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Author(s): Robert B. Pippin

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BEING, TIME, AND POLITICS: THE STRAUSS-KOJÈVE DEBATE

ROBERT B. PIPPIN

ABSTRACT

The 1963 publication in English of Leo Strauss's study of Xenophon's dialogue, *Hiero, or Tyrannicus*, also contained a critical review of Strauss's interpretation by the French philosopher and civil servant, Alexandre Kojève, and a "Restatement" of his position by Strauss. This odd triptych, with a complex statement of the classical position on tyranny in the middle, Strauss's defense of classical philosophy on one side, and Kojève's defense of a radically historicist, revolutionary Hegel on the other, has now been re-edited and re-published. Victor Gourevitch and Michael Roth have added all the extant letters between Strauss and Kojève written between 1932 and 1965, many of which continue and deepen the exchanges on Xenophon first published in French in 1954. The editors have also reviewed and corrected the translation of Xenophon, and re-translated Kojève's review.

The Strauss-Kojève exchange raises several fundamental questions: the relationship between political philosophy and underlying assumptions about time and history (especially the extent to which collective human time—history—is subject to human will and thought); the nature of our independence from, and dependence on, others in any satisfaction of desire; and the right way to understand the distinctive character of modern, as opposed to classical, political life and thought. I attempt to assess their respective positions on these and other issues, and argue that the nature of the debate between them is seriously and problematically constrained by the way Kojève's reading of Hegel frames much of the discussion.

When Leo Strauss's study of Xenophon's dialogue, *Hiero, or Tyrannicus* was republished in English in 1963, together with a review by Alexander Kojève, and a "Restatement" by Strauss,[1] the resulting "book" had already become a curious stack of Chinese boxes. At the center seemed to be some Xenophonic teaching about the limitations and attractions of the tyrannical life, itself a variation on the central Socratic question: the best human life. But Strauss showed, in commonsensical, detailed remarks about the dramatic setting, the two personalities (the tyrant Hiero and the visiting poet, Simonides), and Xenophon's other works, that the text provided no clear access to that teaching, and

1. Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny* (revised and enlarged) (New York, 1963). Strauss's original study appeared in 1948, and the French edition, with Kojève's essay and Strauss's restatement, in 1954.

certainly no justification for identifying what Xenophon wanted to say with Simonides' praise of beneficent tyranny. In fact, Strauss argued, once inside the dramatic setting, even once inside the implied assessment of the tyrannical and the private life, we come upon some of the most comprehensive and important issues in classical political thought.

In two important passages, Strauss went so far as to assert that the dialogue's treatment of the issue makes clear by contrast the great poverty of the modern or social scientific understanding of political affairs.[2] The modern attempt to understand political matters is a disaster; even tyranny cannot be recognized as such by "our modern sciences." If this result is, as Strauss often implies it is, the "inevitable result" of modern philosophy itself, then we are "forced" to consider a "restoration of classical social science" (177). Strauss claimed that modern philosophy deliberately turned away from a principled distinction between kings and tyrants with Machiavelli (in a way itself informed by Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*), and that a "confrontation" between the *Prince* and *Hiero* was a necessary first step in understanding "modern political science" (24–25; 184–185).

While such remarks are the principal justification for studying the dialogue and introduce Strauss's chief concerns, they are not much explored and the contrast between the classical (successful) and modern (failed) understanding of tyranny is approached indirectly. Strauss is clearly dissatisfied with etiological and analytical accounts of the distinctive twentieth-century uses of power by groups or individuals against others or the masses, dissatisfied with the categories "dictatorship" or "fascism" or "totalitarianism." He clearly assumes that to understand the perennial appeal of tyranny, or absolute rule without law or accountability (and so to understand *what*, in human terms, it is), we shall need much more than information about economic conditions, nationalist histories, or the politics of cultural despair. He never presents a theoretical defense of this sort of claim, here or elsewhere, but he clearly intends that a competing, classical account of "what tyranny is," one sensitive to the ends any tyrant must be pursuing, and to the relative *worth* of those ends, will manifest its superiority.

Kojève then placed all of this in yet another box, a historical point of view. He claimed to see in what Strauss had uncovered the great failures of all pagan thought: its utopianism, its misunderstanding of human work and satisfaction, of the human struggle for recognition, even indications of the potential "insanity" of classical philosophy itself. The classical project depended essentially on the autonomy and superiority of the philosophical life, a distinction between theory and praxis which the Hegelian Kojève rejects. He traced such failings, finally, to the largest issue, to the "religious" character of such thought, by

2. Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny* (including the Strauss-Kojève correspondence), ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (New York, 1991), 23 and 177. (All future page references are to this edition.)

which Kojève meant its reliance on a belief in the eternality of Being and the ordered, purposive character of nature.[3]

By the time Strauss had finished his last restatement, the issues had become the ancients versus the moderns, the "history of the Western world," and the political differences which follow from one's view on whether "there is an eternal and immutable order within which history takes place, and which remains entirely unaffected by history" (212). Xenophon's small, neglected dialogue finally seemed in some sense or other to be about, or at least to require a discussion of, the politics of the "Being and Time Issue": In the bluntest terms, either a politics oriented from a notion of cyclical, non-progressive time, the possibility of a higher or lower, better or worse, realization of fundamental human capacities (by reference to which, and only by reference to which, phenomena like tyranny could be intelligible), and a necessary reliance on a chance, natural distribution of these capacities; or a politics of historical time, a history subject, at least in part, to human will and collective effort, the conquest of chance and a project of self-making which could be understood as purposive and continuous.

(Now such alternatives obviously omit what has become the most prevalent modern orientation: neither nature, in the classical or hierarchical sense, nor history, but precisely the unavailability of such comprehensive standards, should orient political discussion. This leaves us with the natural individual [or what results from modern naturalism or from "methodological individualism"] and so rational egoist or rights based political thought. And another thing that makes the exchange between Strauss and Kojève so strikingly unusual is how confidently they ignore such options in this context.)

Victor Gourevitch and Michael Roth have repolished and restacked these boxes, producing now a still more layered, complex book by publishing (without much editing) all the extant letters between Strauss and Kojève written between 1932 and 1965, many of which continue and deepen the exchanges on Xenophon first published in French in 1954. (The editors have also reviewed and corrected the translation of Xenophon, re-translated Kojève's review, and restored a crucial, sweeping statement of philosophical principle Strauss had originally published in the French version and somewhat mysteriously omitted from his own first English version.) The result is a complex and stimulating book, with its "parallel dialogue" between the University of Chicago professor and the

3. Worries about pagan hubris, asceticism, the political implications of classical, cyclical views on temporality (fatalism, the "tragic sense of life," stoic resignation, and so on), or even an underlying ancient *ressentiment* against the human itself, are of course not new, nor limited to traditional Christian complaints (as the famous charges of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche show). What is so unusual about Kojève is that he does not raise such complaints in the name of a traditional post-Christian or modern egalitarianism, a different sort of elite or master morality, or a new subjectivist theology. As we shall see he proposes a *universalist* morality (neither Master nor Slave) in a "universal and homogeneous world state," based on a wholly atheistic philosophical anthropology, and completely indifferent to the liberal democratic concerns that often accompany worries about classical positions on aristocratic politics.

French civil servant, a dialogue made all the more striking since both participants take such unusual, highly provocative positions, and so force readers to face substantial problems in what are often wholly unfamiliar, even shocking ways.

I. STRAUSS'S XENOPHON

As noted, Strauss is confident that there is nothing historically anachronistic in making use of a premodern understanding in an assessment of contemporary issues. It is true that some aspects of modern versions of "absolute rule without law" would be nearly incomprehensible to ancient commentators: the power of modern technology and communications, and so the scope of what could be controlled; also the very idea of tyrannical rule for the sake of some idea, some vision of history or "ideology." But such novelties are, for him, marginal in any thoughtful ranking of possible kinds of lives (cf. 178).

