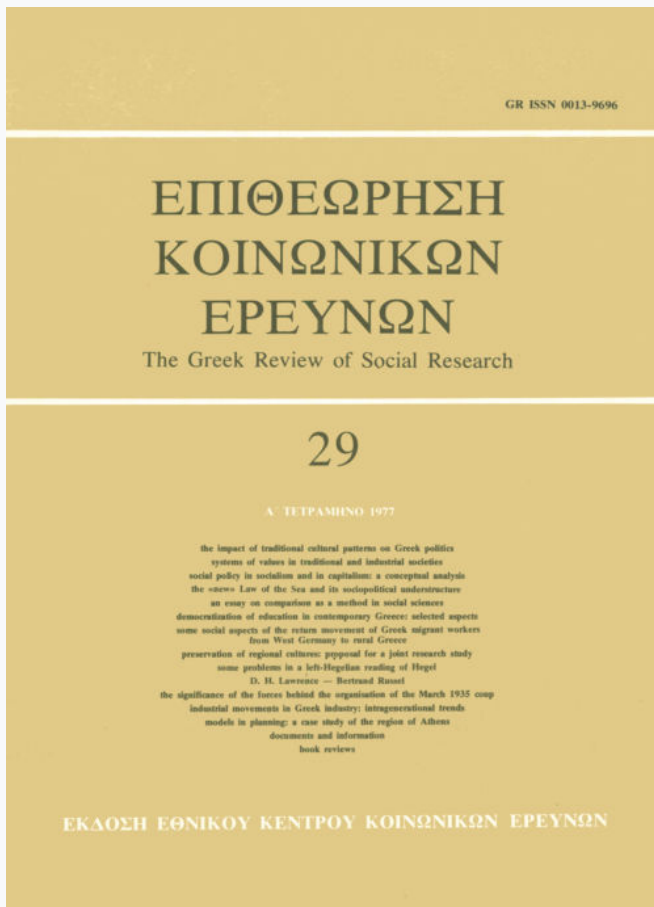


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## Some problems in a left-Hegelian reading of Hegel

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## some problems in a left-Hegelian reading of Hegel

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### 1. introduction: intent and structure of the Hegelian synthesis

Hegel lived in an epoch of upheaval and dissolution. As a political individual, who considered reading the newspaper as the best way to pray to God each morning, he was painfully aware of the hopeless fragmentation of the German Reich.<sup>1</sup> And as a thinker, he rejected the dominant philosophies of the age, those of Kant and Fichte, as formidable attempts to establish the principle of division as the supreme rule for all intellection.<sup>2</sup> He behaved with utter intolerance toward the notion that human reason was indeed privileged to construct projects for a desired penetration into the  $\delta\nu\tau\omega\varsigma\ \delta\nu$ , which, nevertheless, were condemned to remain mere «Ideas», unfulfilled yearnings for all eternity. «Our» understanding could have no experience of the intelligible. Our knowledge was always of the finite. But to Hegel this was an outright abdication of philosophical responsibility, because it tried to pass as ultimate wisdom the self-nullifying proposition that reason of necessity poses to itself tasks that it cannot hope to execute.<sup>3</sup>

A new beginning had to be made, a new method worked out permitting the restoration of unity in thought and action, whose polarities had been manipulated by analysis into rigid, implacable oppositions. Initially, Schelling's «Indifference» seemed to offer this. But eventually Hegel became convinced that «Naturphilosophie» had abandoned conceptual discourse, to become, at best, a bacchic celebration of unconscious bliss in the dark womb of the Divine, or, at worst, confusion in a night in which «all cows are black».<sup>4</sup>

Hegel did embrace the principle of Identity, but he proceeded to articulate it as a rigorous system. Primordial unity was Spirit, alienating itself into finitude, and then recovering itself out of experience, as restored totality. On this basis Hegel would try to reconstitute *all* the dissolved totalities. The best way to characterise Hegelian synthesising in a few words would be, following R. Kroner, by reference to its undaunted pretensions to absolute universality.<sup>5</sup>

1. Cf. «Die Verfassung Deutschlands» in Hegel, *Politische Schriften*, Frankfurt, 1966, pp. 23-139.

2. The critique essentially completed from a Schellingian point of view in the early Jena years with the *Differenzschrift* (1801) and *Glauben und Wissen* (1802).

3. Eg. Hegel, *PhG*, tr. Baillie, N.Y., 1967, p. 289.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

5. Richard Kroner, *Von Kant bis Hegel*, Tübingen, 1961, vol. II, p. 261. Also, G. A. Kelly, *Idealism, Politics and History*, Cambridge, 1969, p. 302.

The problem of the inner structure of this synthesis now arises. Is there a preponderant element providing solid grounding? Immediately the claim of all-inclusiveness introduces acute uncertainty. With a wealth of conflicting emphases, various exegeses have been offered as keys to the system. On the whole, we can discern, following a dichotomy suggested by J. N. Findlay and K. Hartmann,<sup>1</sup> two schools attempting a metaphysical and a non-metaphysical interpretation of Hegel.

The metaphysical argument claims that the system sought to fulfill a religious urge. Philosophy was defined by Hegel as conceptual reformulation of the teachings of Christianity. Overcoming alienation implies healing the deep but artificial rift between man and God, as it arose within the positivised Church. The logical backbone to the system, the triad of abstract universality particularity-concrete universality, is a philosophical transcription of the Christian mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation. God is the only secure foundation for the universal synthesis.<sup>2</sup>

The non-metaphysical interpretation retorts that this «transcription» actually abolished the Christian meaning of the content borrowed from religion.<sup>3</sup> In this paper we will pursue and evaluate how this line of thought reduced Hegelianism to humanism. The reduction, as elaborated by Alexandre Kojève,<sup>4</sup> rests on a brilliant analysis of labour in the *PhG*\* and attempts a new linkage between Hegel and Feuerbach and the young Marx. It has become a major landmark in Hegelian criticism.

## 2. a summary of Kojève's argument

Hegel systematically demolishes the false transcendence of the Christian absolute.<sup>5</sup> The God of traditional theology is an unreal «abstract universal» beyond finite subjectivity. But a *χωρισμός*, an insurmountable cleavage between infinity and finitude is a prejudice of analytic

thinking. We must think the *μετοχή* of empirical being in ideality, suppressing the static transcendence of *εἶδος*. The Idea descends into *empeiria*. This vision of the Idea's self-supersession, the personalisation of Substance is systematised by means of the Aristotelian concepts of *δυνάμει* (potentia, an sich) and *ἐνεργεία* (actu, für sich).

The insight into the necessity of the divine's *κένωσις*<sup>6</sup> was possessed by the religion of revealed Spirit, but only as image and sentiment. The encrustations of *Vorstellung*\* presented the *ἐνανθρώπισις* of God as a contingent historical event.<sup>7</sup> Human autonomy was crushed in the presence of an alien God-substance, of Jewish inspiration. But the creation of the world is no mythology. It is the expression in imagery of the rational principle that the Absolute contains in its very being its own opposite qua finite world. The empirical universe is in God, and God is self-negation, movement, finite history. Religion is human essence projected as a transcendent, diachronic totality.<sup>8</sup>

God is Man and Man is God. Kojève had no hesitation to resolve the extreme ambiguity<sup>9</sup> of these pronouncements in a definite way. For him, no less than for Marcuse,<sup>10</sup> it was axiomatic that *Geist*<sup>11</sup> is the ideogramme or hieroglyph, which, if deciphered correctly, yields the laws of finite human activity. The metaphysical connotations of the *term*<sup>11</sup> Geist must not be allowed to obscure this reduction. Only thus can we do justice to Negativity, which is no sport or Schein anchored in an intelligible Jenseits, but the core category of Hegel's historical thinking. For only historical man is self-transcending confrontation with nature and other men.

History is free creative labour. It cannot be imprisoned in the straitjacket of some rigidly aprioristic scheme. It is essentially open. The laws of philosophy are an understanding of what *is*, a backward-looking investigation of the origins of the present, and not divine ordinances to be fulfilled in the inevitable eschaton. The satisfaction of Science is the contemplation of this open-

1. J. N. Findlay, «The Contemporary Relevance of Hegel and Klaus Hartmann, Hegel: a Non-metaphysical View», in *Hegel, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. MacIntyre, N.Y., 1972.

2. R. Kroner, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 240, 262.

Similar views in J. Wahl, *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*, 2nd Ed., Paris 1951 and H. Niel, *De la médiation dans la philosophie de Hegel*, Paris, 1945.

3. Eg. H. Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, Boston, 1968.

4. A. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Paris, 1947.

5. Kojève, op. cit., pp. 47, 75, 76, 155, 156. Hegel, *PhG*, pp. 763-764.

\* *Phenomenologie des Geistes*

6. Hegel, *PhG*, p. 755.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 765, 768.

8. Kojève, op. cit., pp. 201-202.

9. Although it figures in G. Lukacs, *Der junge Hegel*, Neuwied and Berlin, 1967, pp. 636-644 for example; the notion of a pervasive ambiguity in Hegel was brought out with forcefulness in H. Niel, op. cit., pp. 214, 251-253, 332, etc.

