts and disciplines which emphasized form over content, such as the tea ceremony and the Noh theatre. Such pursuits in effect elevated snobbery to a high art. And,

¹³⁵George Babbitt, the hero of Sinclair Lewis's 1922 novel *Babbitt*, is the quintessential American bourgeois, that human type so despised by European intellectuals. He is a salesman, a Booster, a member of the Good Citizens League. His speech consists almost entirely of the repetition of advertising slogans and the received wisdom of the mass media, perhaps prefiguring the "sign language" of Kojève's post-historical animals. Lewis, however, saw more deeply than Kojève. Babbitt, as contemptible as he seems on the surface, is yet deeply, almost heroically human.

¹³⁶IRH, p.161n Kojève apparently considers such events as the Satsuma rebellion, the Russo-Japanese war, Japanese campaigns of conquest in Korea and Manchuria, and the Second World War as insignificant to his thesis.

since no animal can be a snob, they were entirely human activities.

Kojève writes:

Snobbery in its pure form created disciplines negating the "natural" or "animal" given which in effectiveness far surpassed those that arose, in Japan or elsewhere, from "historical" Action- that is, from warlike and revolutionary Fights or from forced Work.¹³⁷

While originally these disciplines were the preserve of the nobility, Kojève argues that they have been democratized, and that the values they embody have pervaded Japanese culture to the extent that:

...all Japanese without exception are currently in a position to live according to totally *formalized* values - that is, values completely empty of all "human" content in the "historical" sense. Thus, in the extreme, every Japanese is in principle capable of committing, from pure snobbery, a perfectly "gratuitous" *suicide*...which has nothing to do with the *risk* of life in a Fight waged for the sake of "historical" values that have social or political content.¹³⁸

For Kojève, man demonstrates his humanity by opposing himself to the given reality, either by changing it through his work, or by risking his life in a fight, thus transcending his merely biological existence. At the end of history, neither of these is possible. From

¹³⁷IRH, p.161n.

¹³⁸IRH, p.162n For Kojève, there is a difference between a suicide performed for formal reasons and the risk of life in a historical struggle for recognition. Both, however, demonstrate freedom from biological necessity.

the example of Japanese culture, however, Kojève came to believe that it was possible for post-historical man to retain a semblance of humanity. In order for this to be possible, he writes:

...post-historical Man must continue to *detach* "form" from "content," doing so no longer in order actively to transform the latter, but so that he may *oppose* himself as a pure "form" to himself and to others taken as "content" of any sort.¹³⁹

For Kojève, then, there are but two choices for post-historical man: he can become a mindless consumer, in effect an animal, or he can become a snob. Both choices are responses to the central fact of life in the Universal and Homogeneous State, the fact that at the end of history there is nothing significant left to do. Since man is satisfied at the most fundamental level, he has no desire to negate his given circumstances. All the great political, religious and moral questions have been definitively answered. Man is a citizen of the Universal and Homogeneous State, living in peace and security. He is, if we accept Kojève's definition of man as one who fights and works, no longer human. The only possible "human" activity left to him is snobbery.

Kojève originally saw the Universal and Homogeneous State as a goal to be achieved, a purpose toward which he directed his

¹³⁹IRH, p.162n.

efforts, both as a philosopher and as a statesman. Yet he arrived at a view of post-historical life which inspires at best a feeling of resignation. How are we to understand this turn? The major point to be considered here is that, when Kojève regarded the end of history as good, he also saw the Universal and Homogeneous State as something yet to be achieved. While it remained a project, Kojève (rather like Marx in this respect) apparently gave little attention to what life would really be like in the post-historical era. His few statements on this appear to assume only that man will be satisfied, therefore happy. When he came to the conclusion that history had indeed already ended, Kojève realized that it would be possible to examine the life of post-historical man more closely, since it was already a fact.

In Kojève's later formulation, the "animal" who lives at the end of history is indeed somewhat less than human, and the coming of the post-historical world marks a decline from the heights reached by historical man. This is particularly clear in Kojève's discussion of the characters of Queneau's novels, who live at the end of history. Whereas Homer sang of the gods and heroes of the Trojan war, and Dante described the Inferno, Des Cigales, the Poet of Rueil, may, we are told, be offered the chance to write a poem in honour of

socks.¹⁴⁰ We saw that Kojève's change in attitude came about when he decided that the end of history was not a project to be advanced but an accomplished fact. Stanley Rosen's discussion of Kojève suggests that his disillusionment with the post-historical world may have been related to the necessary reappraisal (and diminution) of his own role. Rosen writes of Kojève:

...history had deprived him of the chance to fulfill his dream. After 1948, the most Kojève could claim for himself was the subordinate or daimonic task of bringing Hegel's wisdom up to date. What he had initially conceived as theological propaganda for himself, he now saw as in fact propaganda for Hegel.¹⁴¹

Once he had come to the conclusion that history had indeed ended, Kojève's attitude towards post-historical life was at best one of resignation. At times, as we see in "Les Romans de la Sagesse," he is playful, appearing to find the whole thing amusing. Michael Roth argues that in later works, such as his review of Francoise Sagan's novels, he became more openly and bitterly ironic.¹⁴² In the interview in *Quinzaine Littéraire*, published shortly after his death, Kojève says, "It is true that philosophical discourse, like history, is

¹⁴⁰Raymond Queneau. *The Skin of Dreams*. (*Loin de Rueil* in the original French) H.J. Kaplan trans. (New York: Howard Fertig Inc., 1979) pp.16-17.

¹⁴¹HP, p.105.

¹⁴²Michael S. Roth, *Knowing and History: Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth-Century France*. (Cornell University Press, 1988) p.135.

closed. That idea irritates."¹⁴³ At times, it seems that he regarded himself as a post-historical sage, an idle, playful god, rather like Queneau's heroes. However, unlike, for example, Valentin Brù, Kojève was not silent. Rosen suggests that Kojève could not entirely decide upon his own position in the post-historical world, whether he was "a *fainéant* god, a philosophical administrator of automata, or a potential Japanese snob." Rosen argues that Kojève knew that philosophy as such had ended, yet he continued to philosophize. In so doing, he effectively refuted himself.¹⁴⁴ This may be overstating the case; it is apparent that Kojève thought that there were still gaps in the circle of Wisdom, which needed to be filled.

While Kojève seems to have been at least resigned to the reanimalization of man, this later view of the end of history is less than attractive to most of us. If, at the end of all our struggles, we all become nothing but animals or automata, or at best, snobs, history seems to be something of a tragic joke. The obvious question is whether such an existence can really be satisfying to humans. Kojève argues that it can, and that it is the only form of satisfaction available to us. If we accept Kojève's anthropology, must we accept his conclusions? Leaving aside that question for the

¹⁴³interview in *La Quinzaine Littéraire* 53 July 1-15, 1968. p. 20, quoted in HP, p.106.

¹⁴⁴HP, p.106.

moment, we will examine the most powerful objection to Kojève's views of history and its end. This is the Nietzschean view put forward, first by Leo Strauss and later by Francis Fukuyama.

Chapter 5: Last Men at the End of History?

Leo Strauss and Kojève were contemporaries and friends, who had the greatest respect for each other while disagreeing on many fundamental issues. While their only public exchange was published in *On Tyranny* in 1954, they maintained a private correspondence for many years. Strauss's debate with Kojève is interesting for many reasons, not least because Strauss, at least to a degree, accepts Kojève's conclusions on the advent of the Universal and Homogeneous State, while absolutely rejecting the premises on which they are based. Specifically, Strauss rejects Kojève's anthropology, particularly the idea of recognition as the fundamental desire motivating human action. Strauss sees Kojève's Hegelian anthropology as being ultimately based on that of Hobbes, and sharing its flaws. He argues:

Kojève knows as well as anyone living that Hegel's fundamental teaching regarding master and slave is based on Hobbes' doctrine of the state of nature....Hegel's teaching is much more sophisticated than Hobbes', but it is as much a construction as the latter. Both doctrines construct human society by starting from the untrue assumption that man as man is thinkable as a being that

lacks awareness of sacred restraints or as a being that is guided by nothing but a desire for recognition.¹⁴⁵

Given this fundamental opposition, it is difficult to see how a real dialogue between Strauss and Kojève could be possible. However, while he rejects Kojève's anthropology, and hence his account of history, of which he says only that it "would seem to presuppose the truth of the thesis that it is meant to prove,"¹⁴⁶ Strauss appears to agree with Kojève that the idea of the Universal and Homogeneous State accurately describes the political ideas underlying the modern world. But while Kojève, in Strauss's view, sees the Universal and Homogeneous State as "the simply best social order,"¹⁴⁷ Strauss himself sees it as essentially evil, and by its very nature destructive of humanity. Strauss argues:

...according to Kojève, it is the participation in bloody political struggles as well as in real work or, generally expressed, the negating action, which raises man above the brutes.¹⁴⁸

We saw that, for Kojève, humanity is defined by the actions of fighting and work. In the Universal and Homogeneous State, man neither fights nor works, and the end of history marks the

¹⁴⁵RE, p.192.