Neither are the classical categories of assessment inadequate, however foreign they might first sound to modern ears. Any adequate condemnation of the tyrannical life must just show it to be *unsatisfying* in itself, not a worthy or reasonable goal. A certain claim about pleasure and satisfaction in human life is implied by those who aspire to tyranny, and this claim is in error. This incompleteness, or even perversion of human possibility, is what is wrong with tyranny; it is why the harm done to others, the use of brute force to restrict their lives and so forth, cannot be justified: it is in the service of an objectively unworthy end.[4]

The Xenophonic dialogue used by Strauss to pursue these issues can sometimes have an air of unreality or folderol, much of which is pointed out with great concision by Strauss. The poet-businessman-sophist-perhaps-wise-man, Simonides, has travelled for unexplained reasons to the tyrant Hiero's city.[5] He

4. There is of course the option of arguing that by harming others the tyrant does harm to himself (as does a shepherd who harms his flock), but that can simply sound like advice to the tyrant to "fatten the flock" more efficiently, more cunningly (cf. *Republic*, 345b). In more modern terms, one could argue that there is no solution to that problem, that harm to others always invites or in principle sanctions harm to all, and so no rational egoist could affirm a tyrannical life, as in the Hobbesian equations. Or one could argue that "I" cannot be "me" apart from a certain relation to others, so that my flourishing and theirs are necessarily linked, a train of thought introduced by Aristotle (mediated by the notion of being fully human, or species being) and extended by Hegel to the modern notion of individual identity.

5. Strauss suggests a possible business transaction (36), but, throughout his commentary, he adopts Hiero's view that Simonides is simply a wise man, and he often treats Simonides as some approximation to the Xenophonic Socrates (cf. 38). Strauss is obviously aware of the fact that Simonides is introduced in the dialogue as a poet (an issue that raises the sophistry-philosophy problem), and of his reputation for wealth, even "greed" (33). He points out that Simonides should indeed be called a sophist (94), and that his advice to Hiero speaks a language the latter can understand; it concedes a good deal to hedonism, is amoral, and praises as highest not virtue, but happiness unmarred by envy. But what is important to Strauss is that Simonides preserves a distinction between the pleasant and the good as such (95), and that the praise of honor leads Simonides (and especially us) "outside" the city and fellow humans (as finally insufficient in the pursuit of the highest) and even beyond the conventional understanding of honor. This Socratic reading of the implications of Simonides' advice begins with the discussion of friendship on 97.

defers to Hiero's presumed wisdom, and asks which is better, the life of the tyrant or private man. (Hiero is supposed to have superior knowledge of this issue simply because he has experienced both; the necessity for good judgment is not mentioned.) Hiero responds in a complaining litany that often sounds like a rich person grousing about the miseries of vast wealth, or a beautiful person that no one understands him or her. He claims that tyrants really do have fewer pleasures, and more and greater pains, than private persons. Simonides finds this claim incredible, and the first half of the dialogue is under way. When it is over and Hiero's most interesting and believable complaint has been lodged – that the sweet pleasures of love (for Hiero, pederasty) are denied him, are always clouded by fear and compulsion – Simonides takes over and in the second part offers advice. He counsels Hiero to worry more about honor than love (it is a higher, more satisfying pleasure), and he shows him some simple (and obvious) means to encourage such admiration and to avoid mere fearful compliance.[6]

So, while there can be no doubt that a good Socratic like Xenophon would indeed believe that a tyrant's life, despite appearances, is really miserable, he goes about establishing such a claim in an odd way. No Thrasymachean boldness here in defense of such a life; the tyrant himself, in an unbalanced and exaggerated way (the pleasures of tyranny are hardly mentioned) does all the work undermining the tyrannical option (even if with an air of protest-too-much insincerity), and it is Simonides, referred to as "wise" by Hiero, who must correct the account by reminding Hiero of the higher pleasures of honor or admiration, available to the tyrant if some elementary precautions and anticipations are managed. He thus appears to praise highly beneficent tyranny. He does not praise it as best simply, but the dialogue ends with the claim that a beneficent tyranny is at least one way to secure the "most noble and most blessed possession to be met with among human beings," that is, "while being happy, you will not be envied for being happy" (21).

Strauss points to a number of possible explanations for this drama, and draws out a number of implications taken up very critically by Kojève.[7] Hiero's

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See also the apposite remarks by Victor Gourevitch in "Philosophy and Politics, I," *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1968), 79–82, and "Philosophy and Politics, II," *Ibid.*, 309–310.

6. Cf. 66 on the first part as "pathology," the second as "therapeutics," together with the reminder that the reader must "add to and subtract from Hiero's and Simonides' speeches to lay hold of Xenophon's teaching."

7. Strauss clearly understood that the way the issues of love and honor (or "recognition") were raised by Xenophon and interpreted by him (Strauss) made Alexandre Kojève the only appropriate interlocutor. (For Strauss, Kojève was clearly history's most interesting and thoughtful "Hegelian," and their exchange was the result of Strauss's invitation and persistent encouragement.) In a note (125, n.59) Strauss alludes to the fact that Hegel's later writings seemed to abandon his earlier "dialectics of love" for a "dialectics of recognition." He refers to Kojève's *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris, 1947), for support of this claim (Strauss refers to the work as "*Introduction à l'étude de Hegel*") and notes passages where Kojève discusses such a change in Hegel, 187 and 510–512. These passages suggest that Strauss himself was much influenced by Kojève's distinction between love and the desire to be loved on the one hand, and the struggle for recognition on the other. (See especially Kojève's discussion of a passage from the theological fragments on 511–512.) The insufficiencies of Hiero's *desideratum* are described in terms that parallel Kojève's invocation of Goethe's insight about the same issues on 512, and much of their debate is possible because both share Simonides' dissatisfaction with Hiero's desire to be desired, and both see similar implications

somewhat overstated deprecations of the tyrannical life are not surprising, on Strauss's reading. The reasons for Hiero's eagerness to discourage any potential aspirations towards such a life by Simonides are stated explicitly by Hiero. Tyrants, we are told by Hiero, fear the brave, the just, and the wise; they must suffer the fact that they cannot enjoy the company of such virtuous souls because of this fear. They fear the brave "because they might dare something for the sake of freedom"; they fear the just "because the multitude might desire to be ruled by them"; and they fear the wise "because they might contrive something" (12). The indefiniteness of the last fear reveals that Hiero must fear the wise the most because he understands them the least.[8] He only knows that he doesn't understand them and that they possess what seems to many a valued good, a good he cannot achieve with all his power. (Strauss links this fear of the wise with the general, "vulgar" mistrust of theoretical types; with the suspicion that the wise will see no reason to compromise with or accommodate themselves to the non-wise, and so will aspire to tyranny; and with the anxiety that the skepticism of the wise will be subversive of civic life and religious piety. There is a "disproportion between the intransigent quest for truth and the requirements of society," and so "society will always try to tyrannize thought" [27].)

Simonides' advice and his ultimate praise of beneficent tyranny, while highly "rhetorical," and comprehensible only within this particular setting, lend some credence to that fear. Simonides does seem to "long for tyrannical power" himself (55), although, Strauss argues at length, not simply as an end in itself. While Simonides praises what is productive of the greatest happiness without envy, this is not said to be the greatest good, and it must be somehow squared with Xenophon's other, much more Socratic remarks about virtue.

That is, Strauss argues that Simonides' praise of beneficent tyranny reveals (and is intended by Xenophon to reveal) its own limitations (68) (limitations beyond those required in any conversation with a tyrant by a visitor in the tyrant's home town) and that such praise, by implication and suggestion, points to deeper concerns. Simonides has an interest in advising and especially moderating the tyrant's actions; he is cleverer even than Machiavelli in creating the rhetoric necessary to gain the ear of an immoderate man (he is simply silent about the amorality of the tyrannical; Machiavelli believes he must be more explicit about ruthlessness to establish his *bona fides*). But his words, limited and careful as they are, allow Xenophon to address us as well. These claims about the implied limitations of the tyrannical life and the positive implications suggested by those limitations will take us to the heart of the debate with Kojève

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for contemporary discussions. (They do, however, differ on some details; see 199ff.)

I mention all of this because their discussion is framed by certain Kojèvian assumptions about Hegel's position which so limit that position that it becomes a good target for many of Strauss's objections. As Hegel's remarks on forgiveness and reconciliation later in the *Phenomenology* show, there is no simple shift from a "dialectics of love" to a "dialectics of recognition." This will all become quite important in assessing Kojève's position later.

