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## **Alexandre Kojève and the Many Ends of History**

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### **Introduction**

In 1992, American political scientist Francis Fukuyama published a book with an intriguing title: *The End of History and the Last Man*. The book was an extension of Fukuyama's earlier essay (1989). The fundamental idea, in the book as well as in the essay, was that the end of the Cold War was the end of history. Of course, there shall be all kinds of events even in the future. Technology will develop, the fashions will change, people will be interested in new things, and so on. However, the victory of liberal democracy, of capitalist market economy, and of the ideology of individualism they are grounded on, will be final and irreversible in the sense that they will not face any plausible ideological challenges.

Fukuyama's central thesis was generally rejected. The book and its title became symbols of the liberal euphoria that followed the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet empire. The idea of "the end of history" was generally seen as a philosophical chimaera that could be taken seriously only in the exceptional conditions of the early 1990's. Most people who use Fukuyama's title as a symbol of groundless optimism have probably not read the book, for the book itself is far more complex and ambiguous than its reputation. Fukuyama had a neo-conservative rather than a liberal background and he himself was not fully happy with his conclusion. The second (usually omitted) part of the title of the book refers to Nietzsche and to "the last man", the truly despicable creature who appears in Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Shadia B. Drury's early review of Fukuyama's work (Drury 1992–3) provides a

useful antidote to the usual reading; according to Drury, Fukuyama's fundamental thesis was "profoundly anti-liberal and anti-democratic" (p. 80).

In his work Fukuyama related his thesis of the end of history to G.W. F. Hegel, and, above all, to the Russian-French philosopher Alexandre Kojève. Kojève was one of the most influential interpreters of Hegel in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his famous lectures, held in 1933–39 and published in 1947 with the title *Introduction à la Lecture de Hegel* (ed. Raymond Queneau, Kojève 1947/1969), Kojève argued that the end of history is a logical consequence of Hegel's philosophy – especially of the philosophy formulated in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Kojève's interpretation was not a new one. Earlier, similar claims were made (very briefly) by Friedrich Nietzsche (1873–6/1997, 104–5) and by Friedrich Engels (1886/1973, 306–7). Both argued that although Hegel himself did not explicitly present the "end of history" thesis, it was an unavoidable consequence of his philosophy. For both, this was an argument *against* Hegel's philosophy, a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* result (Dale 2018, 22–78; Maurer 1965, 60). To Kojève, by contrast, the consequence was fully acceptable. Indeed, he considered it as the cornerstone of Hegel's system. History has an end, and humankind has already reached or is approaching that end. Kojève's attitude towards this supposed end of history is as ambivalent as Fukuyama's, but he never doubts that it is the correct way to read Hegel, and expresses an important truth.

Kojève's – and Fukuyama's – interpretations are often rejected, not only as absurd but also as mistaken ways to read Hegel's philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Kojève himself admitted quite openly that his main purpose was not to present as loyal interpretation of Hegel as possible, but rather to use his interpretation as a way to express his own ideas in a Hegelian way. However, most Kojève's

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel himself talked explicitly about "the end of history" only in once, in his *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Maurer 1967, 446).

students and those writing under his influence have uncritically accepted his Hegel as the real Hegel. Our purpose here is not to take a definite stand for or against the fundamental thesis (Hegelian or not) of the end of history. Rather, we try to do the following. First, we consider briefly those less well-known thinkers who defended a similar thesis *before* Kojève. The thesis of the end of history may or may not be genuinely Hegelian, but Kojève was not the first to argue that Hegel's theory implied the thesis, and that the thesis actually was true. Most thinkers who took the thesis seriously were, like Kojève himself, of Russian origin.

The thesis about the end of history has appeared in different arguments and in different contexts. It can be taken as a typical example of a philosophical idea without *prima facie* intuitive plausibility. For many people even the very talk about "the end of history" seems absurd. However, when looking at the thesis more closely, we are forced to admit that the unconvincing thesis follows from assumptions which themselves seem to be plausible. "The end of history" *seems* to provide an answer to problems that are genuine. Hence, we cannot simply sweep it aside without a further argument. Next, we say something about the reception and the influence of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel – for it has been extremely influential, especially in the post-war France. Finally, we will take up one important critique of the thesis.