¹⁴⁶RE, p.207.

¹⁴⁷RE, p.192.

¹⁴⁸RE, p.208.

"disappearance" of man as man. And Kojève does call this post-historical creature an animal. Strauss, however, takes this to mean that post-historical man returns to a subhuman level, in effect to the "prehuman beginnings of History."¹⁴⁹ He assumes that post-historical man is necessarily inferior to historical man. For Strauss:

The state through which man is said to become reasonably satisfied is, then, the state in which the basis of man's humanity withers away, or in which man loses his humanity. It is the state of Nietzsche's "last man."¹⁵⁰

It should be understood that Strauss is not interpreting or explaining Kojève's view here. Rather, he is passing judgment on the Universal and Homogeneous State as he sees it. Kojève's disappearance of man and Strauss's "loss of humanity" are not strictly equivalent. It may be that post-historical man is, or can become, the sort of degraded creature Strauss seems to be describing. And there is a certain resemblance to Nietzsche's "last man." This term, however, has become something of an all-purpose epithet, popular among critics of modernity, and in the process, its original meaning may have been obscured. To understand what Nietzsche meant by "last man," it is first necessary to see how he understood man in general. For Nietzsche:

¹⁴⁹RE, p.209.

¹⁵⁰RE, p.208.

Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman - a rope over an abyss...What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an *overture* and a *going under*.¹⁵¹

What is highest in man, for Nietzsche, is his ability and his drive to transcend himself, to continually recreate himself as something greater and more beautiful than he was. The last man, for Nietzsche, is the one who ceases to change, who loses or abandons the drive for self-transcendence. He is literally the *last* man, because nothing more can develop from him. He is content to stagnate in comfort and security. Nietzsche describes the life of the last man:

Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same....One is clever and knows everything that has ever happened....¹⁵²

The resemblance to the universality, homogeneity, and wisdom of Kojève's end of history is obvious. And Kojève's post-historical man is also the last man in the literal sense. Since he ceases to change, future generations will be no different. Post-historical man lives in the "eternal present."

There is, however, an essential difference between the Nietzschean last man and Kojève's post-historical man. Nietzsche's last man has turned away from his true purpose of self-

¹⁵¹ Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Walter Kaufmann trans. (London: Penguin, 1966) pp. 14-15.

¹⁵² *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p.18.

transcendence, accepting security and decadence. Kojève's post-historical man, however, has achieved the goal of history. Like Nietzsche's last man, he ceases to attempt to transcend or overcome himself. He does so, however, not because he has grown lazy and decadent, but because he knows (because Wisdom has been achieved) that there is nothing further to strive for. There is nothing beyond himself to which he can aspire. He has no end beyond the satisfaction of his desire for recognition.

If we accept Kojève's anthropology, and his (early) conception of the post-historical man we can conclude that the Nietzschean criticism of the post-historical man is simply unreasonable, the error of one who has not achieved Wisdom. For surely it is unreasonable to criticize one who has achieved all that is possible, and who knows it, for not attempting something else. If, however, we reject this conception of human nature, and hold the view that humans have potential that goes beyond the mere satisfaction of the desire for recognition, we must see the cessation of action in the Universal and Homogeneous State as a pathological condition, rather than a realized utopia. As well, if we reject Kojève's view of human nature, we remove the anthropological support for the view that the Universal and Homogeneous State is to be permanent. This is essentially the position taken by Strauss.

Strauss sees the coming of the Universal and Homogeneous State as a result of the combined influence of modern technology and modern philosophy. In the classic conception, according to Strauss, "the best regime" was a utopia, unrealizable in practice but necessary as an ideal which could guide practice. Modern philosophy, in contrast, lowers man's goals. Strauss argues:

Modern man, dissatisfied with utopias and scorning them, has tried to find a guarantee for the actualization of the best social order. In order to succeed, or rather in order to be able to believe that he could succeed, he had to lower the goal of man. One form in which this was done was to replace moral virtue by universal recognition, or to replace happiness by the satisfaction deriving from universal recognition.¹⁵³

While modern philosophy replaced classic ideals with a debased, but ostensibly achievable ideal, modern technology provides the necessary underpinnings (freedom from labour, or necessity). And it can be argued, as Kojève said, that the ideals of the Universal and Homogeneous State are the ideals which define modern political discourse. Strauss concedes that, "It is perhaps possible to say that the universal and homogeneous state is fated to come."¹⁵⁴ What Strauss does dispute, however, is the proposition that the Universal and Homogeneous State is permanent. On the contrary, he argues, it

¹⁵³RE, p.210.

¹⁵⁴RE, p.208.

contains the seeds of its own destruction. The Universal and Homogeneous State's claim to permanence rests on the assertion that it satisfies man, but Strauss argues:

...it is certainly impossible to say that man can reasonably be satisfied with it...There will always be men (*andres*) who will revolt against a state which is destructive of humanity or in which there is no longer a possibility of noble action and great deeds. They may be forced into a mere negation of the universal and homogeneous state, into a negation not enlightened by any positive goal, into a nihilistic negation.¹⁵⁵

While Strauss admits that it is not possible to foresee accurately the form that the corruption of the Universal and Homogeneous State will take, he does suggest one possibility, based on the political structure it will entail.

Strauss attacks what he sees as the necessary political form of the Universal and Homogeneous State, arguing that it cannot provide satisfaction for all. He argues that Kojève writes that only the ruler of the Universal and Homogeneous State is "*really* satisfied." Since there are presumably others who are equally qualified to rule, Strauss argues, "those others then have very good reason for dissatisfaction: a state which treats equal men unequally is not just."¹⁵⁶ And it is here that Strauss finds a remaining "outlet

¹⁵⁵RE, pp. 208-209.

¹⁵⁶RE, p.208.

for action" at the end of history. Kojève, Strauss argues, writes that the risk of death is still present in political competition. Strauss apparently takes this to mean that political struggles will always be violent, at least among a small minority, and he asks:

...is this not a hideous prospect: a state in which the last refuge of man's humanity is political assassination in the particularly sordid form of the palace revolution?¹⁵⁷

Indeed it is a hideous prospect. And it seems unlikely that such a state would be permanent, or even long-lived. But the question remains whether it is a necessary or even likely consequence of the coming of the Universal and Homogeneous State.

Strauss makes this argument with specific reference to a passage from Kojève's *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*. Since this passage is not included in the English translation, and the French text is not easily available, it is worth quoting at some length:

Certainly, only the Head of the universal and homogeneous State (Napoleon) is *really* "satisfied" (= recognized by all in his personal actuality and value). He alone is thus truly free (more so than all the Rulers before him, who were always "limited" by "specific differences" of family, of class, of nation). But all citizens are here potentially "satisfied," because *each* can *become* this Ruler, therefore the personal action ("particular") is at the same time universal action (étatique), that is to say the action of all (Tun Aller und

¹⁵⁷RE, p.209.

Jeder). For there is no more hereditary succession ("inhuman", "natural", "pagan" element). Each can thus actualize his Desire for recognition: on the condition of accepting (element of Mastery) the risk of death implied in this State by competition (=political struggle; this risk guarantees besides the "seriousness" of the candidates), and on condition also of having beforehand taken part in the constructive activity of the Society, in the collective Work which maintains the existence of the State (element of Servitude, of Duty, which guarantees besides the "competence" of candidates). The "satisfaction" of the Citizen is thus a result of the synthesis in him of the Master-warrior and the Slave-worker. As well, what is new in this State, is that *all* are (on occasion) warriors (conscription) and that *all* also participate in the *work* of society.¹⁵⁸

It seems clear from this that Kojève does not see political struggles as *necessarily* violent. It is true that he states that political activity will *imply* a risk of death, and that this is a necessary element of the synthesis of Master and Slave in the Citizen. But to state that the risk of death is implied is a far cry from suggesting that politics will necessarily be carried out by violence. In modern liberal democracies, for instance, leadership aspirants accept a certain risk. The security precautions taken to ensure the safety of, for example, the American president are sufficient evidence of this (as are the assassinations and attempted assassinations of political figures). As well, especially in America, presidential candidates are

¹⁵⁸ILH, p.146 (my translation).

still expected by many to have personally risked death in war in their past. (Witness the recent controversies over the military records of Dan Quayle and Bill Clinton.) Violence, however, is rarely used as a tool of political struggle in advanced states. As well, in his concentration on the risk of death (the element of Mastery) in the politics of the Universal and Homogeneous State, Strauss appears to ignore completely the emphasis on service to society (the element of Slavery) to which Kojève attaches equal importance.