8. Hiero himself points out that the tyrant enjoys the "least share" of trust, and that he must regard everyone as a potential rival for his wealth (11).

and to Strauss's basic claims about the absolute (or "eternal") limitations of political life itself (not "Greek" political life); the absolute (or "eternal") tension between a philosophical or theoretical life and human, political concerns (and not just as an expression of alienated social relations in a particular society); and the impossibility and undesirability of a historically achieved, universal state within which free, mutual recognition is realized.

Strauss reasons this way. If Simonides is right that honor is a more worthwhile goal than love, then no tyrannical life can realize such a goal, despite the content of Simonides' advice. For one thing, the citizens of the tyrant, while they can be enriched by prizes, will always experience an "inequality of honors" in comparison with the tyrant. They cannot have the honor he has, and so cannot honor him without also envying and resenting him, no matter how elaborate the ritual of prize-giving, the composition of the militia, and so on. The citizens, however subject to such measures, are not, after all, fools. This fact inevitably adds constant uncertainty and tension to the tyrant's rule. For another, Simonides offers no real solution to the problem of freedom raised by Hiero himself. Praise from others is the more pleasant the freer the bestower, but there is no situation with less freedom than tyranny, however beneficent.

It as at this point that Strauss pushes his interpretation well beyond the text itself. Rather than interpret, he begins now to think through the implications of the position within a much larger frame of reference. The key link in the reasoning is that, while "love has no criterion of relevance outside itself . . . admiration has" (89). For Strauss this already means that "Simonides' emphatic praise of honor cannot possibly mean that he preferred honor as such to all other things" (87). Honor, Aristotle reminds us, cannot be the highest good, sought for its own sake. (And so securing the chief condition for satisfying honor, freedom, cannot be essential to political life.) One is honored only by reference to some ideal or standard of excellence which one approximates. Such an ideal or good is not good because it is honored; it is honored because it is good. Thus, while appeal to the pleasures of acclaim and praise might moderate and render more virtuous a tyrant, the real issues are more complex. In fact, interest in honor, if it can be inspired and nurtured, can only be a transitional stage in education, leading to a more noble concern with that-for-which-one-is-honored, "in itself" as it were.[9] A beneficent tyrant might be able to pursue such a goal, let us say, virtue in itself, and, given the problem of freedom noted above, not be able to enjoy in any satisfying way the praise of the citizens. But that would be important only if virtue were linked essentially to an honored life, or if a "virtuous polis" *required* free citizens. The former cannot be true for the Aristotelian reasons just cited, and Strauss points out that, at the very least, Xenophon himself cannot have believed the latter given his admiration for the "slavish" but virtuous young Cyrus (72).

9. Strauss claims that "the desire for praise and admiration as distinguished and divorced from the desire for love is the natural foundation for the predominance of the desire for one's own perfection" (90).

Strauss is careful to point out here, as he does elsewhere, that this teaching about a *truly* beneficent tyranny (essentially the absolute rule of the wise) has a "purely theoretical meaning"; it is not a blueprint for action. Of course, a view that only the rule of the wise is legitimate, but that the rule of the wise is impossible, is a position which, however "theoretical," has many practical implications, some of them notorious. It might lead the young to "look down with contempt on the political order established in Athens"; it might be "embarrassing" for its supporters in "almost every city" and might have had something to do with the real difficulties experienced by Socrates and Xenophon (76). It might also serve as a prelude to the issue of the rule of law, although Strauss clearly regards even that "second best" solution highly "problematic" (77).[10]

Hence Strauss's conclusion, that the dialogue intends to present us with a great contrast between two ways of life: the political life and the life devoted to wisdom (even though, Strauss admits, the *Hiero* itself is "silent about the status of wisdom"), and to "indicate" the superiority of the latter. Or, "when Socrates assumes that the wise man is just, he understands by justice transpolitical justice, the justice which is irreconcilable with hurting anyone. The highest form of justice is the preserve of those who have the greatest self-sufficiency which is humanly possible" (91).

This is a sweeping conclusion with many assumptions. Among them are:

(i) there is a difference between better and worse regimes but there is no hope for some fundamental perfection of political life. That would require the rule of the wise and this is impossible since it would presuppose some reconciliation between the wise and the non-wise. This in turn would be unjust to the theoretical person (the wise will never wish to rule) and would require utopian and dangerously naive assumptions about the power of education and reason in human life. The fundamental political fact is the few-many distinction, and it is a permanent consequence of the nature of things. Accordingly, the fundamental classical teaching on politics can be stated in one word: moderation.

(ii) Philosophers are not wholly self-sufficient (only self-sufficient as philosophers) and could not lead philosophic lives without a division of labor and the creation of sufficient wealth and leisure. So they must attend to politics, but, essentially, only to make the political world safe for philosophers. Or, "[i]n what then does philosophic politics consist? In satisfying the city that the philosophers are not atheists, that they do not desecrate everything sacred to the city,

10. Cf. Leo Strauss, *The Argument and Action of Plato's Laws* (Chicago, 1975). Strauss's commentary implies that, besides the notorious "blindness" of written laws, the "rule of law" is fraught with many dangers. In communities where the law is the highest authority, like Sparta and Crete, a Dorian spiritedness threatens to take over, mere courage rather than moderation becomes most important; the ground of good law in reason and so nature must be suppressed in favor of a more politically persuasive theological authority (and this with unjust consequences: the wise must enter into compromise with the unwise); there must be many, many laws; and, for Strauss, there are many indications in the dialogue that what must be given up or moderated for a regime of law, free from Dorian imperfections, may be worse than those imperfections, that too much in the dialogue represents a compromise with the actual.

that they reverence what the city reverences, that they are not subversives, in short that they are not irresponsible adventurers but good citizens and even the best of citizens" (205–206).

(iii) True philosophic self-sufficiency is possible. A philosopher's satisfaction in progress towards wisdom is completely autonomous and in no way dependent on the recognition or, ultimately, even the cooperation of others. Such a life is certainly not dependent on the social and political character of one's fellow citizens; philosophy is not its own age, politically, socially, religiously, culturally, "comprehended in thought." "The wise man alone is free" (84).

(iv) If such a life is in fact best, it would be unjust to affirm political principles which made the realization of such a life less likely or more difficult, even if in the service of other, otherwise desirable goods, such as maximizing the free self-development of each, or protecting the natural right to liberty, and so on.

(v) Philosophy itself, however, is not a doctrine or method or dogma. It is an awareness, difficult to achieve and rare, of "the fundamental problems," and an awareness, equally difficult, of how little is known in answer to such questions. Philosophy is radically zetetic, can never become wisdom.

With magisterial self-confidence, Kojève sweeps aside all these claims and proposes a radical alternative.

II. METAPHYSICAL POLITICS

> Regarding the issue, I can only keep repeating the same thing. If there is something like "human nature," then you are surely right in everything.
>
> (Kojève to Strauss, October 29, 1953, 261)

The Russian emigré, Alexandre Kojève, nephew of Kandinsky, lecturer at the École des Hautes Études, trade negotiator and civil servant under de Gaulle, has been called the "big secret of French philosophy," the force "behind Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Aron, and also Lacan, behind the thinking which dominates France between '45 and '70."[11] In the early and more revolutionary part of his career, Kojève's lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (delivered between

11. André Glucksmann, interviewed in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (November, 11, 1983), quoted by Michael Roth in "A Problem of Recognition: Alexandre Kojève and the End of History," *History and Theory* 24 (1985), 293. See Bataille's representative description of the effect Kojève made on students, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1970), VI, 416, or R. Queneau's "Premières confrontations avec Hegel," *Critique* (1963), 195–199. For a summary (insofar as one is possible) of the participants in the seminar, see the Appendix to Michael Roth, *Knowing and History: Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth-Century France* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988), 225–227. Kojève claimed that, prior to taking over Koyré's Hegel seminar, he had read the *Phenomenology* thoroughly four times and hadn't understood a word. But when he read it in 1933 for the seminar, and got to Chapter IV, it occurred to him that it was all about Napoleon and he was off, always lecturing extemporaneously, without preparation. See the interview reprinted in *Vermittler: Deutsche-französisches Jarhbuch* I, ed. J. Siess (Frankfurt a.M., 1981), 121. For general accounts of Kojève's influence see Roth's book; Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, transl. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (New York, 1980), 9–54; and Judith Butler's *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York, 1987), especially her summary of Hyppolite's objections to Kojève, 63–92.