10. H. Marcuse, op. cit., p. 139.

11. For the problem of the religious connotations of Hegel's language, cf. F. Grégoire, *Études Hégéliennes*, Paris, 1958, pp. 212-217.

\* Thought by means of representations, objectified images

\*\* Spirit

ness, the rational reconstruction of the systematic doubt incessantly performed by historical being on itself. It is a rejoicing in the formative genius of humanity, which has also accomplished a perfect comprehension of its own life.<sup>1</sup>

The dialectic of social labour constitutes the dynamic of this radically historicised existence. For Kojève, Hegel's eternal merit is that, as Marx had already acknowledged in 1844,<sup>2</sup> he was the first philosopher to install *homo faber* as the ground of all philosophising.<sup>3</sup>

Man is need, biological desire. But this is *passive* activity, consumption of external matter in total dependence to it. It is also a false conquest of nature, because the original void perpetually reasserts itself.<sup>4</sup> We must break out of this vicious circle to gain freedom, which is imposition of human meaning on *subjugated* externality.<sup>5</sup> The environment for this transition is the battle for recognition between two men-brutes and the resultant stratification into masters and slaves.<sup>6</sup> This is the properly «anthropogenic» situation, in which animal desire becomes human because it acquires another desire as its object.<sup>7</sup> In the well-known inversion, the master self-destructs, as an indolent being, an «existential impasse»: Only the slave achieves humanity. Fear liquefies the fixed determinants of the slave's being, and labour educates him in freedom: by producing he grasps himself as determining externality. A first abstract consciousness of freedom emerges. The slave becomes a stoic, while the master vegetates, destined to die out eventually.<sup>8</sup>

For Kojève, history is from now on the process of concretising the abstract freedom won by the slave, ultimately in the shape of a political order of universal equality.<sup>9</sup> But before this is achieved, a series of «strategies of retreat» will intervene, pretended redemptions in thought that leave the social reality of slavery intact. Supreme among such fictitious liberations is Christianity.<sup>10</sup> Genuine freedom can come only by the abolition of the last form of slavery, bourgeois society, and its Christian ideology. This was accomplished in the French Revolution, the final revolt of the slaves against the masters and the triumph of

equality and atheism.<sup>11</sup> When Napoleon finally translates the ideals of the French Revolution into a new institutional order, Hegel sees this, according to Kojève, as the realisation of the «homogeneous and universal»<sup>12</sup> state of objective freedom, the telos of history.<sup>13</sup>

Napoleon establishes the political conditions for the full blossoming of atheist, creative humanity. Hegel is the consciousness of this achievement, he comprehends this perfect reality from the standpoint of the *Weltgeist*. Hegel's absolute philosophy is the conceptualisation of the new rational order.<sup>14</sup> The definitive *Befriedigung*\* of historical man is, in fine, in the free pursuit of selfdevelopment in the Napoleonic state, and in the consciousness of this his concrete freedom through the principles of Hegelianism.

### 3. Hegel's history and Kojève's reduction

Kojève's reduction is based on a special reading of the *PhG* alone. Based on this exclusive emphasis Kojève claims that for Hegel the Napoleonic Empire is the consummation of history.

It is well-known that in 1806, the year of the *PhG*, Hegel believed that under the leadership of Napoleon a rational reorganisation of the world was in process.<sup>15</sup> This conviction reflected an objective truth, namely that at the time Napoleon was in fact the principal agent of historical progress. His push for world domination was expediting throughout Europe the collapse of decadent feudal holdovers.

And yet, it would be inaccurate to claim that the mood of intense expectation for political change is the dominant element in Hegel's thought in 1806, and equally after the collapse of Napoleon's adventure.

Hegel was interested in Napoleon only to the extent that his schemes could be integrated in the march of the *Weltgeist*, the progress of freedom. In this light the changes he wrought, affirming freedom within an objective order, were permanent conquests of the human spirit. It was this a priori of objective freedom that Hegel never renounced.

But it is arbitrary to conclude from this either that Hegel saw his ideal free state realised in Napoleon's Empire; or that this ideal was based

1. Kojève, op. cit., pp. 300-302.

2. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, N.Y., 1973, p.177.

3. Kojève, op. cit., p. 217 among numerous other references.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 14.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-34.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 180, 181-182.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 289, 145 among numerous other references.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195 among numerous other references.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 153 among numerous other references.

15. G. Lukacs, op. cit., pp. 555-556.

\* Satisfaction

on the principle of equality and atheism; or, finally, *even if* we concede that for a moment he saw in the Empire the highest expression of freedom in the world, he stuck to this view after its collapse.

On the contrary, we know that Hegel's mature conception of the state depicts a severely hierarchical structure, with an important role played by religion and the Church. And it is patterned not on Napoleon's state but on the Prussia of the Stein-Hardenberg reforms.<sup>1</sup>

The shift away from a profound, yet of necessity temporary, allegiance to Napoleon can be corroborated by reference to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, that Hegel pronounced in Berlin after 1818. They express his mature vision of history. The important point here is that, in comparison to the *PhG*, the significance of the French Revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath has perceptibly receded.<sup>2</sup> It does not any more represent the decisive turning point in modern history. The great event that launches the final drive of Reason for definitive triumph is now the German Reformation,<sup>3</sup> which reaffirmed the infinite value of subjectivity to break the stranglehold of the positive church. The French Revolution failed because the French soul had not managed to shake off the shackles of Catholicism before it undertook to demolish the political order.<sup>4</sup> The real earth-shaking revolution will occur in Germany. It will be the spiritual revolution culminating in Hegelianism, which builds on Luther's insights. The *Weltgeist* has migrated from France and political objectivity to Germany and philosophical subjectivity. The same movement is foreshadowed in the *PhG* as well.

Napoleon is not any more the principal agent of spiritual progress. Rather, three other world-historical individuals, whose vocation was at the antipodes of Napoleon's worldly undertaking, predominate. All three represent the *irruption of the subjective principle* into closed «natural» syntheses to explode their objectivised limitedness. They are: Socrates, whose affirmation of subjective freedom disrupts the custom-based harmony of the Polis, registering the fact of its incipient decomposition; Christ, who manifestly unites an alien God-object with finite subjectivity; and, as we would expect, Luther.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, it becomes evident from the outset that Hegel's rational schematisation of history purported to account for the triumph of subjectivity and spirituality in a processually unified cosmos.

But, could it be that the «mature view» is a degeneration of original insights under the impact of steadily growing uncritical conservatism? Could Kojève's emphasis on the French Revolution and Napoleon, although not valid for the system as a whole, reflect the spirit of an earlier, more «progressive» phase in Hegel's thought?

We must answer in the negative. At no time in Hegel's development was the telos of history defined in political terms. Paradoxically, this applies particularly to the most Napoleonic phase of his thought. A synoptic evaluation of the *PhG* proves that a primacy of the political moment, whose essence is labour, is an exaggeration. On the whole, the primacy of the *ideal* moment is already established by 1806, and it will remain an unchanged assumption throughout.

Kojève's key claim is that in the *PhG* philosophy and religion are conceived as ideological superstructures determined by the concrete historical existence of the organised human community, the *Volk*.<sup>6\*</sup> It is instructive to note that the textual evidence produced to back this view does not come from the *PhG*, but from an earlier text. No wonder. For, first of all, the political moment as conceived and analysed by the mature Hegel is absent. Social morality, as the reconciliation within the framework of a constitutional monarchy of the various private and social aspects of human life (property, conscience, family, class, economic activity, political representation, etc.), simply does not figure. Further, the shape of the Ethical Order (*Sittlichkeit*) with a different content, that does appear is ultimately superseded in the *PhG* by Morality, reversing the sequence of the 1821 *PhG* (*Philosophy of Right*).<sup>7</sup>

Admittedly, we would expect, in an itinerary of consciousness, the socio-political background to be refracted through the prism of subjective *doxa* on its way to perfect *aletheia*. But, even allowing for this distortion, we would still demand fragments of subjective impressions somehow corresponding with an objective reality exhibiting Hegelian articulation (estates, corporation, etc.). But in the *PhG* a post-revolutionary political order is not reflected. We will see later why.

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 557, 620. Also S. Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, Cambridge, 1972, pp. 63, 67, 70.

2. G. Lukacs, *op. cit.*, pp. 561-562.

3. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, N.Y., 1900, pp. 412-438.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 444, 445, 447, 453.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 267-271: on Socrates; pp. 318-326: On Christ; pp. 414-418: on Luther.

6. Kojève, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-201, 289. Quotation referred to in next sentence, pp. 201-202.

7. Compare *PhG*, pp. 466-679, from «*Sittlichkeit*» to «*Moralität*»; with *PhG*, Frankfurt, 1970, pp. 203-503, from «*Moralität*» to «*Sittlichkeit*».

\* People, Nation.