Because he does not accept Kojève's anthropology, as Cooper puts it, in effect refusing to enter into the Kojévian system, Strauss is unable to confront Kojève's ideas directly. Strauss's contention that *andres* (as he calls Kojève's Masters) will rebel against the Universal and Homogeneous State, even if their efforts are doomed to be no more than senseless destruction, is meaningless in Kojévian terms. For Kojève, in the Universal and Homogeneous State, there are no longer any true Masters. There is only the Citizen, who combines within himself elements of Mastery and Slavery. While, admittedly, the final state does not *perfectly* satisfy *all* its Citizens, it seems unlikely that they will be driven to a "nihilistic negation." It seems even less likely that such actions will attract sufficient support to pose a serious threat to the Universal and Homogeneous State. As Kojève says, the "healthy automata" are satisfied, "and the 'sick'

ones get locked up."¹⁵⁹ What Strauss sees as a last, glorious, even if doomed, effort on behalf of humanity would more likely be seen (and dealt with) by Kojève's Citizens as the isolated acts of criminals or madmen. Strauss also appears to assume that, in the Universal and Homogeneous State where all are mutually recognized, all are also supposed to be entirely equal. For Strauss, one of the flaws of the modern world is what he sees as its extreme egalitarianism. He appears to fear a world like that described by Kurt Vonnegut in his story "Harrison Bergeron." Vonnegut describes a world of egalitarianism gone mad, where the strong are forced to carry weights and the beautiful wear ugly masks, all in the name of equality. Even intelligence is equalized:

Harriet had a perfectly average intelligence, which meant that she couldn't think about anything except in short bursts. And George, while his intelligence was way above normal, had a little mental handicap radio in his ear. He was required by law to wear it at all times. It was tuned to a government transmitter. Every twenty seconds or so, the transmitter would send out some sharp noise to keep people like George from taking unfair advantage of their brains.¹⁶⁰

In suggesting that the Universal and Homogeneous State will necessarily be one in which all are supposedly entirely equal (if not

¹⁵⁹Kojève, letter to Strauss, Sept. 19, 1950. in OT p.255.

¹⁶⁰Kurt Vonnegut. "Harrison Bergeron." in *Welcome to the Monkey House*. (New York: Dell, 1984) p.7.

quite to the extreme that Vonnegut describes), Strauss distorts Kojève's view. His account of the nature of political competition shows that Kojève sees the Universal and Homogeneous State as one where competition, and hence unequal status, is still possible. The defining characteristic of the Universal and Homogeneous State, mutual recognition, is a minimum condition. Recognition of the individuality of each and all does not preclude competition, with winners and losers. One citizen may be richer or more skilled than another, but in the Universal and Homogeneous State this difference in status does not entail, as it does for the Master, a denial of the very humanity of the lower.

We see the same difficulty in communication in Strauss's arguments on the fate of philosophy in the Universal and Homogeneous State. Strauss agrees with Kojève that the coming of the Universal and Homogeneous State will mark the end of philosophy, but for very different reasons. As we have seen, for Kojève, the end of history is also the end of philosophy, because it has been replaced by Wisdom. Strauss, however, rejects this view. He states that the head of the Universal and Homogeneous State will not be a Wise Man, and, less obviously, assumes that Wisdom will not in fact be achieved. The Head of the Universal and Homogeneous State will then be but a pretender to Wisdom. Strauss then argues:

To retain his power, he will be forced to suppress every activity which might lead people into doubt of the

essential soundness of the universal and homogeneous state: he must suppress philosophy as an attempt to corrupt the young.¹⁶¹

For Strauss, the ruler of the final state is not the ruler of a state based on Wisdom, but simply another tyrant who resorts to thought control to maintain his position. Philosophy has faced this problem before, and survived. In this case, however, Strauss argues:

From the Universal Tyrant however there is no escape. Thanks to the conquest of nature and to the completely unabashed substitution of suspicion and terror for law, the Universal and Final Tyrant has at his disposal practically unlimited means for ferreting out, and for extinguishing, the most modest efforts in the direction of thought.¹⁶²

Again we see that Strauss has a very different idea of the Universal and Homogeneous State from that described by Kojève. It is difficult to reconcile the state of satisfaction in mutual recognition of Kojève's account with the "unabashed substitution of suspicion and terror for law" that Strauss seems to assume will be a necessary feature of the final state. In the Universal and Homogeneous State as understood by Kojève, suppression of thought would be for the most part unnecessary. Wisdom has little to fear from error, which is all that so-called "philosophy" which opposed the Universal and

¹⁶¹RE, p.211.

¹⁶²RE, p.211.

Homogeneous State could be. Only if such error were to be transformed into action threatening the state would a response be necessary. (The modern argument against "hate literature" is not that it is in *error*, but that it provokes a certain type of *action*.) The Universal and Homogeneous State would not be threatened by a teaching that there were, for example, natural masters and natural slaves. An attempt to put such a doctrine into political practice would, however, provoke a response.

Strauss's arguments about the possible nature of the Universal and Homogeneous State are interesting as criticisms of modernity, but they are of little use as criticisms of Kojève's views. While Strauss uses many of the same terms as Kojève, it is apparent that, for him, they have markedly different meanings. It certainly may be argued that Strauss is justified in rejecting Kojève's anthropology and his account of history. In so doing, however, Strauss effectively rejects Kojève's work as a whole. This position, however defensible, makes it impossible to criticize Kojève's work on its own terms. The gulf between the two scholars is masked somewhat by the similarities of terminology, but it is essentially unbridgeable. They can and do present two alternatives, but they are alternatives between which little compromise can be made. Strauss's reading of Kojève is in effect one which superimposes a Nietzschean anthropology on Kojève's Hegelian view.

This line of interpretation is one that has been followed by the most widely publicized recent interpreter of Kojève, Francis Fukuyama. In *The End of History and the Last Man*, Fukuyama attempts to use Kojève's work as a base from which to explain the modern world. Beginning with Kojève's account of human nature and the genesis of history, Fukuyama constructs an account of world history which culminates in modern liberal democracy. The Universal and Homogeneous State which occurs at the end of history is a liberal democratic, capitalist state. Or, as Fukuyama expresses it in his earlier article "The End of History?":

We might summarize the content of the universal homogeneous state as liberal democracy in the political sphere combined with easy access to VCRs and stereos in the economic.¹⁶³

I will not deal in detail with Fukuyama's account of the historical process. It does suffer from serious weaknesses. It is interesting to note that two basic criticisms that could be levelled against this account are used by Fukuyama against his opponents. Of those who predicted the persistence of Marxism, he suggests that their views "simply represented projection of the recent past into the future."¹⁶⁴ Since he is basing much of his account on the recent and perhaps

¹⁶³Francis Fukuyama. "The End of History?" *National Interest* Summer 1989. p.8.

¹⁶⁴END, p.10.

temporary trend towards democracy in many countries, it would seem that Fukuyama is open to the same criticism. Fukuyama also criticizes modern economists for stretching a definition of utility to the point that it becomes a tautology, and thus explains everything and nothing. As Steven Holmes points out in his review of Fukuyama, the same criticism could equally be applied to the notion of *thymos* that Fukuyama presents as a more comprehensive substitute for Kojève's idea of recognition. Holmes argues that for Fukuyama, *thymos*:

...is "the origin of tyranny, imperialism, and the desire to dominate" as well as "the psychological ground for political virtues like courage, public-spiritedness, and justice." It explains anger and pity, duty and disobedience, religious piety and aggressive untranationalism, pride in one's work and shame at one's looks, extreme self-confidence and its total lack. It is the source of eccentricity as well as conformism, fierce individualism as well as subordination to the group. It is the passion that engenders affection for a heroic leader as well as contempt for pitiful weaklings. It produces the striving for excellence and the acceptance of one's wormlike nullity.¹⁶⁵

A concept which can be used to explain diametrically opposed actions obviously contributes little to an understanding of human

¹⁶⁵Steven Holmes. "The Scowl of Minerva." *New Republic*. March 23, 1992 pp.31-32

action. In explaining everything in terms of *thymos*, Fukuyama succeeds in explaining nothing.

These and other problems notwithstanding, Fukuyama's work is interesting primarily because of the degree to which he expands on Strauss's Nietzschean interpretation of the idea of the end of history. The assumptions that are implicit in Strauss's view are discussed in considerable detail. For Fukuyama, the Nietzschean criticism of modernity understood as the Universal and Homogeneous State is so powerful as to undermine his optimistic view of the end of history. While he begins by attempting to explain, justify, and even celebrate the end of history as the culmination of human struggles for freedom, security and dignity, Fukuyama ends by portraying the modern "post-historical" world as facing two choices: a descent into the animality of the last man, or the possibility that dissatisfaction with this will make us "ready to drag the world back into history with all its wars, injustice, and revolution."¹⁶⁶ Fukuyama is at his most eloquent in the chapter "Men Without Chests," where he presents Nietzsche's critique of modernity¹⁶⁷. He

¹⁶⁶END, p.312.

¹⁶⁷What I describe as Fukuyama's Nietzschean view appears to be second-hand. They might be described more precisely as based on Nietzsche as interpreted by Allan Bloom. Fukuyama acknowledges his debt to Bloom, and the resemblances to Bloom's account of modernity in *The Closing of the American Mind* are striking. Compare for instance Fukuyama on tolerance as the virtue in a democratic society (p.305) with Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987) p.30.

paints a picture of a flabby, self-satisfied society, paralysed by relativism, absorbed in petty materialistic concerns, and incapable of any sort of greatness or beauty, all as a result of the suppression of *megalothymia*, as he calls the mentality of the Master.