1933 and 1939) convinced many French intellectuals and philosophers that the great sweep of Western world history could be comprehended as a whole, given some comprehensive philosophical point of view, a kind of "wisdom" which Kojève professed to have, all in preparation for a bloody final revolution, permanently establishing a universal and homogeneous world state.[12] Many later "engaged" or even armed intellectuals drew their inspiration, wittingly or not, from this charismatic Hegelian.

These École lectures form the basis of the remarks made by Kojève in his "Tyranny and Wisdom" essay. Human existence, it is assumed, must be understood in a radically historical way; both the significance and the adequacy of present forms of life, practices, institutions, and so on, lie in a possible connection with some future realization (and not as measured against some eternal ideal of human perfection or some formal criterion of rational action). This realization or completion must be brought about in good left-Hegelian fashion, by the deeds of finite historical agents; World Spirit does not necessarily unfold or manifest itself. So the full realization or completion of what is rationally implied by the first expression of a distinctly human (free) act may or may not come about. If it does, or if its general outlines and possibility become clear (as they do with Napoleon-Hegel), this can be retrospectively comprehended by a proper account of this distinctiveness and a proper reconstruction of its historical consequences.

This latter task is the heart of Kojève's project. Human being, and so human history, must be understood as the result of intentional human *action*, itself the expression of some original dissatisfaction, a *negation* of the actual for the sake of the possible. Human being is *desire*, but a form of negation distinctly or self-consciously human. To show in what distinctive sense, Kojève proposes a kind of philosophical anthropology much influenced by Hobbes and Heidegger as well as Hegel. Purposive human action cannot be properly understood by reference to some spiritual or other-worldly dimension. In this or our world, death is the first lord and master, and any account of the human struggle to achieve any end must take account of the conflict among such struggles and the willingness of some to risk all for success. Human deeds always occur in a distinctive setting or context—possible opposition among actors—and is always overshadowed by the further possibility of a complete indifference to life by one of the actors. Any introduction of a moderating or mediating assumption into this initial situation is often characterized by Kojève (in a Nietzschean voice)

12. In his later work, Kojève appears to have changed his mind, and argued that, essentially, such a State had already come to pass, prompting a much more ironic tone in his style. Cf. the helpful discussion by Roth, *Knowing and History*, 134–146. This is perhaps the place to point out that Kojève's claims about the "end of history" should not be understood as another odd eccentricity in what has seemed to many an endless parade of such claims in café society philosophy. Kojève is stating without compromise or hedge the self-understanding and the "legitimation strategy" of *modernity itself*. He really believes the modern credo: prior to modernity all philosophy and science was really religion; nature is to be mastered; there is nothing essentially new to *think* about in the postmodern world; a complete and universal human satisfaction is possible.

as "religious." (All of which makes the issue of the tyrant, or Master, and the limitations of such a life, of supreme importance for Kojève.)

So far this could simply serve as a prelude for an account of clever and/or vicious animals. What changes everything for Hobbes is fear, and the kind of future-oriented, egoistic rationality inspired by fear. Hegel-Kojève see no reason to assume such a universal fear. What finally distinguishes human desire as human is the desire for an end only another self-negating (acting) being can provide: recognition (*Anerkennung*). Human beings desire (and, in order to be fully satisfied, reassured, *must* desire) that the worth, prestige, and entitlement which their own risk of life warrants (or so they believe) be recognized by others; desire is human as desire for another's desire. Moreover, it is only in the risk of life, or the indifference to death, that even such "socially mediated" desire can be understood as truly human or free, more than a strategic satisfaction of an animal need for dominance.

All of this requires, initially, the fundamental human social relation: masters and slaves, those willing to take this risk, and those who are not. This situation, however, leaves the master at an "impasse": their recognition is coerced and so is not true recognition. Even if freely given, the Master would be recognized by those whom he does not recognize as worthy. His only satisfying option is a life of constant war with other masters, dissatisfying at the moment of victory. The slave, on the other hand, *works*, and so by that work begins gradually to achieve control over nature and his own "slavish" devotion to natural life. To make a long story short, it is by such work, the realization of the slave's ideas and the mastery of nature, that the conditions are slowly created for the world historical possibility of genuinely *mutual recognition*, some institutional achievement of and securing of legal, civil, and in general terms, political and social, equality.

Thus, once we understand history in terms of this philosophical anthropology, understand the significance of human work and the political situation in which it has always occurred (unequal power), it will be possible to talk about the "end of history," or the full realization of the most distinctive and important element of human desire, the desire for recognition.

This also means that the profound disagreement between Strauss and Kojève occurs within some shared view of what the basic problems are and how they must be addressed.[13] For each, the basic issue depends on how one understands human desire and its possible satisfaction: for Kojève a theory of *negation*, an active doing or making, a response to an original insufficiency or not-being which reforms, shapes, even creates the only possible human home, an activity that essentially confronts and must eventually include, others;[14] for Strauss, a desire for *completion*, wholeness, or the eternal *possession* of the good, a perfection which requires the cooperation of others, but which is in itself silent and private.

13. There is a prima facie similarity in the fact that one defends a "pre-historical" and the other a "post-historical" point of view, returning both to the ambiguous problem of nature.

14. Cf. the discussion and the "ring" image (much used later by Sartre) of the metaphysical assumptions of such a position in *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 485–487.

This fairly breathless summary of many, many issues in *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* at least makes it possible to see the great critical relevance of someone like Kojève for Strauss. For one thing, as noted, Hiero's complaint, and what it reveals about the inadequacies of tyranny, open up the Xenophonic and Straussean concerns to Kojève's major problems. "In describing his situation, Hiero describes the tragedy of the Master analyzed by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Mind* (chapter iv, section a)" (142). Said in a more directly Hegelian way, this means that Hiero wants to retain and live out his own subjectivity (that his deeds be *his*, enacted *because* of him and his will), that he adopts a short-sighted, "Masterly" interpretation of what this should mean (that all be coerced into submitting to this unlimited claim to entitlement), and so finds that this subjectivity cannot be acknowledged as such, remains always in doubt, threatened, insecure and so unsatisfying.

And, as we have also seen, according to Strauss, when Simonides attempts to correct this "impasse," and suggests that Hiero can be esteemed for the great deeds of his city, he begins to raise implicit questions about the goods for which honor is bestowed, and the qualifications of the bestower, questions that will eventually lead to the great contrast between the political and philosophical life. This is precisely what Kojève rejects, and is the basis of his own defense of the moderns in the famous quarrel. So, thanks to Kojève's reading of Hegel, and his application of that reading to the ancients-moderns' "history of the West," this issue—Simonides' advice and what it implies—is the point in the dialogue where all the differences between them come to a very fine point.

Before pursuing it, though, it should be noted that Kojève tailors his own response to Strauss's essay, and so does not present a full defense or even account of his own position. First, Kojève refuses to be constrained by the way Xenophon has set up the issue between tyranny and philosophy. Kojève is out to make quite an extreme point: that the ends of the theoretical life and the political life are ultimately the same and cannot be satisfied independently. Accordingly, he rejects the notion that the actions of the tyrant, Hiero, would make sense if he were motivated by a desire to be *loved*, that he wants to experience the unqualified regard of as many as possible. Neither his actions nor Simonides' would make sense were they out to have some "value attributed" to their very "*being*." "Love thrives in the family, and the young man leaves his family and devotes himself to public life in search not of love but of recognition by the State's citizens" (156).