### **End of history as a Russian philosophical theme**

In this context, some clarifying comments are needed. The German "Ende", like the French "fin" and the English "end" are all ambiguous. They may refer either to a halting of a process, or to its purpose or aim. For example, the destruction of the human world would mean the end of history in the first sense, for after the event there would be no humans left. However, it would not mean that human history had achieved its aim or final purpose. In the latter sense, a process, for example human history, might have an "end" (in the sense of an aim or purpose)

even if it never attains that end. Kojève's "end of history" is an "end" in both senses of the term. For Kojève, "history" is not just a temporal succession of events. A peculiar property of human history is that historical actors themselves are aware of the fact that they are part of that history, although they do not understand all the preceding conditions or the full consequences of their actions. They are motivated by (real or imagined) historical facts and use them as legitimation for action. The motivating and legitimating aspects of human history are related on one hand to the idea of *progress* (improvement, not just change), and on the other hand, to the idea of *tradition* that makes actions parts of larger temporally defined wholes. Both ideas provide ways to justify actions. In a sense, Kojève's "end of history" means that both justifications become obsolete. According to Kojève, at the end of history people are fully satisfied. They have neither a need to strive for something better, nor a need to legitimate the present by referring to the past.

Another Russian-French philosopher, Nikolai Berdyaev<sup>2</sup> has argued that "the end of history" is a specifically Russian theme (Berdyaev 1941/1957, 35). Besides Hegel, potentially relevant authors who have written extensively about this theme are a theologian and philosopher of religion, Vladimir Solovyov<sup>3</sup> (1853–1900), Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948), and Moses Rubinstein (1878–1953). Rubinstein was born in Irkutsk but did his doctoral dissertation in Germany in 1906. These philosophers had several things in common. All of them were Russians and influenced by Hegel's philosophy of history.<sup>4</sup> They all discussed "the end of history" thesis before its most famous Russian-born proponent, Alexandre Kojève.

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<sup>2</sup> Transcribed variously as "Berdiaev", "Berdyayev" or "Berdjajev".

<sup>3</sup> Transcribed variously as "Solovjeff" or "Solovjev".

<sup>4</sup> Because President Putin has recently referred to Solovyov's and Berdyaev's philosophies of history in his speeches, it is important to stress that actually both thinkers rejected narrow-

In his work *Three Conversations concerning War, Progress, and the End of History* (1900/1912, cf Solovyof 1899/1918) Solovyov presents his version of our theme. The book consists of philosophical discussions, and the narrative about the end of history is embedded in them as a separate story.<sup>5</sup> In the story, Solovyov provides two versions of the end of history. One possible end of history is the unification of humankind by a secular idea of peace. For Solovyov, this secular (or degenerate Christian) version means the victory of the Antichrist: in it, human beings try to become divine by taking the place of God. The other, *real* end of history is that peace is reached when humankind universally accepts the Kingdom of God. Its earthly expression is a Christian world-community. Human beings become divine in God by humbly accepting His will.

After immigrating to Germany, Kojève did his dissertation in Heidelberg on Solovyov's philosophy of religion (*Die religiöse Philosophie Wladimir Solowjew*, 1926). In the published version of the dissertation (Kojève 1934–5), Kojève does not thematise Solovyov's version of the end of history thesis, but it is clear that he knew it. Kojève's relation to Solovyov has been studied systematically (e.g., Lowe 2018, ch 3.), while his relation to another Russian philosopher, Nikolai Berdyaev, has not been studied at all. Nevertheless, the topic is potentially interesting. Although Berdyaev belonged to an earlier generation of Russian philosophers, he and Kojève had a lot in common. Both emigrated after the revolution and settled in Paris. Both moved between Orthodox Christianity and Marxism; while Kojève moved from Christianity to atheism, Berdyaev moved to the opposite direction. For both philosophers, Hegel-influenced

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minded nationalism as a form of collective egoism and idolatry (see e.g. Solovyof 1899/1918, 295–8; Berdeyaev 1935/1961, 84–109).