How are we to understand this about-face? In my view, Fukuyama makes a fundamental error in interpretation. He appears to regard Kojève's account of the development of man into the Citizen who combines attributes of both the Master and the Slave as equivalent to Nietzsche's account of the triumph of slave morality. This confusion distorts Fukuyama's understanding of Kojève's anthropology.

For instance, Fukuyama tells us that Hegel finds the master more "morally praiseworthy" than the "ignoble" slave.¹⁶⁸ It is not entirely clear whether Fukuyama is describing the views of Kojève or Hegel. Fukuyama does write at one point:

In subsequent references to Hegel, we will actually be referring to Hegel-Kojève, and we will be more interested in the ideas themselves than in the philosophers who originally articulated them.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸END, p.156.

¹⁶⁹END, p.144.

In this case, however, it is not clear which philosopher he is describing, because neither Kojève nor Hegel held this view. Both demonstrated the tragedy of the master. Kojève writes:

Mastery is an existential impasse. The Master can either make himself *brutish* in pleasure or *die* on the field of battle as Master, but he cannot *live consciously* with the knowledge that he is *satisfied* by what he is.¹⁷⁰

Faint praise, if praise it is. Elsewhere, Kojève calls the Master "uneducable," and writes that the Master:

...undergoes History, but does not create it: if he "evolves," he evolves only passively, as Nature or an animal species does. The Slave, on the other hand, evolves humanly - that is, voluntarily and consciously, or, better, actively or freely....¹⁷¹

If the Master-Slave dialectic (in Hegel, not Kojève) is considered at the level of individual consciousness, it can be understood as a demonstration of the tragic consequences of essentially immoral action. The person who never recognizes others as fully human cannot himself lead a fully human life.¹⁷² In the modern world, we call such a person a sociopath or psychopath (e.g., a serial killer),

¹⁷⁰IRH, pp.46-47.

¹⁷¹IRH, p.229.

¹⁷²G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. V.A. Miller trans. (Oxford University Press, 1977) pp. 114-117.

and lock him up if possible. Kojève would call him a "sick automaton," and agree with imprisoning him.¹⁷³

For Fukuyama, the coming of the Universal and Homogeneous State is the final triumph of the Slave over the Master. Fukuyama admits that this was not Kojève's view,¹⁷⁴ and his account is much closer to Nietzsche than Kojève. He does not appear, however, to realize that this change amounts to a repudiation of the anthropological support for his argument. Kojève makes it very clear that the citizen of the Universal and Homogeneous State is *not* the Slave. His entire account of the process of history is based on the successive attempts of the Slave to overcome his fear of death and so *cease to be a slave*, and history does not end until the Slave succeeds, through the French Revolution and the Terror which followed.¹⁷⁵ On this view, the French Revolution was not, as Fukuyama implies, the triumph of slaves over their masters, but the final step in the process by which Slaves overcame their slavery to become Citizens. At that time, Masters and Slaves had become bourgeois. Lacking Masters to rebel against, they themselves created the conditions (the Terror) in which they risked their lives and finally became Citizens.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³Kojève, letter to Strauss, Sept. 19, 1950. in OT p.255.

¹⁷⁴END, p.301.

¹⁷⁵ IRH, p.69.

¹⁷⁶IRH, pp. 68-70.

Fukuyama's problem is apparent in his attempt to answer what he sees as the Nietzschean critique of the idea of the end of history. He writes:

...we can readily accept many of Nietzsche's acute psychological observations, even as we reject his morality.¹⁷⁷

This is a reasonable position, which has been developed by, among others, Richard Rorty. The problem for Fukuyama is that one cannot take such a position without discarding the Kojévian anthropology which is the basis for his (Fukuyama's) account of human history. Strauss, in his critique of Kojève, explicitly denied the truth of Kojève's anthropology, in effect criticizing Kojève from outside the system. Fukuyama, in attempting to weave together two incompatible accounts of human nature, succeeds only in confusing the issue.¹⁷⁸

Fukuyama's attempt to merge Nietzsche and Kojève fails because he fails to recognize the basic incompatibility of their accounts of human nature. If Kojève is correct, Nietzsche is simply wrong about human beings. For Nietzsche, the highest human type is

¹⁷⁷END, p.313.

¹⁷⁸Fukuyama adds to the confusion in another way. Not content with attempting to weave together the incompatible anthropologies of Nietzsche and Kojève, he occasionally appeals to a doctrine of natural rights as well. see END, pp.288,296.

the creator of values. Kojève replies to this indirectly and restates his own position in a letter to Strauss, where he writes:

"Modern" anthropology leads to moral anarchy and tasteless "existentialism" only if one assumes, God knows why, that man can give *human* values. But if, with Hegel, one assumes that at some time he *returns* to his beginning (by deducing what he *says* from the mere fact *that* he *speaks*), then there indeed is an "ethics" that prescribes that one do everything that leads to *this* end (=wisdom), and that condemns everything that impedes it - also in the political realm of progress toward the "universal and homogeneous State."¹⁷⁹

For Kojève, unlike Nietzsche, values cannot simply be created, if they are to be truly human values. They must be rooted in the fundamental human characteristics of self-consciousness and the desire for recognition, which can only be satisfied finally by mutual recognition. It must be admitted, and Kojève himself admits elsewhere, that calling only these values "truly human" is indeed an arbitrary distinction.¹⁸⁰ However, since at the time Kojève wrote this passage he was convinced that history had ended, it can be argued on his behalf that history had itself justified the distinction. It must be admitted that there is a certain resemblance between Nietzsche's last man and Kojève's post-historical animal. And it is tempting, if we find Kojève's description of the post-historical

¹⁷⁹letter to Strauss, October 29, 1953. in OT p.262.

¹⁸⁰see ch. 2 pg. 50ff above.

world distasteful, to argue that he has indeed arrived at a point where the Nietzschean view is appropriate. However, while it can be argued that the Universal and Homogeneous State will contain at least some last men, in the sense that there will be those who do not develop to their full potential, I am inclined to argue that it is necessary to choose between Kojève and Nietzsche. If Kojève is correct and history is over or approaching its end, then Nietzsche is simply wrong about human beings.

Conclusion: To Sail Beyond the Sunset

Kojève has claimed that history is over, and that man will cease to be human. What does this mean for us, who live at the end of history? We have no future, according to Kojève, only an "eternal present" in which we will lapse into animality. We will cease to change our world and ourselves, because there is nothing significant left to do. If we do remain human to a degree, it will only be by way of an empty formalism. It is difficult to share Kojève's attitude of amused resignation towards this prospect.

There are several directions from which we may challenge Kojève's conclusions. As we saw in the previous chapter, one can simply deny the truth of his anthropology, as Strauss did. I am inclined to argue, however, that there is much to be learned from Kojève about human nature and the nature of the modern world, that he should not simply be dismissed. Cooper goes so far as to state that:

...the content of Kojève's interpretation expresses the self-understanding of modernity. It presents the aims and premises of the modern world....[and] brings to light specific aspects of contemporary, modern life that otherwise might be overlooked....the end of history is a

symbol fully adequate to express the meaning of our present age.¹⁸¹

Cooper may be overstating his case, but not to a great degree. Hegel and Kojève are not widely read, but their fundamental ideas have permeated modern discourse. Irving Kristol, in his response to Fukuyama's original article, writes:

...his [Hegel's] mode of thinking about history...has already so infiltrated our own minds that we don't even know when we are being Hegelian. When Jesse Jackson is quoted in the *Washington Post* as saying "We have to determine which side of history we are on," he is unwittingly speaking pure Hegelianese (as transmitted by Marx, one can assume).¹⁸²

Cooper, however, in accepting Kojève's views, finds himself unable to suggest any alternative to or exit from the Kojévian "system." While he appears to see the Universal and Homogeneous State as a tyranny, either of bureaucracy or simple force and terror, and inhuman in either case, he can offer as a solution only, "perhaps Heidegger was right: only a god can save us."¹⁸³

Is it inevitable that acceptance of Kojève's premises lead us to such a despairing conclusion? Is the Kojévian "system" really a

¹⁸¹Cooper, pp.4,6.

¹⁸²Irving Kristol. "Response to Fukuyama." *National Interest* Summer 1989. p.27.

¹⁸³Cooper, p.350.

closed system, which must be either accepted or rejected as a whole? If we accept his premises, must we then accept his conclusion about the fate of humanity? I would argue that it is not necessary. Even if we accept Kojève's account of history and human nature, we need not accept his description of the final state, or even accept it as final. Kojève's system, I would argue, is not circular or closed, but open-ended. While it arguably provides a useful account of our past and our present, it fails as a means of predicting our future. There are a number of ways in which we might "exit" from the system. The first is based on the problem of determining whether history has or will end.