Second, Kojève explicitly contrasts the "aristocratic" context of his discussion with Strauss-Xenophon and the "'bourgeois' way of looking at things" which is neglected in their exchange (141). He is happy enough to discuss the implications of the human desire for honor (recognition) since it will allow him to make his central point: that there is no difference between what the tyrant wants and what the wise man wants. But this context obscures the importance of *work* in the final realization of such ends. "A man can work hard risking his life for no other reason than to experience the joy he always derives from *carrying out* his

project or, what is the same thing, from transforming his 'idea' or even 'ideal' into a *reality* shaped by his own *efforts*" (140).

The pagan connection between deeds and glory must be "complemented" (141) by the "Judaeo-Christian" renunciation of glory in favor of the humble laborer's point of view, the pride in accomplished work, especially as a manifestation of one's unique individuality. This all indicates that a full response to the "pagan point of view," or a fuller account of the historical conditions within which a satisfying form of mutual recognition could take place, would finally involve an account of the significance of labor, both as conquest of nature and realization of self, in the final content of that recognition.[15]

In this context, Kojève orients his discussion from an obvious point: Hiero never responds to Simonides' advice. He remains silent, and there is no indication that anything Simonides has said has persuaded Hiero of anything. Simonides' proposal for a form of tyranny or coercion in which those on the street would nevertheless "*willingly* give way" hangs there at the end of the dialogue like the "utopian" faith it is. "Simonides seems to have behaved not so much like a wise man as like a typical 'Intellectual' who criticizes the real world in which he lives from the standpoint of an 'ideal' constructed in the universe of discourse, an ideal to which one attributes an 'eternal' value, primarily because it does not now exist and never has existed in the past" (137).

This evocation of Hegel's famous remarks in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* is meant to introduce a contrasting explanation of Simonides' failure. This failure is not due, as Strauss argued, to the fact that Simonides is moving the discussion towards the supreme good of the theoretical life and so is hinting at the eternal tension between the human goods of political life and that supremely self-sufficient good. For one thing, as Kojève will soon try to show, such a notion of the supreme good is incoherent. For another, he first argues, the possibility and desirability of a beneficent, theoretically enlightened tyranny depends on concrete historical and social conditions. It might take time ("centuries") before such conditions were appropriate, but there is no (non-question begging) reason to rule out a priori such a possibility by appeal to human nature. If there exist conditions wherein massive suffering and injustice can be ameliorated only by absolute rule without law or accountability, genuinely in

15. In his "Restatement," Strauss denies that the dialogue implies praise for some pagan or aristocratic sense of "workless nobility" (191). The position he is teasing out of Simonides' remarks concedes the fact of a "pleasure deriving from doing one's work well" (190), but insists that this pleasure, to be truly satisfying, must be linked to the work's relation to "virtuous or noble activity." The point is not the praise of workless nobility, but a rejection of "ignoble work" (191).

Kojève's remarks are subject to this criticism, but only because he does not clearly link the bourgeois notion of work with the highest bourgeois good, freedom or even autonomy. It is the value of work as the realization of free individuality which cannot be properly understood within a pre-Christian context. This alone will introduce moral distinctions (a safecracker's pleasure [190] cannot count as a truly *free* expression of individuality) if a longer story is told. Kojève cannot tell this story because he interprets Hegel in such a Platonic or non-bourgeois way, and so does not place him in the Rousseauean-Kantian tradition in the right way. See my "Hegel, Ethical Reasons, Kantian Rejoinders," *Philosophical Topics* 19 (1991), 99–132.

the service of such ideals, so be it. (In a famous reference, Kojève mentions Portugal's Salazar as a possible actualization of a modern "ideal" tyranny.)

Such hard-headed, "dirty hands" rhetoric, so reminiscent of intellectual and Party bravado from the 1930s and 1940s, now seems simply naive.[16] But Kojève's main point is the first one mentioned above, his direct attack on the ideal of philosophic self-sufficiency. In criticism, he argues against the assumptions behind the "Epicurean" ideal of a private "garden" for philosophers and Pierre Bayle's "Christian-bourgeois" notion of a "Republic of Letters," where intellectuals must work for a living but "renounce all *active* interference in public affairs in return for being 'tolerated' by the government or the tyrant" (151).

In order to justify such a life, one must make a decisive assumption: that "being is essentially immutable in itself and eternally identical with itself," and that it is eternally accessible (151). In contrast to this "theistic" assumption, Kojève then briefly and often in bewildering terms proposes Hegel's "atheism," according to which "Being itself is essentially temporal (Being = Becoming) and creates itself insofar as it is discursively revealed in the course of history: revealed Being = Truth = Man = History" (152). Even for readers reasonably familiar with the Hegelian, left-Hegelian, and Heideggerean background of such claims, this can all seem very elusive ("Being creates itself"?), especially since Kojève does not explain or attempt to justify this radically humanistic historicism. But regardless of his own position on ontology, the effect of his remarks is to cast rather traditional and quite pointed skeptical doubts on Strauss's isolated, egoistic wise man, self-certifying in his presumed wisdom.

For what Strauss praises seems to Kojève a recipe for incommensurable sects and the resulting sectarianism. It leads either to putatively self-certifying wise men who are indistinguishable from the mad (153), or a cloister, a closed society perpetuating prejudices and self-satisfaction, insulating itself from others in ways that cannot be challenged or moderated.

By contrast, Kojève proposes the necessity of some form of social confirmation even in the theoretical life: "From this perspective there is therefore in principle no difference whatsoever between the statesman and the philosopher: both seek recognition and both act with a view to deserving it . . ." (156). Since a person seeking recognition "should do everything in his power to make the

16. See the remark on 146 about when, "regretfully," the ruler would be "forced to kill 'the resistants'." In principle both Strauss and Kojève affirm uncompromisingly the superiority of the rule of the wise (or the authority of some historically realized wisdom in the latter's case). This means in principle a willingness to consider a possible suspension or transcendence of conventional moral constraints on political action, and so a consideration of possibilities that can sound shocking, or, as Strauss frequently points out, simply tyrannical. As noted, Strauss considers this a *wholly* theoretical issue, the utter unrealizability of which entails that moderation and the rule of law emerge as second best, a very high status on such a list. For Strauss, Kojève seems to stand for a kind of apotheosis of the modern, reckless disregard of such classical restraints, and so his praise of real tyranny is treated "theoretically" and prompts no "moral" outrage. Cf. his understanding of their relation, 186. (Strauss is prepared to concede the Salazar issue, even though "one swallow does not make a summer," but he draws the line, still surprisingly gently, at Kojève's foolish allusions to Stalin [188–189].)

number of those 'worthy' of recognizing him as large as possible" (157), the project of philosophic satisfaction essentially involves the project of politics, or of realizing those practices and institutions within which genuine and free mutual recognition is possible. *Only* such mutual self-reassurance can satisfyingly resolve philosophic, theoretical differences. Any criterion of evidence or experiment will itself be the product of such social recognition, and so our attention should be focused on decreasing the role of power and wealth in such social practices (which always lead back to "Masterly" impasses), and increasing the "worth" (essentially the freedom) of potential "recognizers."

This does not mean that philosophers should act as political agents, or spend their time offering advice to tyrants. There is simply no time for such divided labor. But philosophical claims about the nature of human being, universals and particulars, essence and appearance, the virtues, and so forth, come to be, in Kojève's rather clumsy and misleading word, "verified" historically and only historically. Philosophical disputes can be resolved

> only to the extent that they are played out on the *historical* plane of *active social* life where one argues by *acts* of Work (against Nature) and of Struggle (against men). Admittedly, Truth emerges from this active "dialogue," this historical dialectic, only once it is completed, that is to say, once history reaches its final stage [*terme finale*] in and through the universal and homogeneous state which, since it implies the citizen's "satisfaction," excludes any possibility of negating *action*, hence of all *negation* in general, and, hence of any new discussion of what has already been established. (168)

Philosophers in short are (*an sich* if not *für sich*) speculating always on the rational possibilities made available, brought to light, in their own age. Kojève is here assuming that in any age's comprehensive, philosophical self-consciousness,[17] what will always be at least implicitly at issue is human being as such, especially, the *human-as-origin*, origin of criteria of truth, limits of knowledge, self-conscious agency, and so on.[18] Such speculations are, it is further assumed, always also necessarily linked to a possible course of *action*; claims about nature or the human cannot be separated from proposals that agents can and should *act* in various ways.[19] In this sense, they are always aiming at what might finally be mutually affirmed within a universal and homogeneous state, without Masters and Slaves. And "history" itself determines the progressive realizability of such possibilities, and so their progressive truth. It is only when their speculations (their own political reality comprehended in thought or given the form of rationality) are "tested" by someone acting on the basis of such ideas, when an attempt to remake and create is undertaken in the light of some philosophic claim, that the idea can be established or discarded (cf. 174). (This all raises

17. Cf. the "Introduction" of Kojève's *Essai d'une histoire raisonnée de la philosophie païenne* (Paris, 1968), 11–57, for an account of the distinctness of philosophic reflection.