<sup>5</sup> Dostoyevsky's *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* in his *The Brothers Karamazov* is an obvious model for this kind of narrative technique.

philosophy of history and philosophical anthropology were recurrent themes. Both accepted a version of Existentialism before it came to fashion. They lived in Paris at the same time, and both were somewhat odd birds within the Russian émigré community. As far as we know, they never referred to each other in their works. We do not know whether there was any communication between them.

For Berdyaev, the end of history is a central theme (Berdyaev 1923/1990; Berdyaev 1941/1957). As for Solovyov, for Berdyaev it has a religious meaning. However, Berdyaev claims that Solovyov still sees the end of history as a *historical* event, as the beginning of an earthly Christian World-State. For Berdyaev, the end of history must itself be outside history (Berdyaev 1941/1957, 231–2). Although the necessity of the end is a part of the divine revelation, its (conditional) necessity is also revealed in the structure of our being. As he says, the end of history has at the same time an existential and a religious meaning (Berdyaev 1941/1957, 148).

**Berdyaev's basic argument** is the following: Either actions and events taking place in history have a (knowable) meaning, or they are meaningless. If the latter is true, our own lives are meaningless, too. If actions and events have a meaning, it must be related to their historical consequences, and, more generally, to their place in the flow of history. Therefore, their true meaning can be known only when all of their consequences and their final place in history is known. This can be known only if history has a (knowable) end. If history has no (knowable) end, new events can always change the apparent meaning of the earlier events. Hence, either history has a knowable end, or all actions and events are without meaning.

Some critics of the traditional philosophies of history have argued in a somewhat similar way. For example, Arthur C. Danto (1965, 7–16; cf. also Löwith 1949, 5) argues that any historical event can have a meaning only within a particular context. In another context, it may acquire a

different meaning. To take a simple example, at first most observers considered the Russian Revolution only a new bloody incident in the turbulent history of the country. When the Bolshevik regime stabilized itself, both the enemies and the supporters of the new government now saw the revolution as a world-historical turning point, either as the realization of a Utopia or as a mortal danger to the civilization. Now, after 30 years of the collapse of the regime, many historians have moved closer to the initial interpretation. By contrast, *human history itself*, as a complex event, cannot get its meaning from history. If human history as a whole has a meaning, it must come from outside of itself, from some a-historical or trans-historical context (on this point, see also Sartre 1983/1992, 23). For Danto, this shows that the search for the meaning of history is futile, for all such contexts are dependent on controversial metaphysical or theological worldviews. Thus, Danto accepts the second horn of the dilemma in Berdyaev's basic argument: all historical actions and events are, in a sense, meaningless, because meanings ascribed to them are necessarily subjective or relative to particular contexts. While their meaning within a particular context may be fixed, it may change when we move from one context to another. Berdyaev cannot accept this; hence, he supposes that there must be a single transcendent context. It gives human history its meaning, and thus fixes the true meaning of every significant event in the process. However, he agrees with Danto in that the meaning of history cannot be found by studying the historical process itself. Ultimately, it is a matter of faith.

Berdyaev argues that in a contingent or eternally recurring historical process everything would be meaningless. If the world is totally contingent, every good or noble deed may become insignificant or evil in the future. In an eternally recurring world, all good deeds are futile, for they cannot make any lasting change. However, Berdyaev argues that even in a progressive view of history – central in the Enlightenment, in the early positivism, in Hegelianism, and in Marxism – every generation and its achievements can have only instrumental value, if progress

is seen as an endless project. Endless progress is an inherently paradoxical idea, for it means endless sacrifices for the sake of a future that is never reached (Berdyaeu 1941/1957, 229–30, Berdyaeu 1923/1990, 180–2).<sup>6</sup> According to Berdyaeu, this shows that if historical events are meaningful, history must have an end in *the both senses* of the term.