History, we have seen, ends when the human desire for mutual recognition is satisfied in the Universal and Homogeneous State. Because they are satisfied at this most fundamental level, humans no longer act to change the given reality through fighting or work. But is this indeed the end? Even if, following Kojève, we assume that the desire for recognition has driven history to this point, and that it is indeed satisfied or becoming satisfied universally, are we then obliged to agree that nothing new can ever happen again? Kojève himself poses the critical question:

By what right can one assert that this State will not engender in Man a new Desire, other than the Desire for Recognition, and that this State will not consequently be

negated some day by a negating or creative Action (*Tat*) other than the Action of Fighting and Work?¹⁸⁴

Kojève argues that one can only make this assertion, which amounts to the claim that history has indeed ended, if one claims a complete knowledge of human nature, in other words, if one achieves Wisdom. However, as we have seen, Wisdom is only possible at the end of history. As Kojève writes, "One is caught, then, in a *vicious circle*."¹⁸⁵ Nor does it appear possible to appeal to empirical evidence as an escape from the dilemma. While the Universal and Homogeneous State remains a possibility, and it can be argued that the idea does represent the most plausible future for the world, it is obviously not yet in existence, as Kojève admits.¹⁸⁶ Even if it were, the fact that a universal and homogeneous state existed today would not seem to guarantee that it would continue to exist in the future. "Eternal" empires have fallen in the past. The Thousand Year Reich lasted but twelve years. Kojève argues, however, that Hegel:

...believed he had found a criterion both for the absolute truth of his description of the real - that is, for its correct and complete character - and for the end of the "movement" of this real - that is, for the definitive stopping of History....this criterion is precisely the *circularity* of his description....¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴IRH, pp.192-193.

¹⁸⁵IRH, p.193.

¹⁸⁶IRH, p.97.

¹⁸⁷IRH, p.193.

As we saw in Chapter 2, according to Kojève, Hegel thought that the circularity and completeness of his system was its guarantee of truth. It was from this point, from this complete understanding of human nature, that he could say that history had indeed ended, and that humans would cease to change. But, as Kojève himself argues, Hegel's system not only contains errors, it is not circular. And, while he often wrote from the standpoint of one who has achieved Wisdom, Kojève never articulated a replacement for the Hegelian circle. It seems, then, that there are no grounds on which we can say conclusively that history has indeed ended or will ever end. That is to say, we cannot rule out the possibility that, having achieved satisfaction of their desire for mutual recognition, humans will be driven to act by other desires. Kojève's assertion that history has indeed ended then has the status, not of a statement from Wisdom, but a mere expression of opinion. And I would argue that Kojève is wrong on this point.

It may indeed be true that history, narrowly defined as the process by which humans continually change their world in search of mutual recognition, is coming to an end (at least in some parts of the world). This does not, however, lead inescapably to the conclusion that some other specifically human desire or desires will not drive humans to continue to change their world. It is at least plausible to suggest that, while the desire for recognition is a

fundamental human desire, once satisfied, at least at the basic level of mutual recognition of one's individuality, it may give way to other desires. A person who has not eaten for a week will tend to concentrate all his efforts on satisfying his desire for food. Other desires are subsumed in the all-important desire for food. Once that desire is satisfied, however, and a secure supply of food is assured, other desires arise, and he turns to attempts to satisfy them. In political terms, then, I would argue that once continuing recognition of one's rights as an individual is assured, that desire becomes part of the background. It does not disappear, any more than the starving man ceases to want to eat after being fed once, but it may no longer be the most important desire driving a person's action. What desires might arise to drive continued change? Having denied that a perfect knowledge of human nature exists, we have to admit that prediction is almost impossible. The desire for recognition could take new forms. Desires could arise that were always present in humans, but masked by the desire for recognition, or new desires could be created which never existed before. If that sounds far-fetched, consider the material desires which have been created in the last century. Who wanted a CD player twenty years ago?

In recent years, empirical research has been done which provides a degree of support for this view. Ronald Inglehart, for example, has argued that younger generations, in advanced industrial

states, who have been socialized in an atmosphere of political and material security, tend to profess values that differ considerably from previous generations. They take affluence and security for granted, and pursue new goals. "Postmaterialists," as Inglehart calls them, tend to emphasize concerns such as "belonging, self-expression and the quality of life," and prefer aesthetic over material goals.¹⁸⁸ They tend to be more politically active than materialists, and, most importantly from a political viewpoint, Inglehart argues that they "constitute "an elite characterized by its adversary stance toward the existing social order." ¹⁸⁹ And, while postmaterialists at present remain a minority, the data suggest that they will comprise at least half (and likely a more politically active half) of the populations of many advanced industrial states by the turn of the century.¹⁹⁰ It is difficult to say at this point where these changes in values may lead, or how truly fundamental they may be, but there does seem to be some evidence that advanced industrial societies, those supposedly closest to becoming "post-historical," are not entirely characterized by satisfaction with the status quo.

¹⁸⁸Ronald Inglehart. "Post-Materialism in an Environment of Insecurity." *American Political Science Review* Vol. 75(4) December 1981, pp.880-900. Inglehart's work is part of a large body of literature which is attempting to track and explain perceived value changes in advanced industrial states.

¹⁸⁹Inglehart. *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990) p.331.

¹⁹⁰*Culture Shift*, p.103.

It would be an exaggeration to argue that Inglehart's work provides a refutation of Kojève. In Kojève's defence, it could be argued that so-called "value changes" and social scientists' discussions of them are simply part of the endless chatter of the post-historical animal, and that their political effects will amount to no more than tidying up the details of the Universal and Homogeneous State. This is likely what Kojève himself would say. The student revolts of the sixties were the first major manifestation of post-materialist political action¹⁹¹, and had perhaps their greatest political effect in France, where they nearly forced Charles de Gaulle from office. On this subject, Vincent Descombes writes:

In the face of the events of 1968, Kojève is reported to have said that, since there had been no bloodshed, nothing had happened.¹⁹²

In other words, they were simply trivial events, the amusements of the post-historical animal. This is approximately the tack taken by Fukuyama in his discussion of leftist concerns about liberalism (Inglehart's post-materialists tend to be concentrated on the left end of the political spectrum). Fukuyama gives the impression that

¹⁹¹*Culture Shift*, p.331.

¹⁹²Descombes, p.13.

they are either trivial (e.g., the advocacy of female Boy Scouts in the name of equality), or grandly absurd, as when he writes:

...consider the possibility of a future super-universalization of rights, where the distinction between human and non-human is lost.¹⁹³

Whether minor quibbles or major foolishness, Fukuyama argues that the criticisms from the Left are not fundamental criticisms of the Universal and Homogeneous State¹⁹⁴ At most, they are likely to lead to minor changes in detail. Ironically, Fukuyama himself demonstrates this postmaterialist attitude, albeit from a right-wing perspective. He himself takes a critical attitude towards modern society, rather than simply being satisfied with his own well-being. Kojève scorned the social sciences, calling sociologists "modern sophists," and suggesting that social scientists are unable to explain the groundings of their own discourse or action, which in turn casts considerable doubt on the value of their conclusions about the motivations or actions of others. Social science, in his view, would provide much of the chatter of the post-historical world.¹⁹⁵ Simply labelling an idea as "chatter" does not invalidate it, however, and Inglehart presents considerable empirical evidence to support his thesis. Without endorsing his views entirely, I would argue that

¹⁹³END, p.296.

¹⁹⁴END, pp. 289-299.

¹⁹⁵Kojève, interview in *La Quinzaine Littéraire* 53 July 1-15, 1968, p.20.

Inglehart's work is evidence post-historical society may not simply settle into a satisfied stasis.

I would suggest that the achievement of mutual recognition does not necessarily mean the end of creative, specifically human action. While Kojève has narrowly defined human or historical action as fighting and work which changes the given reality to make it conform to an ideal, it is arguable that fighting and work do not exhaust the possibilities for human action. There is even a possible precedent for this in Kojève's own account of the past. The bourgeois Intellectual, according to Kojève, neither fights nor works, but does not for that cease to be human.¹⁹⁶ Neither is he insignificant historically. As we saw, it is the Intellectual who provides the ideology which explains, justifies, and thus makes possible the Universal and Homogeneous State. Neither does it seem absolutely necessary that changes be brought about by violence. It is the *willingness* to risk one's life that is essential, not the act of fighting. It is in being willing to risk one's life for a non-biological end, showing that there are values that are held to be higher than mere survival, that a person demonstrates his or her humanity. Citizens of modern liberal democracies, those who are closest to living in the Universal and Homogeneous State, have shown

¹⁹⁶IRH, p.68, also Chapter One above.

themselves both willing and able to risk their lives in defence of their ideals.

If we accept the view that wars and violent revolutions are less likely to occur in the post-historical world, how might changes be brought about? Richard Rorty offers one possible model for peaceful change. People may continue to change their given circumstances, he writes, by a process of:

...trying to actualize hitherto undreamed-of possibilities by putting new linguistic and other practices into play, and erecting [or simply describing] new social constructs.¹⁹⁷

Such attempts to create new political and social realities could be grounded, not in appeals to some ahistorical human nature (since in denying Wisdom we deny the existence of a knowledge of such a nature), but in "an appeal from our community's practices to...the practice of a real or imagined alternative community."¹⁹⁸ Advocates of change would justify their proposals by portraying them as more attractive or imaginative in some way, and attempt to attract support on those grounds. This may not be history by Kojève's definition, but I am inclined to argue that imagining utopias and attempting to realize them is a peculiarly human activity. If such

¹⁹⁷Richard Rorty, "Feminism and Pragmatism." *Radical Philosophy* 59, Autumn 1991, p.5.