18. To understand *why* Kojève believes this would be a much longer story, and would involve, at the center of such an account, the anthropological and systematic way Kojève reads Kant (especially the *Critique of Judgment*) in his posthumously published *Kant* (Paris, 1973). See the diagram on 75 for an indication of how involved such an account would have to be.

19. Cf. the remarks in *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 95.

obvious problems not much taken up by Strauss, who has other interests. *Which* modern institutions realize mutual recognition, or are essential conditions for such realization, and why those? How does one determine what counts as "historical verification" or true "success" in this radically pragmatic theory of truth?, and so on.)

By contrast, Kojève insists, Strauss's picture of the Platonic wise man or lover of wisdom renders *his* social activity incomprehensible, and makes it difficult to understand Socrates' activity in the market place. "Self-admiration," besides being an invitation to a sort of insanity and sectarian smugness, "is relatively worthless when compared with the pleasure one gets from being admired by someone else" (161). Socrates' own public activities, while not "motivated" by a desire for fame, appear to confirm Kojève's understanding. "If, as a consistent atheist, one replaces God . . . by Society . . . and History, one has to say that whatever is, in fact, beyond the range of social and historical verification, is forever relegated to the realm of opinion" (161).

III. PERFECTIONISM, ACTUALIZATION, AND HEGEL

> You have never given me an answer to my questions: a) was Nietzsche not right in describing the Hegelian-Marxist end as "the last man"? and b) what would you put into the place of Hegel's philosophy of nature? (Strauss to Kojève, September 11, 1957, 291)

Kojève has, in effect, defended a radical version of a modern claim: that the human is self-sufficient unto itself. Even under extreme finitistic, or "post-Heideggerean" assumptions about the human (atheism and the finality of death), a form of absolute or final satisfaction is possible, one also linked to an absolute or final *account* of such satisfaction.[20] The great human self-dissatisfaction, incompleteness, and restlessness characteristic of world and especially Western literature and philosophy, is always an expression of a concrete historical insufficiency orienting all human labor and thought, one which can be comprehended concretely by an adequate theory of human desire and satisfaction, and is an insufficiency which can be progressively overcome by that labor and thought.[21]

Kojève has left it more than a little unclear, here and throughout his work, why we should believe that this great disaffection (originating fundamentally in

20. Cf. Strauss's comments on 212: "On the basis of Kojève's hypothesis, absolute attachment to human interests becomes the source of philosophical knowledge; man ought to feel absolutely at home on earth. . . . On the basis of the classical hypothesis, philosophy requires radical detachment from human interests: man ought not to feel absolutely at home on the earth, but ought to be a citizen of the whole." This claim raises the question of what sort of "attachment" to the earth or human is possible for such a cosmic citizen, an issue I address below.

21. Strauss explicitly rejects these assumptions and denies that "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" (192). But this seems to rule out of bounds, a priori, the notion of restraints that restrain while not being "sacred," and it ignores that Hegel's desire for recognition cannot be realized without the historical realization of those capacities *worthy* of such recognition. Cf. Section Three of my "The Modern World of Leo Strauss," *Political Theory* 20 (1992), 458–466, and n.61.

the implications of the Master-Slave dialectic) can be *progressively and continuously* ameliorated. (The "one damn thing after another" or "postmodern" school of historiography is owed a better response than the one implied in Kojève's work; for example, that his own version simply will be or has been "proved" correct, or is correct to the extent that he can will or rhetorically create its own correctness in history.)[22] The metaphysical assumptions governing his project remain obscure and are delivered in a style that never goes beyond the oracular and hermetic. And the characteristics of life within the end state, the universal and homogeneous state, seem, alternatingly, hopelessly vague and terrifyingly banal.

None of this, though, prevents their exchange from illuminating a great deal about the fundamental alternatives they represent. Strauss is eager to bypass the many issues of clarification and expansion, and to jump right into the center of the basic dispute. At that center is Kojève's (and Hegel's) "miraculous" (191) synthesis of classical and Biblical morality, a combining of two teachings on strict self-restraint which produces, ironically, Kojève's immoderation and "lax morality," a willingness to be satisfied at a low or vulgar level (universal, equal recognition).

Since, by contrast, Strauss's defense of the classical view denies that philosophic satisfaction can be said to require the "conditions for universal recognition," he is eager to respond to the images of egoistic, isolated, self-satisfied, or sectarian philosophers painted by Kojève. But his first attempts are disappointing. He denies that there is *either* some form of intersubjective reassurance available for philosophers, *or* some essentially private, intuitive self-certifying. There is *no* sort of reassurance at all. Philosophy is "nothing but knowledge of one's ignorance," "nothing but genuine awareness of the problems; that is, of the fundamental and comprehensive problems," and so is radically "zetetic" (196). No matter what the inclinations of "subjective certainty," the problematic character of possible solutions can never be ignored. Socrates founded no sects, and even the Platonic "school" was well aware of the *Amicus Plato* warning.

As it stands this is simply a hedge. No formulation of the fundamental problems or claim for their fundamentality can be so "solution neutral." No ability to show the limitations of proposed solutions can itself be so problematic and zetetic. As Strauss well knows, knowledge of ignorance is an extraordinarily difficult thing to *achieve*, and a great deal must be excluded and rejected, on the basis of a great deal affirmed, before it can be achieved.

Strauss himself admits that "Philosophy, being knowledge of our ignorance regarding the most important things, is impossible without some *knowledge* regarding the most important things" (201, my emphasis). This returns us to Kojève's charge again, and Strauss's more interesting remarks about the issue take up the challenge in a more strictly critical way. Whatever the problems are, they cannot be resolved by Kojève's theory of recognition. He has the relation

22. See Stanley Rosen's discussion of Kojève's understanding of his own discourse and its status in *Hermeneutics as Politics* (New York, 1987), 95–107.

between philosophic and political satisfaction all wrong, and his own account of the end state, the universal and homogeneous state, is internally incoherent on this notion of satisfaction.

To make the first point, we are returned to the issue of love and honor. Strauss wants to reject vigorously Kojève's human and social measure for philosophical satisfaction (recognition). So he rejects Kojève's attempt to ignore Xenophon's association of the tyrannical life with "love" (versus Simonides–honor–philosophy) and so rejects Kojève's argument that both the tyrant and the philosopher must be understood to be motivated by a desire for recognition. There *is* a fundamental difference between those who take their bearings from the concerns of the human, and those capable of some radical "detachment" from the human, for whom the desire to be honored by a small minority is the first step towards a desire for the eternal possession of the good. The former attach an "absolute importance" to "man and human things" (198) and this must ultimately mean that "the political man is characterized by the concern with being loved by all human beings regardless of their quality"; whereas the philosopher, in love only with the "eternal beings" or the "idea" of man, finds all human things "paltry and ephemeral" (198).

This is all hardly a hedge, but now the problem is the extreme or exaggerated character of Strauss's distinction. Human love is characterized in a strangely egoistic, calculating way, as "mercenary love" (202). (Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, 20.29, is quoted: "'all men by nature believe they love those things by which they believe they are benefited'," and Strauss had already claimed in his commentary that "love has no criterion or relevance outside itself" [89].) While it might be true that one can love more easily one's own, or those who return one's love, there is no reason given to believe that one cannot love at all those whom one simply finds lovable, without "mercenary" benefit to oneself.[23] And even Strauss's own formulations indicate that it cannot be true that love has *no* criterion outside itself. Just in those cases where one loves in expectation of the good of being loved, one understands this good in some particular way or other, for some particular reason or other, and understands the "exchange" with another as involving some particular good for the other.[24] If one cannot see reflected in love from another *what* one loves in oneself, a content loved in a certain way for a certain reason, it would be hard to recognize love at all, as opposed to a desperate need to be affirmed on any terms at any price.