### **Kojève's end of history**

Now we turn to Kojève. We think that it is possible to distinguish at least three separate arguments for the end of history thesis. The first two are more or less implicit in Kojève's texts. Nevertheless, they are all interconnected.

**The epistemological argument:** The classical definition of knowledge is that knowledge is true justified belief. According to the traditional sceptical argument, for every contingent claim we take as knowledge, it is always possible that in the future new information or new arguments will show that the claim is not, after all, true or sufficiently justified. Hence, Kojève argues that either we do not have any knowledge about contingent matters at all, or there has to be a moment after which we will not acquire any new information or find new (valid) arguments (Kojève 1946/2007, 33). According to this epistemological argument, all philosophers who seriously claim that they have knowledge about something are committed to the further claim that *at least in this issue*, history has reached its end.

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<sup>6</sup> Beauvoir (1947/1976, 103–6) discusses the same problem. However, it seems that the paradox is avoided if steps towards the full realization of an ideal are *also* inherently valuable, not only valuable as a means to an end.

**The ethical-political argument:** We have supreme principles and ends (e.g. justice, freedom, universal happiness...). It is part of the notion of principles or ends that their full realization is possible. We can at least imagine a situation in which they are fully realized. When all principles and ends are fully realized, there is no need to strive for them anymore. However, human history *is* (largely) striving for unrealized principles and ends. Insofar as we have any supreme principles and ends, we have to admit that the end of history is at least conceivable.<sup>7</sup>

The epistemological and ethical-political arguments have a common ground. According to them, we human beings are teleological creatures. Our history consists of various attempts to attain knowledge or to realize principles and ends. The necessary starting point of this striving is that the aims we are striving for must be conceived as possible. Thus, having the idea of the final state seems to be constitutive for the human condition. At the same time, the idea contains a paradoxical element. If the desired final states were realized, there would be no further reasons for any significant action.

All the arguments sketched above (including Berdyaev's argument) are conditional: *if* history has a meaning, *if* genuine knowledge (in the classical sense) is possible, *if* we have supreme principles... then, the end of history is at least conceivable. In his *Introduction*, Kojève connects the arguments (sketched above) to his Hegelian view of the nature of society and of human history. There is no room to present Kojève's full theory here, but we may recall its general outlines. Kojève, as Hobbes, Hegel and Marx before him, thinks that the society arises from conflicts, and that history is essentially conflictual. However, self-preservation and competition for scarce resources, emphasized by Hobbes, are not enough to explain why human beings are driven into conflicts. In the historical materialism usually ascribed to Marx, human history is a history of class struggles because human beings need products of labour to satisfy

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Sartre 1983/1992, 141: "All ethics presupposes the end of history".

their material desires. In order to satisfy their needs, a process of production has to be organized, but effective organization of production unavoidably creates a division between the rulers and the ruled. Classes struggle with each other for the distribution of the surplus created in the production process. Ultimately, they struggle for the control of the production process itself and thereby for the control of their own lives. Thus, the satisfaction of material needs is the motor of history.

Here, Kojève disagrees. Not all fundamental human needs are related to material satisfaction. Work is not the only distinguishing trait of human beings. Human beings desire “things” that are internally dependent of the desires, values and actions of *other* human beings (Kojève 1947/1969, 6). They do not desire only material satisfaction, but also love and respect of others, in brief, they want to be *recognized*. If material scarcity were the only reason for conflicts, a world of abundance would necessarily be a peaceful one. By contrast, the desire for recognition cannot be satisfied simply by creating more of the desired “things”. The desire for recognition is internally related to other human beings who have similar desires in the sense that they also desire love and respect. The desire for recognition, unlike desires directed towards material objects, is self-centred but, at the same time, *essentially* social. For Kojève – and according to his interpretation, for Hegel too – history is a struggle for recognition. Human beings, unlike other creatures, are willing to risk their lives for aims that are not related to their material survival (Kojève 1947/1969, 6, 4). Hence, Hobbes was wrong, and even Marx needs some correction.