¹⁹⁸Rorty, p.6.

activity does not entail bloody violence, so much the better. Kojève would agree, I think, but he would also reply that such arguments are beside the point. Post-historical man ceases to change (and thus becomes an animal), not because change is impossible, but because it is not worth the effort. Being finally and definitively satisfied (and being told by the Wise Man that this is the best he can reasonably hope for), post-historical man has no reason to change, and chooses not to. Given that we have denied the Wise Man's perfect and final knowledge of human nature, what is the status of this claim?

At this point, we have argued that Kojève cannot claim the authority of Wisdom for his contention that history has already ended, at least in principle, and that no alternatives are possible. His statements on this must be understood as having only the force of opinion. In effect, then, we discard Kojève's post-1948 teaching, and return to his earlier view. History, on this view, is moving in a certain general direction. It is possible to speed or delay its progress, to steer it towards an end, and to some extent to determine the nature of the Universal and Homogeneous State (whether it is American or Russian, for instance). And in Kojève's early teaching, as we have seen, his system is not Wisdom, or truth, but "a program of struggle and one of work," which, if successful, will make the system true, by destroying all worlds which do not

conform to it.¹⁹⁹ Rather than being a description of what is, it is a prescription for the future. In effect, then, Kojève's system is an ideology. It comprises a "total ideology," of which Daniel Bell writes:

A *total* ideology is an all-inclusive system of comprehensive reality, it is a set of beliefs, infused with passion, and seeks to transform the whole of a way of life.²⁰⁰

This seems a fair description of the scope of Kojève's project. On this view, he is not describing the inevitable end of history, but attempting to steer events in a particular direction. His anthropology and account of history can be made true. Humans can be finally and definitively satisfied by mutual recognition, not because it is their nature to be so, but because they have been convinced that they are or should be satisfied. I argued earlier that Kojève's anthropology could not be conflated with that of Nietzsche. If, however, we argue that Kojève's account of human nature is not complete and true, that the system is not closed, we can understand Kojève as describing a human nature to be created, not human nature as it is. At this point, then, we can consider criticisms of his view from a Nietzschean standpoint. And Nietzsche provides a very apt

¹⁹⁹HMC, pp. 41-42.

²⁰⁰Daniel Bell. *The End of Ideology*. revised ed. (New York: Free Press, 1965) pp. 399-400.

description of the attitudes of those who are convinced by Kojève that they are finally satisfied:

Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels differently goes voluntarily to a madhouse.²⁰¹

If history ended, it would not be because human nature had been fulfilled, but because we had been convinced to accept limits on our development. We would indeed be Nietzsche's last men, who abandoned our future for the security of the eternal present.

But are we? Certainly there are those in our world who are last men, who care only for their own security, and want nothing beyond it. There are those who think they have "invented happiness," in a world where, as Nietzsche puts it:

One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night: but one has a regard for health.²⁰²

Admittedly, this seems to describe much of modern society. Arguably, however, there have been such people at all times and in all places. Kojève admits that the most common human tendency has always been towards stasis. The mass of humanity, those who are not philosophers, tend to:

²⁰¹*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p.18.

²⁰²*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p.18.

...close themselves up within the range of things of which they have already become conscious and remain impervious to new facts in themselves and outside of themselves. For them: "the more things change, the more they stay the same."²⁰³

Whether peasants who knew little and cared less about anything beyond the village, or decadent aristocrats, there have always been those who were "satisfied" and thus content to remain as they were in perpetuity. They have not been agents of change; rather, they have tended to resist it. History was driven by the few who were not content to remain static, the philosophers and the statesmen (or tyrants), who were able to drag the masses of humanity into new situations. It is not clear that the present world is fundamentally different in that sense.

It may indeed be true that the present world is moving toward something that resembles Kojève's Universal and Homogeneous State. The advanced industrial states are becoming increasingly integrated, and supranational bodies such as the EEC are becoming more important. Some sort of universal political structure may be part of our future. Societies are as well becoming more homogeneous, as differences of class, race, religion and sex become less important. Obviously, this is not a smooth, obstacle-free

²⁰³IRH, p.85.

progress, but we can see progress nonetheless. The important question is not whether we are moving towards a Universal and Homogeneous State, but whether that state must indeed be the scene of our reanimalization. I am inclined to argue that it can be, but only if we allow it. We can, if we wish, remain static and contented with security, and convince ourselves that we have reached the highest peaks to which humans can aspire. Or we can, as some humans have done throughout history, continue to recreate ourselves and our world. Even if the political structures of the world come to resemble Kojève's Universal and Homogeneous State, however, we are not forced, either by history or by our inner nature, to become Kojévian animals or Nietzschean last men. (Once we deny the Wise Man's perfect knowledge of human nature, these two become almost indistinguishable.) However well Kojève's work interprets and makes comprehensible our past and our present situation, it does not provide a blueprint for an inescapable future.

When we deny Kojève's claim to Wisdom, we reduce his description of our future from truth to philosophy, and it must be understood as taking on the limitations of philosophy. In the preface to his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel wrote:

...every individual is a child of his time; so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as absurd to fancy that a philosophy can transcend its

contemporary world as it is to fancy that an individual can overleap his own age, jump over Rhodes.²⁰⁴

Kojève accepted this view, but thought that his own work went beyond philosophy. In writing the epitaph of history, he thought that his work transcended it. Fukuyama accepted this, and entitled one of the sections of his book "Leaping Over Rhodes."²⁰⁵ I would conclude, however, that while Kojève helps us understand our past and our present, he is a poor guide to our future. His "leap" falls just short.

²⁰⁴G.W.F. Hegel. *Philosophy of Right*. T.M. Knox trans. (Oxford University Press, 1952) p.11.

²⁰⁵END, p.209.

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Appendix 1: Translation of "Les Romans de la Sagesse."²⁰⁶

This essay originally appeared in the French literary journal *Critique* in May of 1952. It is ostensibly a review of three novels by Raymond Queneau: *Pierrot mon ami*, *Loin de Rueil*, and *Le Dimanche de la Vie*. As he did with Hegel, however, Kojève uses Queneau's work as a base from which to expound his own ideas. In this essay, he is primarily concerned with developing his description of the Wise Man and his behaviour at the end of history.

²⁰⁶Kojève. "Les Romans de la Sagesse" *Critique* VIII (60) May 1952, pp. 387-397.

NOVELS OF WISDOM²⁰⁷

...this is the Sunday of life, which levels everything, and rejects anything bad; men gifted with such good humour cannot be fundamentally bad or base. HEGEL.

We have often attempted to assess the theological propriety of literary works. But it is rare that we submit them to a philosophical examination, except in the case of poetic works, generally devoid of rhyme and composed in an obligatorily obscure language, dealing with eminently profound subjects .

This situation may be explained by the fact that theology, like all axiomatic sciences (or to put it more simply, hypothetical-deductive sciences) is an exact science, permitting clear

²⁰⁷[Author's note] In the present review, the author has attempted to parody his own style. He points this out in order to apologize to the reader for the quasi-unreadable character of the French in which the following pages are written, this *unreadable* quasi-French having of course nothing to do with the "spoken French" used by the author of the three novels reviewed here. (The play on words found in the present footnote -for which the author apologizes as well, just as [he apologizes] for all those that will be found in the text itself - is a plagiarism, which is at the same time a dedication.)

[Translator's note]- The plays on words referred to by Kojève have unfortunately not survived translation. As for the unreadable style, I am not sure that Kojève's attempt at parody is entirely successful - this review seems to me to be not much more unreadable than most of his other writings. In translating this work, I have used Kojève's capitalization throughout, while adding capitals where appropriate in English (e.g. Christian, Antichrist). Italics and quotation marks correspond to Kojève's. The first footnote is Kojève's; all others are mine.

distinctions and universal judgments, once one accepts the initial premises. While philosophy is supposed (contrary to the express intentions of its founders) to be dedicated to the clash of opinions, this should not allow those who profess these opinions to condemn without appeal those who do not share them.

In order to reassure the timid spirits, it may be preferable to show from the start that the present account aims to examine the aforementioned three novels by Raymond Queneau not from the point of view of philosophy in general, but solely from a Hegelian point of view.

While this point of view makes it possible in all circumstances to make universally valid judgments, which depend neither on the willingness nor the credulity of those who accept, more or less voluntarily and knowingly, a given system of axioms, nor on the spiritual or temporal power of those who impose such a system by force, there is reason to explain why three apparently unimportant humorous novels demand, or at least allow, a hearing convened before the Hegelian tribunal of universal history.

The justification for these proceedings rests on the fact that the three novels in question deal with Wisdom. Queneau describes three versions of the Wise Man, that is to say three of his aspects, or "constituent moments", each different and complementary.