This would at least mean that there cannot be the *strict* divide between the political and philosophical life, and for a simple reason. To care for others (or for myself) is not to care for whatever they (or I) happen to want but for what they (and I) ought to want, for what good would make them (and me) fully satisfied, and one cannot care for that unless one also knows something about what is satisfying, and can find a way of reassuring oneself that things are as

23. This problem in Strauss's account is pointed out clearly by Victor Gourevitch in "Philosophy and Politics I," 71–84.

24. Cf. *Republic*, 437e-438b.

one thinks they are. This would then lead one to a wholly "selfless" concern with the good in itself only if one could distinguish the tangle of human motives far more than one can, or if the many doubts raised by the existence of competing sorts of goods, exemplified in competing individuals, articulated and defended by competing, often persuasive partisans, could be resolved by the intuitive self-certainty about which Strauss has already hedged.

And, on the other hand, the philosopher's "attachments" to other humans still look incomplete and dangerously closed on such a picture. All the elements of philosophical politics for Strauss, the need for others, for divided labor and wealth, the natural beneficence of the philosopher (not being subject to the normal, mercenary human concerns), the fact that the philosopher "cannot help" being drawn to potential interlocutors, and to well-ordered souls within which he might see an image of the eternal, and the fact that the philosopher can satisfy such requirements in all sorts of regimes, just or unjust, with only a select few and some privacy needed—all these simply re-raise Kojève's basic point. That point was not about the strategic need to create as many smart interlocutors as possible, all to keep the level of discussion high. The point was essentially about modern *skepticism*, and the profound consequences of the modern discovery that, say, the science studied for millennia was a disaster, that the sun did not revolve around the earth, that God did not ordain who should end up princes and who peasants, or eventually that the universe was not eternal nor were species fixed in hierarchical order and so forth.[25]

Said more broadly still, modernity (going now beyond what Kojève said and to the Hegelian spirit of his enterprise) did not originate in a willful dissatisfaction with the moderation and self-constraint in the tradition, in fatigue at what was asked. It was provoked by an inability to affirm conscientiously the assumptions on which such a notion of self-constraint was built—nature's teleology, hierarchy, and species characteristics, all accessible to unaided human reason. It would not be unreasonable to suspect that, after such a break, only versions of Kant's transcendentalism, Hegel's historical-dialectical account of reason, and Nietzsche's perspectivism would be on the horizon. In this situation, the great problem of modern reassurance about its own or any historical direction will require more than the chance discovery of like-minded souls.

This issue is not as clear as it might be in the Strauss-Kojève debate because Kojève's statement of Hegelian humanism is both so extreme and so undeveloped. Strauss is able to characterize matters in a Kantian way: as a contrast between a selfish, human-all-too-human self-absorption, and a selfless dedication to the highest in itself.[26] But Hegel himself rejects both Enlightenment humanism (which he thinks always does tend to lower the terms of recognition to "utility" and the immediately satisfying) and classical virtue theory (insensitive as it is to the self, to the ways in which "the" good can come to seem a good

25. This is all of course a much longer issue. For a fuller discussion of this claim, see my *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (Oxford, 1991).

26. Cf. Gourevitch, "Philosophy and Politics I," 80–81, and Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 122.

"to me"). He does this by denying that we should conceive of our relation to others in terms of some fixed "self" or stable set of desires which we seek to realize through or in spite of others, or which we must abandon for the good in itself (or the right, the moral law). The whole question of free subjectivity itself and its conditions must be properly raised before the claim for its necessary realization in modern, universal institutions can be made out. And Kojève's "heroic,"[27] existentialist rhetoric does not allow that to happen.

The same issue can be put another way. Strauss denies that anything remotely like the satisfaction promised by Kojève could, on the latter's own terms, be available in the universal, homogeneous world state. In the first place, if a state guaranteeing genuinely mutual recognition and "equal opportunity for all" comes into existence, it would be hopelessly utopian to think that as a matter of fact everyone will be satisfied with such a state, and history as such will end. Men and women do not act reasonably; human passions are terribly powerful.

But this means that the citizens of the end state are only "potentially satisfied" (210)[28] and this is why Kojève still describes a *State*, or laws with teeth in them, not a stateless society. But then the ruler must engage in practices which, in effect, *force* people to be free. (See the chilling description of this "age-old drama" on 211.) So much for mutual recognition and universal satisfaction. (Not to mention that Kojève's whole "historical verification" theory is in trouble if we are only talking about potential satisfaction.)

But the apparent susceptibility of Kojève's position to this *reductio* is a result of the incompleteness and vagueness of his account, and not to anything essentially Hegelian or modern in it. Hegel's account requires that some case be made that various concrete institutions in modernity (and not just the State) have achieved the legal, civil, and cultural conditions within which mutual recognition *is* possible, in which barriers to such recognition are not characteristics of the institutions themselves. (There must actually *be* such institutions for the Hegelian case against utopianism and moralism to go through, but the issue concerns institutions and what they make possible.) The serious objection to Hegel's position is not that, even so, there will still be psychologically dissatisfied, irrational individuals. It would be absurd to require of politics a kind of universally achieved divinity. All the Hegelian needs to show is that, as rational individuals (even if not wholly rational), there will be no *rational* basis for any dissatisfaction. The much more serious objection to Hegel's position is internal to his project, one which accepts his critique of Kantian moralism and classical "objectivism," but which argues that no historical case has been made (or perhaps could be made) that any such modern institutions exist or are even on the horizon, that the modern family, market economy, and state cannot meet the demands of "ethical life" set for them, and so that a generally moral (or relatively apolitical) stance is all that is justified within modern assumptions. This issue

27. I borrow this term from Roth, "Alexandre Kojève and the End of History," 298, and *Knowing and History*, 19ff.

28. Strauss quotes Kojève as having admitted this and cites 146.

does not arise in the present context because the only concrete *institutional* realization of the Hegelian ideal which Kojève discusses are the revolutionary activities of contemporary, mad tyrants (who he persuaded himself were, I suppose, World Spirit in limousines).

More serious is Strauss's objection that, on Kojève's own terms, there is not even a *potential* universal satisfaction in a final state. First, whatever the institutional character of the final State, there will remain a profound difference in degree between the kind of satisfaction available to the humble farmers, laborers, and civil servants of such a State, and Kojève's sage, or, perhaps, the Chief of State. This means that there can never be a true mutuality of recognition; only the Chief or sage will be "truly free" (a kind of "Planetary Oriental despotism" [208]), and the satisfaction of such freedom is suspect because he is not, finally, recognized by those whom he recognizes. Moreover, by settling for equality of recognition, made possible by the elimination of most scarcity and the conquest of nature, Kojève describes an end almost identical to that Nietzsche characterized as the age of the "last men," people who had learned to desire the lowest but most accessible, the simplest kind of happiness, what could be successfully desired, and, once satisfied, were "nodding off" into a permanent cultural "sleep." To this Strauss responds, "Warriors and workers of all countries, unite, while there is still time, to prevent the coming of the 'realm of freedom.' Defend with might and main, if it needs to be defended, 'the realm of necessity'" (209).

This last remark is connected to the theoretical issue behind Strauss's objections to any sort of historically achieved satisfaction, an issue particularly clear in a letter Strauss wrote to Kojève just after reading Kojève's Hegel book (August 22, 1948, 236–238).[29] There is a very general reason why life in a final state of mutual recognition could not be fully satisfying. Unless we show by some deduction from a philosophy of nature that the historical process leading to and realized in such a State is the unique satisfaction of the most fundamental, comprehensive, essential human desire, then the chance events which led us to esteem such recognition so highly and to labor so throughout time to realize it cannot be shown to be unique or uniquely satisfying. Another sort of history may start up tomorrow, given what appears to be Kojève's radical rejection of a philosophy of nature. And if his philosophical anthropology *is* a sort of philosophy of nature, then it is not "modern" or "atheistic" as promised, needs its own defense or nature's teleology, and so on. Further, that concession would imply that the only true satisfaction would be a comprehensive knowledge of such a nature and its implications, or, traditionally, wisdom. This sort of satisfaction would be available only to the few; however the many would understand it, it would be a kind of religion, unstable, unsatisfying, making "unavoidable" the "decline and fall of the universal-homogeneous state" (238).