For Kojève, the struggle for recognition leads to master-slave relationships. However, such relationships (and institutions built on such relationships) are necessarily unstable, for in such relationships neither the masters nor the slaves can be fully satisfied. A necessary requirement for recognition is that it is given *freely* (Kojève 1947/1969, 13, 21). Ultimately, the external signs of recognition given by slaves who are coerced or bribed do not satisfy masters’ need for

recognition. Fearful masses shouting slogans under the surveillance of the police, or courtiers with their flattering speeches do not really satisfy tyrants' desire to be recognized. According to Hegel (and Kojève) a relationship in which people are treated as a means only (to use a Kantian expression) is psychologically unsatisfying and therefore unstable.

**The third (explicitly Kojévian) argument for the end of history** is the following: The need for recognition is the fundamental motive for human action. Human history consists of human actions. The *universal homogeneous state* that recognizes all its members in an equal way and in which people recognize each other so that nobody is excluded from the social body of mutual recognition can satisfy the need for recognition of all human beings (Kojève 1947/1969, 44, 90, 95, 158–63, 236–7; Kojève 1946/2007, 42–4). Therefore, the arrival of the universal homogeneous state means the end of human history.

In Kojève's Hegelian view, this argument is connected to the earlier arguments. First, one central form of recognition is that the others are recognized as potentially relevant sources of knowledge. They are recognized as beings who have independent points of view that must be taken into account. Only when *all* points of view are taken into consideration, we can be sure that no important claims are left out. Thus universal (in Hegel's terminology, "absolute") knowledge and universal recognition are interconnected; universal knowledge is possible only in a state where everyone is equally recognized (Kojève 1947/1969, 32, 35, 95, 194). In this way, Kojève's recognition-based argument is related to the epistemological argument for the end of history. It is also related to the ethical-political argument. Because history is a struggle for recognition, all historically influential principles and aims must somehow be connected to that struggle. Only such principles are able to enjoy wide support. At the end of the day, only the principles of equality and general liberty can be successful, for they alone are compatible with universal recognition. Universal realization of the principles of the French revolution –

liberty, equality, fraternity – realize the “universal homogeneous state” (Kojève 1947/1969, 50).

What is the nature of this “universal homogeneous state”? Kojève’s description remains at an abstract level. He does not specify, for example, whether the universal homogeneous state would be capitalist or socialist. Kojève was a Marxist in his own idiosyncratic way, and in some of his texts, the universal homogeneous state could be identified with Marx’s communist utopia. However, in other places he indicates that capitalist societies like the United States or Japan also realize the end of history. In his posthumously published work on the philosophy of law (Kojève 1981/2000), the end of history is depicted as an individualist *Rechtsstaat*. As we saw, for Kojève’s interpreter Fukuyama the end of history is unambiguously the final victory of liberal individualism. What is common for all these descriptions is that the end of history is a fully developed *modern* society. Kojève is thoroughly and consciously a theorist of the modern world, and so, according to him, was Hegel. Nevertheless, Kojève’s formulation (“universal homogeneous state”) sounds somewhat un-Hegelian. The modern state described in Hegel’s *Rechtsphilosophie* is clearly a nation state characterized by internal complexity and differentiation (Roman-Lagerspetz 2009, 145). It is, perhaps, not an accident that Kojève mostly ignores *Rechtsphilosophie* and concentrates on *Phänomenologie*.<sup>8</sup>

One important consequence of Kojève’s interpretation is that Hegel’s philosophy is itself, in two different ways, a part of the end of history it describes. According to the epistemological argument sketched above, all claims of knowledge imply that at least in some area of human knowledge, history has reached its end in the sense that no new (valid) arguments can refute those claims. However, Hegel is a special case, for he tries to understand the entire human history. According to his philosophy, history is essentially the development of collective self-

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<sup>8</sup> We are grateful to one of the referees for a useful comment.

understanding. Because Hegel is the first who recognized this, *his philosophy is itself a decisive step in the process it analyses*. It refers to itself, and is its own proof, for nothing important can remain outside of it. It shows, not only its own possibility, but also its own necessity (Kojève 1947/1969, 49, 90, 94–6, 192–4; Kojève 1946/2007, 44–5). Its emergence itself shows that history is approaching to its final state.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Hegel’s philosophy is also *self-realizing*. When people become aware of the truth of Hegel’s philosophy – for example, by reading Kojève’s exposition of it – they start to act according to that philosophy, and by their own actions realize the universal homogeneous state (Kojève 1947/1969, 98; Kojève 1946/2007, 56; cf. Roman-Lagerspetz 2022). Kojève’s own later career as a bureaucrat who worked for the European economic integration could, perhaps, be seen as an example of this.