Certainly, at first glance, it does not rightfully fall to the philosopher to judge the Wise Man. But if philosophy is love of Wisdom, love by definition conscious and voluntary, that is to say reasonable, it is necessary that a philosopher, however unworthy of the name, know a little of what makes a man wise and be able to judge the authenticity of the wisdom of he who presents himself or who is presented as such; or again that of one who for whatever reason does not pretend to such a *presentation*.

Now, literary works only rarely present these Wise Men. When they do, they are generally about men, often bearded, or of an epileptic rigidity, living in isolation and speaking, at night by preference, of things considered sublime. With a few rare exceptions, these personages produce in consequence the effect of a perfect inauthenticity, to say nothing of hypocrisy or a congenital feebleness of spirit, expressed by a total absence of common sense. Now, if Queneau shows us people who are modern and normal, acceptable from all points of view and who give the impression of leading the lives of sages, it is, for a reader who has studied philosophy, almost a duty to try to see more closely if this is not a case of authentic Wisdom.

Unhappily, by denying the existence of this Messiah of philosophy who is the Wise Man in flesh and blood, the modern philosophers have ended by forgetting that which is Wisdom itself,

thus finding themselves in the situation, more Grailesque than philosophic, of someone who ignores that which is the thing that he is supposed to love above all, consecrating his life to his romantic quest. Certainly it has become difficult today to speak of Wisdom, unless one speaks of it from a "Hegelian" point of view. In fact, on the one hand, Hegel is, with Plato, one of the very great philosophers who have treated the problem of Wisdom with the most thoroughness and frankness; on the other hand, his [Hegel's] philosophical point of view, being the latest, is the only one directly accessible to a modern man, since this man (unless he is himself a great philosopher) can do no other than to be "Hegelian" (if need be, unknowingly) because of and according to modernity which he is by definition assumed to represent, to be subject to or to promote, if he is not an incorruptible remainder of the eternal and accordingly unchanging past of Spirit.

For Hegel, who does nothing here but recover in a modern perspective, that is to say post-Christian, the tradition of aristocratic and pagan Antiquity, Wisdom is none other than perfect satisfaction accompanied by complete self-consciousness.

It suffices to specify that the Wise Man is satisfied, *not in spite* of the consciousness he has of himself, but on the contrary, *because* of this consciousness, to make clear that the situation corresponding to the definition specified is more difficult to

achieve, that is to say, even in the cases where it is not spectacular, it is infinitely far from all that is banal and commonplace.

That it appears to be an ideal, perhaps even the only ideal of a truly human life, everyone more or less feels, although they are rare who know how to state this clearly, to themselves or others.

In any case, no one truly appreciates a "satisfaction" without consciousness, in particular without adequate self-consciousness. Certainly some Hindus have affirmed and still affirm that the ideal of man is a "fourth state", less conscious even than a dreamless sleep. But it would appear that precisely insofar as they *speak* of these things, these bearded pseudo-sages who stay inauthentic in spite of all the hard and very sincere efforts they make to demonstrate their authenticity to themselves and to others: no sensible man can take them seriously. And as soon as one descends from the Himalayan peaks, the unconscious satisfaction engenders in others only indifference or indignation. In fact, who truly appreciates in others the "satisfactions" produced by drugs and alcohol? Who would want to see on his own face the expression of bestial "satisfaction" which sometimes reflected in the appearance of men and women who content themselves with allowing only their physical or sexual natures to blossom? In any case, no one will want to experience the full and entire "satisfaction" of self noticed in another at the onset of a general paralysis. Certainly, the era

between the wars saw some brilliant efforts intended to give the impression that the wild imaginings of paranoids, which seem to give them full and complete "satisfaction", represent genuine positive values. But these efforts, worthy of a better use, have had so to speak no response among sensible people.

On the other hand, the opposite pseudo-ideal of full self-consciousness unaccompanied by complete satisfaction has had in all times and places an infinitely better fate. Everywhere and always, in a more or less radical fashion, the religious souls have held that the awareness of one's own fundamental unworthiness, personal or national, was a good in itself, which, if accompanied by a profound discontent with oneself, exempted one from all effort (judged presumptuous) with a view to achieving a worth recognizable by others, the self-perfection with a view to the divine recognition being, in theory more or less, left to the charge, and therefore to the responsibility, of the divinity concerned.

In the secular form, this pseudo-ideal of religious essence engenders phenomena well known in the present Republic of letters. Sometimes a poet (perhaps of talent) makes us see clearly in and by his literary works what sort of unworthy man he is, and a thinker in prose praises in a book of five hundred pages the philosophical value of such a poetic awareness of self-consciousness, which would have a clear interest in staying concealed, at least in the eyes of the

police. Or yet again, a neurotic man, or one who wants, no one knows why, to pass himself off as such, fills a small library with his books, where he describes in minute detail all the disgust engendered in him by the things that his lucidity, often Freudian, lets him discover in himself, and some commentators, generally normal in their own private lives, explain then that such a self-loathing, taken as far as disgust or sublimated in anguish, represents the peak of (human) "existence".

Nonetheless, the honest man nowadays continues to think, as in the past, that when one is not satisfied with what one *is*, one must above all try to become other, namely, such that one can be delighted by the favourable judgments that one will then arouse among others, without being obliged to admit that these judgments do not correspond with reality.

Be that as it may, no one, really no one, will want or be able to deny that the ancient and Hegelian Wisdom represent a human ideal. As well, no one should be uninterested in the question of knowing whether the three Wise Men that Queneau offers us as models correspond or not to this ideal, which is always implicitly recognized. This, all the more so because at first sight at least, although this simplistic view be false, the wisdom of these three persons not only spontaneously gives pleasure to everyone, but still

is easily accessible to all. Our friend Pierrot, the Poet of Rueil, the Soldier Brù, - are they really Wise Men?

At first approach, the question seems scandalous. What is there in common, one will say, between the everyday humdrum routine of the banal life of these unemployed "voyous"²⁰⁸ and the profound and original wisdom which will perhaps one day be the supreme reward of the studious life of the philosophers (these, in passing, are more and more inclined, unlike the ancient philosophers, to think of themselves as intellectual *workers*, and to demand, while awaiting wisdom, and sometimes with the aid of a union, the salaries corresponding to their *work* of approaching it).

First, even the language of these nobodies (including that of the poet) is shocking in its vulgarity, not to mention its ungrammatical nature.

But let us reflect a little before passing a definitive judgment on the language spoken by the wise people of Queneau's novels.

²⁰⁸"Voyou" would normally be translated as "lout" or "hooligan". However, Michael Roth and Victor Gourevitch, in their new edition of *On Tyranny*, suggest that Kojève's use of the word follows that of Queneau in *les Temps Modernes*, where he suggests that "the philosopher is essentially a 'voyou'", one who lives, as Socrates did, "in the street" as opposed to in a university or in an "Epicurean garden".
OT p.155n.

Obviously, this language has nothing to do with the language that we find among the philosophers of the past when we read *now*. But is one very sure for example that Socrates (unemployed voyou?) was not speaking in his time a language closer to the present language of the Soldier Brù than that which one hears in the living rooms and salons where the philosophers of our day spout off? And, to take another example, it is necessary not to forget that the *in-itself*, the *for-itself*, and the *in-and-for-itself*, before becoming part of a forbidding jargon called technique, were, from the pen of Hegel, very simple expressions, not to say banalities, borrowed from the German of the time.

If the great philosophers made use of a more or less bizarre vocabulary of their own devising, this was only to better shake off the jumble of *prejudices* that were carried along with the words used "in the forum". But experience shows that, among the disciples or imitators of these men eager for clarity, the vocabulary that the latter have created engenders the prejudices called "philosophical" which distort and camouflage reality infinitely better, so to speak, than did the prejudices imposed by the language of the street. A return to this "vulgar" language becomes then one of the conditions of progress on the path to Wisdom, and there were in all times philosophers who made this return at an opportune moment.

Thus, the vulgarity of the language of Queneau's heroes is not a proof of their lack of wisdom. It is rather an indication of the contrary, although this indication can in no case take the place of a proof properly so-called.

But what do they say, in their "spoken" language, these so unheroic heroes that one would like to be able to call wise, since they are nice and attractive (almost as nice and attractive as these young children to whom a Kingdom of Heaven has been promised and who, therefore, try in vain to imitate innumerable saints of all kinds)?

Well! these heroes speak of everything and anything, while basically not speaking at all but of themselves. Of what they love and of what displeases them, that is to say the world just as it reveals itself in and by their thoughts through their senses, just as it appeared from the point of view in which they put themselves in the course of living there. Are they fully satisfied by this that they reveal when, after having listened with polite, that is to say tolerant, impatience to the self-revelations of others, they jump into "phenomenological description" of that which they see in themselves? All that Queneau lets us glimpse of the serene private life of Pierrot, who at first glance has nothing but disappointments, or of the life of the Poet of Rueil after his brilliant, if remote and unknown, success, who never loses his internal equilibrium, or

finally the existence of the Soldier Brù who, like a god and without any apparent effort on his part stays untouchable amidst catastrophes in which he does not in the least lose interest, allows us to suppose that things are just fine like this. But in being fully satisfied, are they really conscious of themselves? The clarity of the shallow waters where these fish who are far from being silent swim easily, gives the impression that nothing hidden surrounds them and that there is therefore nothing in them undisclosable or abtruse. Why suppose then that they do not themselves realize what is, for the theory and the objective ethic that are ours, so simple and easy to accept and to notice?