29. Strauss's 1957 letter, quoted above, is for the most part correct. Kojève does not take up the challenge in the correspondence. See though his letter of September 19, 1950, 255–256, and the 1953 letter quoted above, 261–262. Kojève's point that the classical account cannot do justice to human agency, subjectivity, action, and so ethical life, is a frequent Hegelian charge.

These sorts of criticisms raise a number of issues relevant to the account of nature presupposed throughout Strauss's work, and about the adequacy of that conception.[30] Strauss's version of a philosophy of nature is a kind of Platonic perfectionism and seems committed to the problematic claim that the true perfection of a human being transcends the human as such. In a letter to Kojève on the issue (May 28, 1957, 276–280), Strauss notes that for a human being, "the end is complex because man is simply both a part of the whole (like the lion or a worm) and that unique part of the whole which is open to the whole" (279). Because of this, "man's form and end is articulated in such a way that justice can come to sight provisionally as simply transcendent and *in no way 'the perfection of man'*" (279, my emphasis).[31] But this is like saying that a "perfect" musical sonata could only be one whose mathematical relations were so beautifully complex that it could not be played by anyone with human hands or human brain. One could ask: in what sense is that a sonata, just as one could ask about a perfectionism which required the transcendence of the human altogether? If the *human* end is truly dual or complex, perhaps the natural perfection of the human is the maximum realization of both or all such ends, rather than the transcendent realization of the divine end? With that Aristotelian claim, we would be closer to the spirit of Hegel's theory of historical "realization" (*Verwirklichung*).

On the other hand, the criticisms of Kojève are indeed relevant to him, but mostly because he was only interested in those aspects of Hegel's position which could be placed in the service of his own claims about the risk of life, the centrality of the Master-Slave relation, the heroic, revolutionary action required to overcome such an impasse, and the final revolution or end State.

By contrast, first, Hegel himself did not simply reject a philosophy of nature in favor of a philosophy of spirit. He did argue that the "concepts" or "notions" presupposed in naturalistic accounts could be shown to be incomplete in a successful explanation of the doings and sufferings of complex natural beings, that reference to what such beings intend and make (*Geist*), and to the activities and projects made possible by the historical institutions which they make, was necessary in any intelligible rendering of the activities of such beings (and so progressively less reference to the strictly natural properties of such beings was necessary). But for Hegel this claim is not the start of a slippery slope towards historicism or Kojève's inconsistent, "anthropological" reading of history.

It is true that in some sense Hegel is maintaining that human beings by nature can only realize or actualize themselves in history, but that is not a claim about

30. See my "The Modern World of Leo Strauss," 461–471; Richard Kennington, "Strauss's *Natural Right and History*," *Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1974); and Victor Gourevitch, "The Problem of Natural Right and the Fundamental Alternatives in Natural Right and History," in *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy*, ed. K. Deutsch and W. Soffer (New York, 1987), 30–47.

31. Cf. Republic, 472d–473a. In the original letter, Strauss had underlined only "man" in the sentence. That and the word "provisionally," with its hints of some future qualification on the claim, and the issue of Strauss's Plato as wholly zetetic, or aporetic, would have to be kept in mind in any more extended speculation on this issue. I am grateful to Victor Gourevitch for comments on this issue.

the actualization of a species-specific potentiality. The character of such a historical realization is shown to depend, if it is to be rational, on what else has been done already, and for what end, and its direction is linked to what is claimed to be an emerging self-consciousness about the potential rationality of such enterprises.[32] Hegel needs to show that there is such an emergence and that such emergent rationality is "real," linked "dialectically" to the forms of life actually lived out in historical periods. (The possibility that nature could provide different starting points, or that contingent natural events could drastically affect history, does not bother Hegel. If the creatures left after such permutations or disasters are capable of historical memory and are rational—whatever their natural composition and immediate inclinations—Hegel claims to be able to show they must enact the only historical drama which historical and rational beings could enact.)

Second, Hegel's account of the *Rechtsstaat* makes no use of the language of ruler–ruled or degrees of satisfaction. His argument for the rational realization of those aspects of our lives which are influenced by love, are cooperative and competitive, is an argument for the historical realization of *those* social aspects, full stop. Given the history of the West thus far, *this* "ethical life" is what would complete and realize "objective spirit." Absolute Spirit is another matter, and while the full satisfaction of the philosopher presupposes a comprehension of this domain of ethical life, the reverse is not true. The State qua State needs no wise man or wisely informed Chief of State. And the fact that citizens are less "satisfied" than sages is irrelevant to the satisfaction of citizens qua citizens.[33] Hegel is, again, an Aristotelian, not a Platonist, on this and many other matters.

Now Hegel may have failed in all of this. But Kojève's aristocratic insistence on the desire for recognition, and his Christian insistence that only a universal and homogeneous state can realize such an end, represent truncated and unsatisfactory jumblings of Hegelian ideas which get a better hearing in the original. It is commonplace among those who admire Kojève to grumble about the "Hegel scholars" who just don't get it when they criticize Kojève's eccentric reading, don't see that Kojève was no mere "professor" and was after World Historical Goals not limited by textual fidelity. But Kojève was a child of his own time too, a time of academic exhaustion with the neo-Kantian and Bergsonian options in the French academy, and especially a time of lingering revolutionary hope and impending global war. Kojève's embodiment of such a finite *Geist* clearly limits and diminishes his work, particularly because it so limits what he can see in Hegel. Whether Hegel's more bourgeois confidence in the institutions, bureau-

32. On Hegel's understanding of the Spirit-Nature issue, see my "Idealism and Agency in Kant and Hegel," *Journal of Philosophy* 88 (1991), 532–541; on the issue of historical rationality, see my "Hegel and Category Theory," *Review of Metaphysics* 43 (1990), 839–848.

33. This is not to say that Hegel's position is without ambiguity on the issue of the "subjective" realization of reason in the lives of citizens in a modern *Rechtsstaat*. See my "Hegel's Political Argument and the Problem of *Verwirklichung*," *Political Theory* 9 (1981), 509–532.

cracies, and administrations of modern civil societies is of greater historical moment, more sensitive to the rational potentials of history, is another matter.[34]

For Leo Strauss the legacy of that wave of modernity which begins in Rousseau and culminates in the revolutionary, Hegelian "historical subject" results in a relativistic and ultimately nihilistic historicism. Kojève's reformulation, with its anthropological interest in objective human satisfaction and end-of-history measure or standard, would, he admits, save that tradition from that fate, but only by counseling resignation to a last-man state of ironic animality ("educated apes") which, just so, cannot possibly be satisfying, or "last." However, as argued above, what makes their debate possible is an agreement about alternatives and categories of assessment which narrows and obscures the tradition at issue between them. That strain of Hegelianism which produced both "scientific" revolutionaries and existentialist heroes has now, it is safe to say, played itself out. Its limitations are clear and its limited and painful historical results also clear. And the great dangers (particularly political dangers) of that strain in Hegel which produced both a reactionary attack on politics itself, and a kind of radical historical fatalism, are also manifest. Whether all of this now finally makes possible a more substantive confrontation between the alternatives genuinely represented by the Kant-Hegel tradition, and the classical principles defended by Strauss, is still an open question.

University of Chicago

34. Admittedly, given the complex history of Hegel's reception, it would take some time to establish that Hegel is just what Marx argued he was, the culmination of "bourgeois" philosophy, or that he belongs solidly in the modern legal, social, and political tradition, however critical of some aspects of that tradition. A number of recent works have begun to explore and defend such an interpretation. See Terry Pinkard, *Democratic Liberalism and Social Union* (Philadelphia, 1987), and Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (New York, 1990).