In this connection it interests us to note that the «Sittlichkeit» of the *PhG* refers totally and exclusively to the «unreflected», customary harmony of the Polis.<sup>1</sup> The only division here is the differentiation between a divine of chthonic law, defended by woman,<sup>2</sup> and the law of the state, upheld by man.<sup>3</sup> This is the direct appropriation of the *Antigone* for philosophy, the poetic conflict conceptualised, absolutised. Hegel's idealistic procedure is well in evidence here: the structure of the social background is deduced from an ideal division. The opposition in the sphere of Law is emphatically non-reducible to any social base. On the contrary, social cleavage is accounted for through ideal conditions. In any case, we are literally worlds apart from modern socio-economic articulation.

Even more momentous is the manner in which «Sittlichkeit» is superseded in the *PhG*. After a long procession of dirempted worlds the dialectic culminates in Kantian Morality.<sup>4</sup>

One of the intermediate forms, whose truth is Kantian freedom of conscience, is the French Revolution, alleged by Kojève to signal the eschaton in Hegelian history. In the French Revolution Kojève's Hegel sees the definitive act of human social and spiritual liberation. It is the revolt of the slaves against the masters that finally abolishes mastery, and hence slavery too. It is the advent of equality in a society of free atheist individuals.<sup>5</sup>

But here Kojève is imposing on Hegel an alien inspiration. The French Revolution as it unfolds in the *PhG* is the consequence of no class conflict. Masters and slaves as constituted social groups battling for possession of the means of production are absent. Consequently, the capture of political power by a class, which, in order to free itself from exploitation, must proceed to liberate humanity as a whole, is equally a fiction.

For Hegel the French Revolution is not a social but a spiritual event; no class rebellion, but the outcome of the rage and fury of abstract, atomised self-consciousness proceeding to impose on the world, which it wants for itself, its arbitrary, unlimited, violent will.<sup>6</sup> This is the negative freedom of the Enlightenment in action. The objective socio-political environment is perceived by the self-centered individuality as a fetter it has to demolish. No institution survives. The old

order is pulverised, and society is reduced to a quantitative aggregation of mutually exclusive atoms.

But in its paroxysm of destruction negative freedom produces death and no new life. No single, unified class accedes to power, but only factions, fortuitous and momentary conspiracies of self-seeking individuals, clashing with one another for purely particular ends.<sup>7</sup> This is a reign of terror and total anarchy. The old order has been subverted, but its place taken by an immense chasm that cannot be filled by the thousands of heads rolling off the guillotine like split cabbages.<sup>8</sup> This is no ideal for reason. It, rather, condemns the spectacle with horror, because it recognises freedom only within an objective context. Negative freedom can only obliterate a moribund world, but cannot deliver the new one. Consciousness will seek a higher principle to reunify the pulverised universe.

It finds it in its own subjectivity. Abstract freedom failed to objectify itself. Consciousness now recoils from objectivity and absorbs the cosmos in its punctiform atomicity. It becomes moral conscience, the self-certainty of subject knowing itself as universal.<sup>9</sup> This was the great teaching of Kant. By embracing it we leave France behind. Spirit migrates to a new land, the land of thought, Germany.<sup>10</sup>

It is the inner dialectic of the Kantian «moral view of the world», culminating in the profound Yea-saying of Forgiveness (*Verzeihung*),<sup>11</sup> and not some terrestrial paradise, just exposed as a miserable failure, that ushers in the era of the finite spirit's unity with the absolute, initially in the medium of faith.<sup>20</sup>

Not that Kantianism as it stands is the accomplished reconciliation. On the contrary, it has to undergo extensive transformation before the wounds of diremption are healed.<sup>13</sup> Kant started well on this road with his «transcendental unity of apperception», but because he refused to sacrifice the «Ding-an-sich», his «intellectus archetypus» remained a mere «Idea». Only Hegel's unification of substantiality and subjectivity<sup>14</sup> will definitively respond to the profound yearning of contemporary *Bildung* for a totalising view of the cosmos.<sup>15</sup>

7. *Ibid.*, p. 605.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 605-606.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 613-614.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 610.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 677, 679.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 685-694. Also G. Lukacs, *op. cit.*, p. 595.

13. The insights of 1801-1802 incorporated in the *PhG*: pp. 190-193, 440-453 for instance.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

15. Hegel, *Differenzschrift*, Frankfurt, 1970, pp. 20, 22.

1. Hegel, *PhG*, pp. 466-499.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 476.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 478.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 613-627.

5. Kojève, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 183.

6. Hegel, *PhG*, p. 604.

Thus, the ideal trajectory beyond political objectivity has already been described in the *PhG*, despite Kojève's insistence to the contrary. But equally important is another fact, which he also chooses to neglect, namely that as yet in 1806 this prospect of salvation in the restored unity of thought is in no position to point to any objective background—and that includes Napoleon's state—as its corresponding political framework.

Not that the *demand* for objectivity is absent; it constitutes an essential aspect of Hegel's method. But, for the time being, it can be no more than this, a mere demand, pure unfulfilled Ought (Sollen).<sup>1</sup> Why? Because, as we saw above, the French Revolution destroyed, but did not create. Napoleon gave the upheaval pan-European dimensions. But his enterprise was still in its formative stage and had produced no permanent institutionalisation. The war between the old and the new in Europe was still raging. No objective order of freedom had congealed, to which Hegel could attach himself definitely and unequivocally. Certainly, there were signs (the Code Napoleon, for instance) that the reality which might emerge out of the turmoil stood a good chance of conforming to the standards of the new rationality. But these were statements of intent, rather than objective crystallisations.<sup>1A</sup>

Consequently, it is claiming too much to suggest that the Hegel of the *PhG* found in the still fluid Napoleonic reality the eternal paradigm of concrete freedom. On the political level, the *PhG* is characterised more by the silence of ambiguity, than by the firmness of commitment. It stands at mid-point between two worlds, decadent pre-revolution France, which died a deserved death, and the future community of universal recognition, which *has not yet come into existence*.

The only certainty is in the realm of thought. Whatever happens in politics, salvation proceeds from a revolution in philosophy. Admittedly, the dialectical method requires that the synthesis

must ultimately acquire a social ground. But the concern with objectivity in no way expresses a belief in Hegel that a political infra-structure conditions the ideal systematisation. The principles for the synthesis have already been posited in 1806, long before reformed Prussia was finally seized upon as the needed foothold in objectivity. In any event, the *PhG* lacks any such firm support.

It was Gyorgy Lukacs who laid stress on this lack of social connection. Hegel's flight into idealism, his conviction that the sheer power of the German spiritual Schwung could alone reconstitute the unities lying broken like gaping wounds on the battlefields of the world, appeared to him particularly empty, precisely because it corresponded to no political reality, German or otherwise. He dubbed it, therefore, «Hegel's German Utopia».<sup>2</sup>

This «utopian» element is significantly accentuated because in the *PhG* the first momentous methodological break-through towards the ultimate ideal reconciliation has just occurred. The *Preface* exudes the intense excitement of the thinker who has just opened his wings to soar in the crystalline ether of Spirit and the whole landscape of reason, as a vast but perfectly constituted totality, is beginning to take shape under his very eyes. The system has not, of course, been completed yet. The *PhG* is only an «Introduction» to Science. But its basis has been laid out; it is the identity of substance and subject.

Hegel is here under the impact of the joy of first discovery, of the breathtaking realisation that at last the principle of universal synthesis has been won. There is no celebration of mundane state structures here; only rupture and amazement at the prodigious power of Reason energising the finite mind. The impetuous rush to complete in one fell swoop, if possible, the assimilation of the totality of life, the flushed stubbornness to undertake a tortuous ascent to the supreme peak of rationality, this is the elemental impulse permeating the *PhG*, the force that shapes the roughness of its texture. Gushing forth like a flood of concepts and feelings it betrays the profound agitation of a young mind, which believes it has just solved the riddle of the universe!

The ecstatic fervour will reach its peaks of enthusiasm in the emotional ending of the *PhG*,<sup>3</sup> which, despite Kojève's attempt to prove that Hegel's habitual misquotations imply that the lines from Schiller are meant as a celebration of

1. Hegel, *PhG*, p. 607. We need a reconstitution of the dissolved spheres, a new institutionalisation. But Hegel here could only conceive of this as a *return to the past* and a repetition of the «cycle of necessity» culminating in the revolution. An objective order as an immediate prospect is *not* contented, although its need is deeply felt. Inwardness is the only way out.

1A. On Napoleon: «He, then, with the vast might of his character turned his attention to foreign relations, subjected all Europe, and diffused his liberal institutions in every quarter. Greater victories were never gained, expeditions displaying greater genius were never conducted; but never was the powerlessness of victory exhibited in a clearer light than then. The disposition of the peoples, i.e. their religious disposition and that of their nationality, ultimately precipitated that colossus:...», *Philosophy of History*, p. 451.

2. G. Lukacs, *op. cit.*, p. 618.

3. Hegel, *PhG*, p. 808.



human empirical existence,<sup>1</sup> constitutes an almost mystical<sup>2</sup> glorification of the awesome power of reason to defeat finitude.