Self-conscious and satisfied with themselves, while being perfectly acceptable to everyone, why wouldn't these people have the right to the dignity of Wise Men, a right which besides they do not claim, perhaps because of modesty which is explained, without being justified, by their Christian origins?

Certainly, their banality could deceive us. But wouldn't that be too bad for us?

Besides, for the lovers of the uncommon, their behaviour is full of bizarre acts which can be a delight to a cultivated spirit, even one not well versed in the history of philosophy.

Doesn't the wise man Pierrot reveal to the "philosophers" (who are happy to pay a higher entrance fee than that which is demanded of the laymen, who take part in the show without being able to enjoy the spectacle that they offer) the hidden, but appealing, things which they would not have known how to make out, or contemplate without his intervention (for instance, the thighs of young girls, usually concealed under skirts and slips)? Doesn't this same Pierrot revere, as a true Hegelian wise man, a Sepulchre where rest the remains of an aristocratic past forever gone, but superb and absurd, which stays always present in his memory, which in no way prevents him from not calling the conservative, mechanized firemen when the cataclysmic fire destroying the bourgeois Luna-Park which encircled and would have had to, sooner or later, absorb the last resting place of the vaguely Slavic prince-martyr, threatened (unsuccessfully, besides) to sweep into emptiness this vestige of the heroic past. And the Poet of Rueil (who moreover, in his wisdom, seems to refrain from publishing any poetry) does he not prove by his very life (and by grace of the reversal, attempted and succeeded at by Queneau, of a literary theme as old as the world, opposing the mob to the elect) that contrary to that which has too often been repeated, Wisdom can be practiced in a lost village (from which nothing good can come, in the words of some Pharisees) without a warlike or revolutionary, that is to say "historical", background, and, something still more implausible, that it can be practiced without undergoing

martyrdom and without bothering or even shocking the honest men, who have left so as not to notice the fact that they are witnesses to this practice, which permits the Wise Man to live decently without having to take refuge in a hermitage, sit on a column, or make his body undergo other treatments of the same sort, as heroic as they are tiresome. Finally, does not the Soldier Brù live in metaphysical fullness since he thinks generally of *nothing* (or if he thinks of something, this thing is none other than the battle of Jena, so dear to Hegel) and devotes his vast leisure time to the identification of the emptiness of his subjective certainty with the nihilation²⁰⁹ of the temporal Being-in-itself, concretized *in* and *by*, or, better still, as a clock, which permits him to count correctly as far as three, and even, at the peak of his wisdom, as far as four (the number seven, mentioned one time by Queneau, p.244,²¹⁰ seems to be nothing but a slip of the pen or a printing error)?

The interpretation proposed above would seem artificial and arbitrary, if one did not know by the way that the author of the three novels in question is imbued with Hegelian philosophy (which he

²⁰⁹ Attempting to remain faithful to Hegel's language, Kojève invented several French words. One such was "néantir", which James H. Nichols has rendered as "nihilate". Following this, I translate "néantissement" as "nihilation". cf. IRH p.xiv.

More generally, I have relied heavily on this translation for clues to Kojève's style and usage.

²¹⁰ p. 157 in translation, *The Sunday of Life*. Barbara Wright trans. (London: John Calder Ltd., 1976).

himself signals, by the way, by borrowing from Hegel the title of his last novel). But knowing this, one could, it seems, allow this interpretation. Now, in allowing this, one is in some way obliged to pose a question, which is itself eminently Hegelian.

How is it that three men have been able to attain Wisdom, that is to say Absolute Knowledge, indeed definitive because total, before History has been completed?

From the Hegelian point of view, as long as the last negating struggles and the last work transforming the given, indispensable to the creation of a world where man could justify in his own eyes and the eyes of everyone his quiet leisure, are not completed, that is to say as long as History properly so-called lasts, the tranquility outside history can be nothing but a simulacrum of Wisdom, which sometimes imitates it, it's true, so that it is difficult to tell which is which. Such illusions have from time immemorial been situated in refined gardens of a special type, in which one enjoys Epicurus or cultivates Voltaire, to name but two of the Antichrists of philosophy, and which have been the stream of wisdom only in the eyes of their inhabitants, while they have been rightly considered as dead ends (if one insists, philosophical dead ends) by the citizens who pass in the streets trying to get somewhere.

The disinterested Proletarian, of aristocratic style and taste, the Poet who succeeds, while publishing nothing, and the pacifist professional Soldier - these three characters of whom Queneau speaks, would they then be none other than epicurean pseudo-sages?

That would be disappointing. But it is necessary to acknowledge it if one would take the novels in question literally.

In fact, it is not of the future, but of our era that there is a question. More particularly - of the war 1939-45. But, in spirit, if only in the spirit of the author (or more or less of the Soldier Brù, who says aptly that "after such a war, there would not be an after" (p.289)²¹¹ would it not be that it is a matter of the "last war" in the absolute sense of the word, and would we not be in the presence of a literary fiction, perfectly justifiable moreover, and of which the authors of the Gospels, among others, have made use.

Certainly, even in this fiction, there would still be rearguard battles. But their result being known in advance, a man of pacifist tendencies might possibly avoid participating, especially after having made the attempt to do so, nowhere better than in a military depot. Certainly, the last work would not be completed, either. In any case, the scaffolding still hides from the eyes of the public the

²¹¹ p.189 in translation.

beauty of the immense edifice, finished in rough. But if someone had truly something else to do, if he were not especially anxious to participate in the ceremonies of the official inauguration, nor in the distribution of the prizes entailed, if he knew already in advance that which the others would not see until after the event, why would he not devote himself from now on, like the Soldier Brù, to the framing of the memories of the great human family and to the advice that can always be given to the souls, of which some will be sometimes, and in whatever conditions, in need.

In fact, if this is truly the "end of time", therefore the last of the wars, that Queneau has in mind speaking of our epoch and of the war of '39, the "Sunday of Life" is none other than the "Sabbath of Man", his definitive rest after the completion of the hard struggles and the hard work required by the creation of the world that he has conceived with a view to being able to live in a satisfaction fully conscious of itself, essentially peaceful and as much as possible idle.

No surprise this being the case that this war has been able to let Brù, who, after having foreseen it, contemplated it while participating in it in a depot relatively remote from the events at the front, but where nevertheless the din of the final tidying up was clearly perceptible, take the last step that still separated the *philosophical* contemplation of the time of Being-in-itself or of the

Temporality as such, where nothing happens, from the *Wisdom* which allows the concrete totality of the completed Universe to be embraced in a discursive glance, this last step being, as expected, a Sanctity of a more or less religious hue (which, be it said in passing, has always tempted the Epicureans whom events have dislodged from the gardens dear to them).

No surprise either that the officer Paul, who took an active part in combat, without being able to say it was a matter of victory or defeat (this distinction not effectively making any more sense in the case of a *last* war, since *all* necessarily profit and to the same degree) was able to be converted to Wisdom which revealed itself to him in and by the discourse of an obscure proletarian. And if this apostle-come-late of philosophical Wisdom did not need to change his name after his conversion, having borne the right one from the beginning, it is because in the times of his spiritual blindness, it is not Violence that he opposed to Discourse, but only the absent-minded indifference of the Ignorant, which, in the final analysis, is never anything else but the Ignorance proper to those whom everything leaves indifferent.

No surprise, finally, if the wisdom that this last war arouses in Valentin Brù is authentic Wisdom, which, far from taking pleasure in its sterile game with itself, immediately makes contact with the concrete reality of the senses, this contact not provoking in the

Wise Man either disgust or anguish, but pleasure and joy; - which brings joyful laughter to that sensible clairvoyant, his faithful and dominant companion Julia (Cf. the last sentence of *The Sunday of Life*).

Certainly, the "Good Friday" which precedes this "Sabbath of Man" while turbulent enough, does not take the form of the cosmic cataclysm which the Religious await in their anguished hope and the transformation, by the way traditional, of the "Sabbath" into this "Sunday" where the heroes of Queneau live, can appear to the Aesthete drab and banal, not to say ridiculous. But ridicule does not kill as they would like. And then, can one *reasonably* aspire to something other than tranquil happiness in perfect satisfaction which gives one a self that one knows perfectly and which is attractive not only for the author (divine or human) which has created it, but still for *all* those who confront it (in life or in a book) *without prejudice*, that is to say as philosophers?

To sum up, if the *New World* (and last, since it issued from the last war) must be the world of the novels of Queneau, one will be able to say, I believe, without irony that it is *brave*. And this is the same in English.

However it turns out, admitting the interpretive hypothesis that I have just presented, and if it is only up to me, I would give the

philosophical *imprimatur* to the three novels of Queneau's which deal with Wisdom; thus the authorization to translate them into *all* languages, except - to give pleasure to the author, my friend - into "literary French".