The demand for the posteriorisation of the a priori, to use again the words of R. Kroner, will be more adequately dealt with later, when, after the collapse of Napoleon's empire, the landscape of Europe solidifies into new, more or less stable political arrangements. The iron logic of history has now disposed of the claims of the Napoleonic state to represent the fulfilment of rationality. The *Weltgeist* is now ready to migrate to a new land *politically* as well as philosophically. The «utopian» vision of 1806 can now be referred to a concrete social entity, the land of thought can now be correlated with an existent German state, Prussia.

Hegel's newfound loyalty for Prussia certainly signals a retreat from the revolutionary expectations of earlier, more unsettled years. And yet, as G. Lukacs has shown, despite a growing conservatism, in the strict sense that a given objective structure is now accepted as the possible social basis of freedom, and, as we might add, in a way *because of it*, as Hegel now possesses tangible empirical material to base his generalisations on, his grasp of the conflicts and cleavages forming the social content of emerging industrial Europe becomes sharp and realistic, his analysis of trends incisive, clearly anticipating the later Marxian critique of bourgeois society.<sup>3</sup> The insights on the function of the market and alienated labour in contemporary capitalism, developed in the years 1803-1806, which were significantly ignored in the *PhG*, are only now (*PhR*, 1821) reappropriated within a political framework with definite objective references.<sup>4</sup>

But conservatism has nothing to do in Hegel's case with servile adulation of a status quo. He became convinced that the ambitious programme of social reform in Prussia could be the starting point for further progress.<sup>5</sup> Prussia was a dynamic reality, certainly in need for improvement, yet a paradigm for rationality in politics, because she allegedly recognised freedom of the individual within an institutional structure based on law. It was again from the standpoint of reason and freedom, that Hegel approached the Prussian experience as a possible objective ground for his ideal state. This later empirical

orientation amends to a significant degree the flight into pure thought of 1806, that so offended Lukacs. But it would be unwarranted to claim that it subverts the sovereignty of the ideal as established in the *PhG*, as some were tempted to assert by totally isolating the *PhG* from its overall philosophical context.<sup>6</sup>

The demand for empirical instantiation is a central aspect of the Hegelian method that synthesises thought and being under conditions of a primacy of thought. Just because by 1821 the absolute System has isolated a sociopolitical background, exhibiting encouraging tendencies for transforming itself into the rationally demanded real framework for the full blossoming of Hegelian man, philosophy does not forfeit its dominance.

The state is necessary and rational only to the extent that it performs the linkage between raw particularity and the universal, i.e. as a basis for higher spirituality. It would be an anachronism to impute to this conception the Marxian relation of determination of a superstructure by a social infra-structure. Philosophy is its time apprehended in thoughts in the precise Hegelian sense of revealing to what degree the Absolute has acquired an adequate objective expression at a particular moment in history. What is actual is indeed rational, but it is only the Idea that identifies what is reality «in the emphatic sense» (*Wirklichkeit*) as opposed to contingent *Realität* which should be disregarded.<sup>7</sup> Philosophy must be seen, therefore, as a rigorous *critique* of what is from the standpoint of reason, even though the most decadent, irrational reality does contain the hidden seeds for a superior truth.<sup>8</sup> The state is «divine» not as an end in itself, the Moloch to which the individual must be sacrificed, but only as a moment, alongside other equally divine moments, in the eschatology of absolute knowledge governing history. It is the most perfect, all-inclusive *objective* structure, upholding the freedom of the individual, so that he may achieve the fullest comprehension of his self in this freedom.<sup>9</sup>

6. E.G. Eric Weil, *Hegel et l'état*, Paris 1950. On this see Kelly, op. cit., pp. 293-294, 323.

7. Hegel, *PhR*, pp. 24.25.

8. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, vol. II, Frankfurt, 1969, p. 465, where the possibility of an empirical state not in conformity with reason is explicitly recognised. Also Kelly, op. cit., pp. 332, 333. «Hegel's is a Gedankenstaat», hence it can conceivably conflict with irrational *Realität*. Also in Kelly, p. 323: «Nothing indeed is in its way more radical than Hegel's notion of reason».

9. Grégoire, op. cit., pp. 331-333, 240-247. Kelly, op. cit., p. 328.

1. Kojève, op. cit., p. 440.  
 2. G. Lukacs, op. cit., pp. 626, 632, 640, 652, 667-668.  
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 568.  
 4. Compare *Jenaer Realphilosophie* (1805-6), Hamburg, 1969, pp. 213-221, and *PhR*, Frankfurt, 1970, pp. 346-360.  
 5. Avineri, op. cit., pp. 78-79.



The argument up to this point has shown, I hope, that Kojève has performed a number of ingenious transpositions to found his claim that in the *PhG*, as well as in the competed system, Hegel puts forth a particular political reality based on liberated labour, and a philosophy determined by it, as the telos of history. Even if this were true of the *PhG* individually, its validity for the mature synthesis would not automatically follow. But as we saw, the «utopian» flight of 1806 disproves the claim as it relates to the *PhG* as well. By 1821 the celebration of pure thought has been tempered by empirical reference, but this is a demand internal to Hegel's idealism and does not disturb the primacy of absolute over objective spirit.

Besides, even if it did the reduction would resemble much more reformed Prussia, than Napoleon's alleged «homogeneous and universal» empire.

#### 4. empiricism and its «truth»

To back his objectivistic slant Kojève attempts a reinterpretation of Hegel's method too. His thesis is that this method is «phenomenological description», further equated with empiricism and positivism.<sup>1</sup> The dialectic is no method, because the latter strictly defined is a set of rules heuristically posited in severance from the object to be dissected. The dialectic, on the contrary, asserts the implicit identity of thought and its content. For it, thought is not a set of formal rules of exclusively subjective validity, but submersion into being, description of its inner life, an imitation, a registration of determining objective tendencies.<sup>2</sup>

Is this ingenious attempt to portray an «empiricist» Hegel tenable?

This reduction starts from a correct identification of the logical core of Hegelianism, the assumption of unity of thought and being. It also rightly points out that if we adhere to an everyday acceptance of «method» and logic, as abstraction from content, then obviously dialectics is not *this sort* of method; it is also illogical. Hegel has argued extensively against the separation of subject from object.<sup>3</sup> But he has also argued for a higher rationality (dialectics is illogical *for Understanding*) on the assumption of identity. Would the ordinary empiricist feel at home in this assumption? Can the constraints of the scientific

method square with the Hegelian a priori? Not so easily.

From the standpoint of a higher criticism, the empiricist's inability to accept original identity, as unwarranted metaphysical extrapolation, appears as *unscientific self-contradicting stubbornness*. On the one hand, he demands that the tools of the mind be kept in total severance from the world «out there». On the other, as soon as he has uttered this, he proceeds to annihilate its validity in practice; he executes projects, based on the abstract conception of method, which are supposed to fully expose the inner structure of the very being assumed as external to reason. But this total interpenetration cannot occur if a radical cleavage separates mind from objectivity.

It is illogical to claim that the coincidence of thought and object, accepted *in practice* by empirical science itself, must be perceived only as a result, a conclusion of unity built on the premises of strict separation. Unity qua result can originate only with an implicit identity, which *appears* as total division to phenomenal consciousness.

The empiricist has the privilege to refuse to make this necessary backward inference. He begins *in medias res* and accepts the *Entzweiung*\* at hand as the ultimate fact. Subjectively, he may even feel quite satisfied in this contradiction. But, strictly considered, if he makes this choice, he has to accept either one of two equally unacceptable corollaries: either science, as of mere subjective validity, *cannot* produce true knowledge of objective being as it is in itself; or, if it *does* produce knowledge, then how it is achieved must remain a mystery.

As far as philosophy is concerned, this contradiction, which actually undermines science instead of securing it from the encroachments of metaphysics, must be lifted. A «higher comment»<sup>4</sup> on empiricism does not deny the reality of the accomplishments of science, which are considered as a most valuable expression of man's inherent drive to humanise nature,<sup>5</sup> but provides it with a solid theoretical underpinning, within the overall synthetic scheme.

Hegelianism cannot be without further identified with empiricism. We must add the all-important specification that dialectics is the *truth* of empiricism, it is true or genuine empiricism, in so far as it takes the plunge into being, healing the *Trennung*\*\* and uncovering empiricism's implicit foundations. Hence, it is equally the aboli-

1. Kojève, op. cit., pp. 447, 451.

2. Ibid., p. 446.

3. The most concise argument in *PhG*, pp. 111-115.

4. Findlay, op. cit., p. 4.

5. Science as a necessary tool for subjugating nature: cf. ch. on «observing reason» in *PhG*, pp. 281-372.

\* Division

\*\* Separation

tion of what we ordinarily understand as empiricism.<sup>1</sup>

Can we reasonably expect the empiricist himself to acquiesce in this his own *Aufhebung*? To him scientific praxis is all that matters. He is not subjectively aware of any contradiction in his situation, and the Hegelian attempt to point one out is dismissed as irrelevant metaphysics.

Paradoxically it was Kojève himself who brilliantly demonstrated that it is not at all necessary that an individual operating on the level of Understanding (or, for that matter, within the limits of any other partial viewpoint) perceive his thus confined existence as torn by intolerable contradiction. Further, he is under no obligation to seek liberation, in case he does experience inner conflict, in thought. Finally, even if he hopes for salvation in some form of self-consciousness, the adoption of Hegel's absolute standpoint is not inevitable.<sup>2</sup>

Hegel assumes a priori the necessity for a relentless ascent from the lowest forms of self-awareness all the way to the final synthesis of absolute idealism. But again it was Kojève who showed that this assumption is shared only by a restricted group of *philosophers*, who accept thought, in its dynamic universalisation, as the proper medium of a necessary reconciliation.<sup>3</sup> It does not apply to those, for example, who espouse the predominance of the irrational in human nature; or to those who seek fulfilment in non-philosophical pursuits (politics, art, business, etc.), understood as limited by dialectics, but not by the participants themselves.

There is no guarantee that a «higher comment» on these partial forms from the outside will cause their disintegration, by unveiling contradictions which the limited subjects themselves do not experience. But further, there is no necessity either why these subjects should acknowledge precisely such limitations in their existence as Hegel professes to discern.<sup>4</sup>

1. Cf. the polemic against mathematics in *PhG*, pp. 100-105; the argument for philosophy's determining superiority vis-a-vis the empirical sciences in *PhG*, p. 125. Also *PhG*, p. 115: «This nature of scientific method, which consists partly in being inseparable from content, and partly in *determining the rhythm of its movement by its own agency*, finds, as we mentioned before, its peculiar systematic expression in speculative philosophy» (emphasis added). This clearly sets Hegel apart from ordinary empiricism.

See also: Kroner, op. cit., 'vol. II, pp. 241-253, ch. on «Empirie und Spekulation in der Philosophie des Geistes»; and E. Bloch, *Subjekt-Objekt*, pp. 109-117, ch. on «Hegel and Empiricism».

2. Kojève, op. cit., p. 286.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 279.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 277.

Surprisingly, these very effective criticisms levelled by Kojève against the notion of a strict progression from «lower» to «higher» forms of consciousness can be turned against his own identification of Hegelianism and empiricism. In this he is practising the same procedure he criticised in Hegel, because he claims a necessary adoption of the dialectical position by the «lower» standpoint.

And yet, an unreconciled, and indeed unreconcilable, discrepancy between relative and absolute points of view, an essential pluralism of attitudes must be granted, *even if* one admits that only some form of «synoptic dialectic», to use Plato's terms, can best achieve the unification of the human experience.

The dialectician may be capable of placing the empiricist in a universal scheme, but the latter is in no way obligated to acknowledge the placement, and its particular form, as the former's right.

## 5. the inner structure of the Hegelian synthesis

The assertion of a primacy of the objective moment in Hegel led Kojève to the identification of the phenomenological with the empirical method. To demonstrate it, he referred abstractly and in general terms to the original unity of subject-object, called, quite correctly, the heart of the dialectical vision of the universe. He has avoided to investigate the inner structure of that unity, to search for the dominant element providing the environment for the totalisation. But, lack of explicit reference to the problem of structure, which seems to imply that such a problem is not even recognised, does not deter Kojève from offering his own solution. The humanist reduction is self-evident truth and the arguments against it simply ignored.

The objective pole is torn away from its subjective counterpart and posited as the quintessence of the synthesis. Kojève is categorical that in Hegel thought is defined as an imitation of being, that philosophy is conditioned by the rhythm of the objective movement, that Spirit is historical man struggling to perfect his existence in the world through labour.

But Hegel also insisted that thought is capable of following the object because being is essentially thought, because the world in-itself (an-sich) is rational articulation, a structure of objectivised, materialised and socialised, concepts.<sup>5</sup> The material universe is no hard rock on which thought's universalistic pretensions are shattered. To the

5. The self-identity of being is pure abstraction, hence thought; cf. *PhG*, p. 113.

contrary, the object cannot, in the final analysis, offer successful resistance to the onslaught of the Idea, whose determination to find itself in matter cannot be frustrated.<sup>1</sup> This occurs not because the object is a dream, an unreality, but because this fundamental impulse of the Idea coincides with the inherent destiny and desire of matter itself, its self-determination to become rationalised. Hence we cannot refer exclusively to a materialisation of thought demanded by Hegel. This assertion must be accompanied by the correlative proposition that materialisation is possible only because matter has been previously profoundly spiritualised; the empirical universe has been defined as manifestation of a rational «an sich», comprehended as moment in the dynamic self-propelled unfolding of reason.

Again, what is actual is rational, thought requires an objective basis, empirical instantiation. But precisely *what* is actual, which objective order is worthy to function as the real instance of reason, this is determined by reason itself. The Idea scrutinises the finite given and a priori selects the configurations corresponding to the ideal needs of its self-supersession.<sup>2</sup>

As Klaus Hartmann has suggested, the «minimal» claim that ought to be advanced is that in the synthesis being figures only to the extent that it is *thought* being; objectivity amenable to totalisation is only that which can be penetrated by the concept. All reality that could be imagined as inaccessible to thought is disregarded.<sup>3</sup>

This procedure is quite glaring in Hegel's approach to nature. The most that reason can achieve in this the most empirical of objective realms is an *imperfect* instantiation of the a priori of unity, in the throes of rampant contingency that spirit cannot claim absolutely.<sup>4</sup> Hence, philosophy is here satisfied to sketch the vague contours of the concept, to somehow guess its presence. It adopts an aporetic posture vis-a-vis non-assimilable irrationality. This stubborn resistance of nature to the universalistic aspirations of Hegelian reason is the origin of Hegel's deep contempt for it, as the point of greatest distance from Spirit. But this resentment is equally a confession

of impotence to tame this harshest expression of finitude, the point at which the elimination of recalcitrant facts becomes somewhat vexatious philosophically, as the rigid scheme comes up against a limit. But this is a momentary discomfort, thought cannot be dragged down by it. It quickly moves forward by turning its back on phenomena that do not lend themselves to conceptualisation. The process of «selection» reasserts itself, the same one practiced in the superior realm of politics, only there with more finesse and convoluted subtlety.

It becomes clear, therefore, that the actualisation of thought (thought is being) cannot be conceived independently from, but only within the framework of spiritualised objectivity (being is thought). This latter thesis is not merely coordinated with the former, juxtaposed to it; they are not both posited in one breath so that they are annulled reciprocally, and the outcome is a big zero. Thought is given a material basis only on condition that reason should purify the object from contingency. Within the synthesis reason is the dominant element. Hegel does in fact unify thought and being, but *in, by and for* thought.<sup>5</sup>

This is the meaning of Hegel's dictum that «all philosophy is idealism».<sup>6</sup> Philosophy, by virtue of the simple fact of being a thought reconstruction of the foundations of reality is ipso facto idealistic, even if it attributes ultimate truth to so-called material principles. Air, water, the void, not to speak of pure matter, represent just differing degrees of abstraction from tangible finitude purporting to express the essential in all empirical existence.<sup>7</sup> Hegel was the first to formulate the conditions under which philosophy would be able to *fully* accomplish its idealistic vocation, i.e. achieve a perfect penetration of the absolute. Idealism became absolute with Hegel.

Since this new idealism is discourse about the inner logic of εἶναι, and the εἶναι of logos, hence an onto-logy, it does not conceive the ideal as lack of objectivity, transcendent void beyond the finite universe: It does not imply either that a thought creates the world ex nihilo, that objectivity is an illusion, a state of mind. In the original thought-based unity subject and object are both real. They become fused because dialectical criticism reveals that they cannot achieve genuine, rational reality in mutually exclusive isolation. Their reality is in and through one another: the positing of Sein is ipso facto the positing of conscious-

1. Ibid., p. 145.

2. Hegel, *Logik*, vol. II, p. 464.

3. Hartmann, op. cit., pp. 103-104. It is a different question whether a «maximal» claim is also legitimate, i.e. a full-scale metaphysicisation of the system. Hartmann himself, p. 117, that a non-metaphysical logical interpretation is adequate, although he does not dismiss out of hand the «maximal» claim (p. 123). But for Kroner, op. cit., vol. II, p. 302, Hegel did not logicise the cosmos, but spiritualised logic. This debate belongs to a discussion of the metaphysical argument as such. What is of relevance here is that both reject the reduction to labour.

4. Hegel, *PhG*, pp. 324-327.

5. Kelly, op. cit., pp. 301, 309-312.

6. Hegel, *Logik*, vol. I, p. 172.

7. Ibid., p. 172.

ness, because Sein is essential abstraction from all determination.<sup>1</sup>

To the extent that the a priori unity is moved by the inherent necessity to transcend its abstract immediacy and unfold the wealth of its implicit determinations qua empirical history it is Spirit. It is the abstract logic of universal dynamic interconnection in the process of assimilating the objective moment; Spirit is descent into finitude and the appropriation of the finite for reason. This is what distinguishes Hegelianism from an idealism that opposes the pure idea to the pure matter of the world, turning both into unreal abstractions.<sup>2</sup> Hegel's idealism is absolute, not because it rejects finitude absolutely, but because, on the contrary, it claims to encompass, to account for transcendently particularity entirely in all its dimensions, because it comprehends the totality of experience as rational from the standpoint of identity. The reality of the finite is not destroyed in this way, but affirmed. Hegel is, as Findlay has put it, «more nearly a dialectical materialist than most Hegelians have realised».<sup>3</sup>

But this cannot be made to mean that Hegelianism is dialectical materialism tout court, in the manner of the extreme reductionists. The movement for the total appropriation of finitude remains an original impulse within thought. The system is the expression of the will to self-opposition and self-recovery in the form of self-transparency internal to the transcendental unity. In this manner the latter is personalised, and this is what «Geist» denotes. The notion of a cosmos permeated by a personal dynamic in pursuit of self-knowledge in every aspect of empirical reality grounds the task of synthesis.

## 6. the mortality of the finite

The circle of the Spirit's descent into and self-recovery from finitude provides the key to Hegel's notion of the essential mortality of the finite, which Kojève employed extensively for the purposes of the objectivistic reduction.

According to Kojève, Hegel conceives philosophy as a superstructure determined by historical existence whose content is struggle and labour. But empirical reality is permeated by the presence of death and the consciousness of that incapable destiny. It is not only a natural series of human generations, but also a process of forms of life negating themselves by giving birth to

superior ones equally transient. Moreover, the end of history is the death of historical man. Hence, Hegel's affirmation of the essential mortality of the finite implies acceptance of the reality of death as the ultimate fact and limit for all life and consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

Kojève's familiar one-sidedness is once again manifested in these assertions. Hegel does describe the finite as mortal.<sup>5</sup> But he also affirms, inherent in that very same finite, a tendency of self-transcendence into infinity and immortality.<sup>6</sup> This on account of a transcendental placement of the finite within the overall ideal totality which is the ground of its empirical existence. As always in Hegel, the emphasis on mortality should not obliterate correlative immortality, negativity cannot be posited without positivity. Both poles manifest themselves as interlocking tendencies within the same being. And the entire process of the finite's self-negation culminates in a positive victory of the eternal over the transient, within thought.<sup>7</sup>

That the finite is mortal is the other side of the proposition we analysed earlier stating the «all philosophy is idealism». But this expressly asserts that tangible, empirical finitude *cannot* be accepted as the ultimate ground of all truth. There can be no knowledge if we choose as foundation the «This» of passive receptivity proposed by naive, natural consciousness. On such primacy of the immediate given only Doxa, relativistic sophism can be erected. This central Platonic argument, forcefully developed especially in the *Theaetetus*, is accepted by Hegel in its entirety. His strategy for going beyond the debilitating stranglehold of Doxa expounded in the opening chapters of the *PhG* is premised on it.<sup>8</sup>

The «This» must be taken up into some conceptual framework, can be pinpointed only through the mediation of a firm a priori scheme. Hence it «dies» qua false pretension to constitute absolute truth. But this death is not an external catastrophe inflicted upon natural consciousness and its object by alien forces. It is experienced by that consciousness itself, as the inner necessity of its own life situation and of its object's own movement. The finite becomes infinite when consciousness rises to awareness of a universal interconnection that «makes sense» out of a fragmented empirical universe. This dynamic rational structuring of reality is the infinity of the

4. Kojève, op. cit., p. 389.

5. Hegel, *Logic*, vol. I, pp. 125-149.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-174.

7. Compare Kelly, op. cit., pp. 313-322. Also Grégoire, op. cit., footnote 4, pp. 69-70.

8. *PhG*, 149-160.

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

2. Cf. critique of Kant's and Fichte's idealism in *PhG*, pp. 272-280.

3. Findlay, op. cit., p. 14.

finite. Yet it is no «grace» conferred on it by an alien transcendent substance, but appears as a tendency of self-infinitisation in the life of the finite itself. The a priori scheme is no generalisation based on empirical observation, but it is invalid if it cannot render experience coherent for finite consciousness itself.

These arguments in Hegel prove the opposite of what Kojève claims: by establishing the essential mortality of the finite Hegel is not at all asserting that transient empirical existence is the ultimate fact on which philosophy must be based. Quite to the contrary, Mortality is a metaphysical statement about the inherent tendencies of self-infinitisation in the finite. It points to the necessity of approaching finitude from the standpoint of a larger rational whole, the necessity of its «death» qua radically self-sufficient *donné*. Along with the recognition of negativity and mortality in the heart of finite being, there goes the affirmation of (philosophical) immortality, the positive supersession of fragmentation on the empirical level by means of a synthesis in thought. This constitutes the salvation of the phenomenon, its resurrection in the eternity of reason. It is the only possible consistent proof of its reality, not as contingent materiality posing as absolute, but as a moment in and for self-consciousness.

Hegel launches a frontal attack on the reality of death on its own level, not because he wishes to acknowledge death's definitive dominion in life and thought. He feels, on the contrary, that the only secure way to *overcome* it is not by pretending it does not exist, but by recognising its great power as the decisive challenge.<sup>1</sup> Christ was only able to triumph over death by submitting to its harsh discipline. After Spirit's death, its self-abandonment to finitude, there is always resurrection, but, equally, spiritual fusion with the eternal comes only as a consequence of the ordeal by death. «Χριστὸς ἀνέστη ἐκ νεκρῶν θανάτῳ θανάτου πατήσας.» Once again Hegel's inspiration can be traced back to the Christian dogmas, although his own version of immortality introduces significant modifications.<sup>2</sup>

The positive supersession of finitude in the non-transcendent eternity of Science cannot, therefore, be said to install a material substratum as the infrastructure to an a posteriori theory. This would attribute to Hegel a view of History as permanent negation, pure transience, free creation without perceptible structure. If science is a posteriori and history-in-nature the ultimate ir-

reducible fact,<sup>3</sup> then the former is determined by the latter. But for Hegel philosophy's «only» presupposition of reason in history does arrange the material into a definite pattern of more or less secularised theodicy or eschatology.<sup>4</sup>

There is a positive supersession of negativity in history through an absolute that is eternally present. Each finite moment is transcended into eternity, while, conversely, the eternal cannot but exist as concentrated in the finite moment as if in a single focus. Death cannot be ultimate, history is no mere «slaughterbench», on which human ideals and strivings are reduced to nothingness.<sup>5</sup> The sparks of immortality glow in time, the present is eternal, the tangible end of time in time is accomplished through the principles of absolute idealism.<sup>6</sup>

The great inner tension of the reduction is that Kojève, as a conscientious student of Hegel, cannot avoid referring to the *speculative* satisfaction in Science as the proper culmination of Hegel's spiritual anabasis. In Kojève's own account, alongside the determining dialectic of «Struggle and Labour», the historical process is also governed by the necessity for a universal diffusion of the light of rational self-consciousness, subjugating to the exigencies of spiritual transparency all aspects of reality.<sup>7</sup> The telos of history is Science as pure contemplation, the mental movement which is the non-movement or repetition in memory of the steps that have led to the abolition of history, or the recollection of history dead and gone.<sup>8</sup> Death is not only the ultimate content of historical existence, but *the death of history as such* is the outcome of the temporal process.

Here Kojève involves himself in a harsh vicious circle. His account up to this point has insisted on determination by Labour. But now the stunning assertion is made that for Hegel the goal of history is the death of the category «historical labouring man» through that very science which has been presented all along as a mere reflection of Labour's reality. Now labour instead of determining speculation, is all of a sudden absolutely and definitively determined or *killed* by the latter! Of course Kojève's Hegel is not advocating the extinction of the human species. Science is the abolition of labour and struggle, while man continues to lead a non-historical purely biological

3. Kojève, op. cit., p. 434.

4. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, pp. 9, 15. Also K. Loewith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, N.Y., 1967, pp. 29-49.

5. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 21.

6. Hegel, *PhG*, p. 800.

7. Kojève, op. cit., p. 302.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 387, 411.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

2. On Hegel and immortality cf. Grégoire, op. cit., pp. 179-184.

existence. It is the restoration of Aristotle's «biological time».<sup>1</sup> But the question still remains: how can this abolition be caused in a medium, which up to this point was considered a mere superstructure to the reality it now absolutely determines?

This is a strange contradiction. For one thing, the truth of spirit is said to be, in good non-metaphysical manner, finite human subjects struggling for survival by material labour, rationalising their existence in ideologies that invert actual relations of production and project into an ideal realm humanity's own alienated essence. For another, the telos of this process is the abolition of labour in history through speculation, i.e. the destruction of spirit's own truth. Spirit is the reality and thought of labour and struggle in history. And yet, the inner dynamic and destiny of spirit is to destroy its own very truth and life. This suicide of Spirit is then supposed to be recognised by a Spirit, which by now does not even exist any more, as its highest fulfilment, absolute satisfaction and perfect self-transparency!

But Hegel could not have argued for any self-inflicted death of Spirit or Infinity; on the contrary, he proved the necessary self-transcendence of the finite, because knowledge cannot be founded on it. He demanded the suicide of the finite into ideality, as it realises the harsh contradictoriness of its life in limitation. Not because he celebrated death as an ultimate, but because he demanded a higher life. Forfeiting a lower kind of natural existence, empirical consciousness re-discovers itself as infinite in the bosom of present eternity, immortal in thought.

Kojève does not lack awareness, which he chooses to suppress, that Hegel's is not a social but a speculative argument. It presupposes the logical a priori of identity, and the aggressive, irresistibly imperialistic tendencies of consciousness. Total diffusion of the light of dialectical reason is the law of a prearranged structure in history. Kojève expressed it quite succinctly: for Hegel, history is the history of philosophy.<sup>2</sup> If the finite is true only via its participation in ideality, how can it be the source of all truth? If history is the history of philosophy, how can it be simultaneously conceived as the history of labour?

If Kojève means that history is the history of a philosophy, which in turn is only a reflection of material labour how can we conceive of this history as bounded by a telos that is the production

in philosophy and in history of their own death?

No. In Hegel labour must be for consciousness and not consciousness for labour. Labour is a tool of speculation, one of the concrete manifestations of *Trennung*, as perceived by consciousness on its highway of despair.<sup>3</sup>

It is self-evident that from the moment Hegel decides to introduce into the essence of Spirit movement by self-opposition, to personalise the absolute, he is bound to confer on the moment of praxis central significance. But this elevation of praxis into the cardinal moment in reason is initially an abstract, a priori operation.

The abstract category will, of course, have to descend to the concrete level and there manifest itself as a particular *Gestalt*. In the words of R. Kroner, the a priori must a-posteriorise itself. And yet, we must repeat, the demand for a-posteriorisation is inbuilt into Hegel's idealism, and does not imply theory construction on observation of empirical facts. The abstract category of Negation, *Entzweiung*, Activity abandon their closed isolation and enter categorial realms of a lower order (social praxis) to generate related but derivative categories.<sup>4</sup> Labour is one of these derivative moments, one Shape in the pedagogy of phenomenal consciousness. Labour is only a species of the genus Division, as established by abstract ontology, to use G. A. Kelly's expression.<sup>5</sup>

Kojève refuses to draw these necessary conclusions from the teleology of speculation he himself discerns in Hegelian history. He does not wish to grant the non-reducible autonomy, if not outright hypostatization of the element of thought within the subject-object synthesis, not in disjunction from, but in history, its own history. But is it not true that even if we concede the most radical humanistic reduction, identifying philosophy with one man of flesh and blood, Hegel, or, to follow Kojève, with one material thing, the Book<sup>6</sup> containing its principles, then again it is *thought* which is thereby hypostatized, in so far as this ultimate reduction does not celebrate Hegel's contingent empirical existence, or the material of which the Book is made, wood, paper, etc., but the universal rational principles in Hegel's mind or printed in the Book, the absolute Power which produced them in order to render the inner structure of the *δραμας ὄν* transparent to human understanding. This is, after all, the meaning of the «end of history» signalled by absolute idealism. It

3. Loewith, op. cit., pp. 262-267.

4. Hartmann, op. cit., pp. 118-121.

5. Kelly, op. cit., p. 333.

6. Kojève, op. cit., p. 384.

1. Ibid., p. 435.

2. Ibid., pp. 391, 397.



implies that the rational tools have now been forged through which a perfect comprehension of man's spiritual vocation has been made possible for all time, for as long as there is empirical history. Because there will be, of course, empirical history after Hegel.<sup>1</sup> To make Hegel's thought the agent of this world-historical consummation, does it not imply to precisely de-humanise him, attribute to him super-human, super-natural, divine qualities, qua participant in the intelligible current of Reason exposed as energising the cosmos?

The divine νόησις νόησεως, which, in any circumstance, is the culmination of Hegelian history, cannot be thought of, on the assumption of the dialecticity of history, as a sudden catastrophic birth *ex nihilo*, negating in one moment a whole past process (material labour) that has been radically different from it. Only if history and the objective moment it contains are subjected to the discipline of a rational teleology, can Science as contemplation be accepted as the eschaton without contradiction.

### 7. master and slave

Finally, since Kojève's reduction is based on an ingenious analysis of «Master and Slave» in the *PhG*, we must briefly discuss the bias it introduces even into this, one of the most social moments of the process.

This confrontation is a division within consciousness itself manifested as a social category.<sup>2</sup> It is a diremption of its original unity to expedite the ascent to the higher level of rational self-consciousness. It is induced by an internal requirement of thought: the vicious circle of animal desire that cannot accommodate awareness of human freedom must be broken. Desire is total dependence on external nature providing material for a temporary satisfaction of biological need. But after a brief interval the pre-existing void is restored.<sup>3</sup> The animal assimilation of nature (*Verdaung*) is a false conquest of externality, a pseudo-activity within the confines of total passivity vis-a-vis matter. But man is also carrier of a fundamental creative impulse that must be allowed full scope as a determining principle. This cannot be achieved under the domination of material necessity. Consciousness must defeat material-

ity. And only an explosive confrontation of two Desires, or the appearance of human consciousness broken up into two mutually repelling entities, creates preconditions for an eventual affirmation of man's ideal vocation, of free formative activity.<sup>4</sup> This is the properly «anthropogenic» framework.

Consequently, Hegel is not here describing the empirical beginnings of human society. It is not historical evidence which dictates the introduction at this point of a duel for the pure prestige of recognition by another desire, in which the yoke of the finite is broken and man accedes to a first consciousness of his freedom.

This does not imply that the master-slave image could not have been suggested by a study of certain periods of history, but, despite empirical references, it is here employed not for a historical but for a speculative purpose, within the ideal scheme of egogenesis, whose essence is the suppression of the tyranny of *empeiria* in perfect and eternal knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

The slave-owning world of antiquity may have been socially stratified, but Hegel's non-empirical approach made him indifferent to the actual functioning of his beloved Polis as a concrete social mechanism. In any case, duels for pure prestige causing stratification, as in the *PhG*, are not to be detected there empirically.

It is significant that Hegel's source of inspiration in this connection is itself an idealised reconstruction of a certain phase of antiquity: the Homeric poems do depict a *Weltzustand*\* of heroes clashing in defense of personal τιμή. They are an *ex post* recreation of historical events that inverts causal chains, despite the wealth of factual information they contain, hypostatizing human forces into active ideal elements. The Trojan war for instance did take place, but not because Helen was abducted. True to his bias, Hegel accepts the idealistic inversion at face value as the actual social content of protohistory. Moreover, he redoubles the idealistic distortion when he utilises Homeric mythology for the a priori purposes of his scheme for consciousness. We find here a direct parallel to the handling of the *Antigone*,<sup>6</sup> from which the content of «Sittlichkeit» in the *PhG* is directly deduced.

The slave-owning world is an immediately given class structure. If thought limits itself to this «fact» the most it can aspire to is an exhaustive description of its constituent elements. But the mystery of its necessity is not thereby penetrated,

1. Kelly, op. cit., pp. 319, 320.

2. Cf. a mediation between the inner and outer diremption in G. A. Kelly's «Notes on Lordship and Bondage», in *Hegel, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. MacIntyre, pp. 189-217. Also Hegel, *PhG*, pp. 219-220, 224.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 221, 225.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 227, 228.

6. See above, ch. 3.

\* World condition.



because for Hegel logical cause is not identical with empirical origin.<sup>1</sup> The rational concept «saves» the phenomena for thought. The function of the ideal duel is precisely to save for consciousness the reality of a world divided into masters and slaves.

It is only in this light that we can comprehend why death of one or both participants, an inherent probability in any duel, does not provide a genuine resolution; why, even if the path of consciousness is lined with corpses of countless Eteocleses and Polyniceses, death is not allowed to arrest reason before it inundates the universe.

The confrontation is predicated on a double requirement: on the one hand, both opponents must risk life for the ideal of recognition, but simultaneously animality must be preserved as a moment in the resultant synthesis, because self-consciousness cannot exist without a biological substratum.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the outcome is destined to be a *living* unity, ultimately expressed as a relation of class domination, rising above the abstract immediacy of decomposing being (death).

These conditions cannot be successfully fused a posteriori, through observation of class relations as they existed in Hegel's time or in the Greco-Roman world. The moment of Life is indeed preserved in contemporary experience, Hegel's and ours, but in a wholly *non-ideal* way. Natural existence is not being gambled for ideal ends, and it was not in the past either, with any necessity. The chance individual gamblers of mythical and historical accounts strike the imagination of brutalised and impotent masses of self-seeking bourgeois and starved (physically and spiritually) proletarians as supernatural beings, Demigods, Heroes or Saints. The social landscape is composed of desperate clashes among deprived individuals for scarce resources. Life is preserved, therefore, precisely in the animal, raw, unreflected manner that Hegel was striving to overcome. Empirical reality is an explosive mixture of rare idealism, which everyone hypocritically professes to admire, and a frenetic egotism, an unthinking, impulsive rush to maintain a vegetating existence, to which higher aspirations are like poison, solely for the sake of maintaining it.<sup>3</sup>

If philosophy elects to theorise about this state of affairs by means of empirical induction, then it is in the final analysis elevating an alienated reality to the status of a natural and eternal «condition humaine». This would inevitably gen-

erate quietistic resignation to the eclipse of ideals, idealism and sacrifice for higher ends, in the face of the onslaught of the «homo oeconomicus» and his materialistic cravings.

Hegel, no less than Marx after him, will refuse to endorse a society, or a theory, based on assumptions of self-seeking individualism as the ultimate motivation in human life.<sup>4</sup> The devices of rationalisation, and hence the pair of ideal combatants, must transcend experience. They found its possibility as a rational system. But this cannot occur, unless, in our case, the duel is resolved in a particular way. The first obstacle is death, a destructive pseudo-resolution, which freezes the dialectic before the «new world» of thought, whose dawn we are witnessing,<sup>5</sup> can come to maturity and fruition.

But, even if an empirical pair of primitive individuals, duelling presumably for control over material means of subsistence, is assumed, the possibility of death cannot be excluded a posteriori, because *empeiria*, segregated from the operation of rational law, is the realm of pure abstract possibility, where everything may occur. Empirical reasoning cannot ascertain with any degree of necessity that, despite the fact of death terminating the struggle of the first pair, and countless pairs after it, there must come a moment of living subjugation, ushering in a higher stage. Any transition whatsoever may and then may not take place under these circumstances. And if we still insist on following the empirical route and simultaneously assert the necessity of this transition (masters vs. slaves), then appeal must be made to chance.

No logical necessity for the *Aufhebung* of animal life into a class relationship and the avoidance of the pseudo-resolution of death can be expected a posteriori. Within the constraints of the empirical method the ascent to rational self-consciousness remains a mystery and must be accepted on faith. This a priori elimination of the possibility of consciousness succumbing to death, especially in a situation where death might be said from an empirical standpoint to be a governing factor, is the reflection on the phenomenological level of Hegel's metaphysical position analysed earlier, namely that mortality is not the final limit in human existence.

The ideal character of the duel image is positively expressed in a spiritual context for the conflict. Two sides of consciousness are pitted

1. Cf. paragraph 3, *PhR*.

2. Kojève, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

3. For Hegel's awareness of the bleak reality of emerging capitalism, cf. paragraphs 189-208 in *PhR*.

4. Cf. Hegel's evaluation of classical economics as the admirable science of the «external state» of *Vestand*, *PhR*, pp. 343-6.

5. Hegel, *PhG*, p.75.

against each other for the ideal of recognition. The disintegration of the original unity has to be followed by integrity restored, a second stage of reconciliation, identification of the opposites. This is the recognition of the implicit similarity of the two combatants qua spiritual beings. Thus, an internal dynamic of consciousness determines the outcome. The nature of this determination imposes as the object of the struggle not command over material resources, security of life of social position, although all these may and do accrue to the victor; the object of human desire can be no other than human desire itself, to be human is to be desired by another human being.<sup>1</sup> And this is an ideal demand par excellence.

This atmosphere of «pure prestige» is not recognised by Kojève, although again he cannot avoid referring to it, as the ideal ether sustaining the combatants. More often than not his reduction to «Lutte et Travail» boils down to an emphasis on «Travail» tout court, while the «Lutte» component in which the ideal element resides is neglected. This introduces further bias. As we saw, in Hegel's metaphysics the level of experience is not primary, but ideally founded, although qua moment indispensable. In this derivative, posited—yet necessary in the absolute—sphere, Labour in «Master and Slave» performs clearly *one* of the significant mediations in the inversion, and does not of itself constitute the entirety of the movement. Labour is expressly depicted as operative only within the environment of the *fear* of death.<sup>2</sup>

The fear of death is the concrete psychological environment engulfing the slave's labour, the only medium in which under conditions of formative activity ascent to an abstract grasp of universality, a first consciousness of freedom is possible. Death is not to arrest the march of spirit, but this is evident only from the higher standpoint of dialectical criticism. From the side of the participants in the struggle it remains a possibility, and hence fear has a tangible reality.

The total dissolution of the slave's being in fear, as it was he who succumbed to the threat of natural death, is not, according to by now familiar procedure, allowed to cause an imaginable re-

turn to a purely destructive inertia of spiritual decomposition. The fearful fluidity of self-negation must be positively transcended, it is the vehicle of a superior satisfaction in a first recognition of humanity by the slave in himself.<sup>3</sup> The redeeming effect of service is achieved under the impact of absolute fear, yet once again disintegration leads to a higher reconstitution.

Fear is negative total dissolution, an *ideal* agent in so far as it abstracts from fixed determination, sets the slave's psyche in motion on the road to self-transcendence. Without fear of the «sovereign master», liquefaction of feelings and concepts in the face of non-existence labour remains petty «technique» that does not challenge domination in general, a mere piece of cleverness which, by mildly questioning side-effects, is basically affirming the overall legitimacy of the slave's existential limitation.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, it remains true that higher crystallisations of freedom cannot originate with fear alone. Without service, fear remains mute, unexpressed potentiality for humanity.<sup>5</sup> Labour is the *real*, objectifying factor. Only in labour does the dissolved personality congeal into a new self-identity based on creativity that thrusts the subject beyond nature's gravity.

It is within this dialectical unification of fear and Labour, in the *Bildung* of the slave that the contradictions bringing about the inversion explode. It is, therefore, hard to justify tearing labour away from the context of unity with its ideal background, in order to affirm it in its abstract materiality as the key to the *Aufhebung* in «Master and Slave», let alone to the Hegelian synthesis as a whole.

Contrary to that procedure, and keeping in mind the inner necessity of consciousness governing the selection of stages of its own itinerary (here dictating a duel of pure prestige as the means to soar beyond finitude), we must conclude that:

although (a) it is impermissible to break up the unity and ascribe causation to the ideal element of fear, or to the material element of labour, in abstraction from their living relation to one another;

it is, nevertheless, true that (b) within the indissoluble unity there is a relative priority of the ideal. This general metaphysical rule in Hegel is expressed in this particular shape of experience as the atmosphere of fear within which the material factor must operate.

For, after all, fear without labour as «mute» po-

1. *PhG*, p. 226. For Kojève, op. cit. p.15, the clash occurs under no conditions of predestination, each of the combatants is radically free in his choice of stance vis-a-vis animality. But this «existentialist» slant (cf. R. Zimmerman, *Kojève's Hegel*, Sarah Lawrence, p.13) is out of place, because although no predetermination selects precisely who will become master and who slave, the duel as a whole is under the discipline of an ideal necessity for reconciliation, as these passages from the *PhG* show, in so far as subjugation-in-life is an apriori destiny.

2. Hegel, *PhG*, p. 237.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 239-240.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

entity for freedom is still a category quite dignified philosophically, possessing of right a certain rank in a dialectical scheme.<sup>1</sup> But labour without fear, degenerating into «petty technique», is something totally trivial, non-spiritual, animal play with dead matter that deserves only contempt.

### 8. conclusion

This paper has tried to explore the Hegelian synthesis *synoptically*, as the only valid standpoint for interpretation. The effort seemed to establish an internal balance on the basis of a relative priority of the ideal moment.

Any attempt to dismember Hegel's unity by setting up one of the terms as the irreducible presupposition of the rest, especially if the one absolutely is objectivity in the manner of Kojève, must be seen as the founding of a new, and quite conceivably more satisfactory interpretation of man in the universe, definitely inspired by Hegel, yet clearly deviating from his genuine inspiration. For Hegel did claim after all to have made *God* transparent to human reason, but, with all the ambiguity of this statement, there is no explicit reference to class struggle as the base of religion and philosophy, or to classless society as the goal of history. And it seems very risky to formulate a striking new interpretation on the basis of what

Hegel *meant* to say<sup>2</sup> by looking behind the misleading «metaphysical connotations» of his terminology.<sup>3</sup> It would be absurd to deny that Hegel was aware of these metaphysical «distortions». Why then was he so deliberate about them? Would he have been so keen on their use, if they were creating such a totally perverse idea in people's minds about what he really meant to say?

In any event, let me state the obvious that this critique of the humanist reduction does not automatically establish the validity of the metaphysical argument in all its ramifications.<sup>4</sup>

More importantly, it does *in no way* imply an adverse judgement on Kojève's enterprise, as an attempt to resolve, by reference to Hegel, modern existentialism and phenomenology, and Marxism, the dilemmas of the twentieth century predicament.<sup>5</sup>

Kojève's exegesis is *not* the definitive rendering of Hegel's genuine motivation; but, viewed in the interwar European context, especially as the brutal impact of the ossification of «official» Marxism, amidst the hecatombs of its victims, threw the intellectuals of the period totally off balance, deserves the deepest respect, not only for its brilliance, but also for its burning passion.

But its appreciation in that light is a wholly different question.

2. Zimmerman, op. cit., pp.12-13.

3. See note 7, ch. 2.

4. For an important discussion of the whole range of interpretative alternatives see Grégoire, op. cit., pp. 140-219.

5. Zimmerman, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

1. See discussion of «formal possibility», which «allows everything that does not contradict itself» in an abstract subjective sense in *Logik*, vol. II, pp. 203-204.