### **Critical arguments**

It is difficult to overestimate the influence of Kojève’s interpretation. It has been said that “the Hegel of the twentieth century is more or less Kojève’s Hegel” (McGowan 2019, 139–40). Whole generation of French philosophers wrote under Kojève’s spell. Jacques Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Georges Bataille and Raymond Aron were among his students; Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, while not being among the regular students, were strongly influenced by his ideas (Butler 1987/1999; Roman-Lagerspetz 2009, 133). When the French philosophers started to criticize Hegel, the “Hegel” they attacked against was Kojève’s Hegel. Philosophers as different as Beauvoir (1947/1976, 103–6, 116–8), Sartre (1983/1992, 88–90,

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<sup>9</sup> Kojève might happily accept Nietzsche’s ironical comment that “for Hegel, the climax and terminus of the world-process coincided with his own existence in Berlin” (Nietzsche 1873–6/1997, 104).

467–8), Albert Camus (1951/1987, 176–194), Emmanuel Levinas (1977/1998, 54, 79–80, 126) and André Glucksmann (1977/1980, ch. 3.) were largely in agreement in their critiques. They generally accepted the Hegelian-Kojévian basic idea that the human history is a history of conflicts, and that these conflicts result from the universal desire for recognition. The human subject as well as the human society are arenas of these conflicts. However, these critics interpreted Hegel's philosophy as a philosophy of all-encompassing "Reason" that tries to overcome all conflicts and to suffocate all differences. Its logical conclusion would be the end of history as a totalitarian "tyranny of reason" (Drury 1994, 45). If the "end of history" is rejected, but the idea of history as a struggle for recognition accepted, what remains is the endless struggle without hope for redemption (Roman-Lagerspetz 2009). As Drury (1994, 76) says about Sartre: "Sartre thought that the best goals are those that are impossible. (...) The master-slave dialectic is a permanent feature of human existence." In these critiques, Kojève's Hegel, the supposed theorist of both the master-slave dialectic *and* the end of history, was self-evidently taken as the real Hegel.

As we noticed in the beginning of this article, the interpretation of Hegel as the philosopher of the end of history was not Kojève's invention. It was discussed already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and, as we saw, Nietzsche and Engels presented it (passingly) as an argument *against* Hegel. Interestingly, the Irkutskian philosopher Moses Rubinstein made an early critique of this interpretation in his dissertation (Rubinstein 1906). Rubinstein's arguments against the end of history thesis resemble the critiques put forth by the French philosophers some fifty years later; but unlike the French students of Kojève, Rubinstein tries to show that the thesis is not only false but also incompatible with Hegel's entire philosophy. Thus, Rubinstein's early dissertation could be interpreted as a pre-emptive reply to Kojève. Rubinstein remarks that for Hegel, the *aim* of history is unambiguously *human freedom* (Rubinstein 1906, 56, 65; Hegel 1837/1972, 54–5, 63, 104). In Rubinstein's interpretation, freedom in Hegel means the ability

to act, and action means the possibility to create something new (new “objects of value”, as Rubinstein puts it). In the supposed end (final state) of history, it would no more be possible to create something genuinely and significantly new. Hence, there could not be any freedom (Rubinstein 1906, 66). For this reason, Rubinstein argues, the interpretation of Hegel as a theorist of the end of history has to be mistaken (Rubinstein 1906, 62).

How would Kojève reply to this critique? Kojève (and following him, both Sartre and Beauvoir) states that the human subject is *negativity*. Human subjects are not constrained by any external limits. We are of course constrained by the physical world, but we have no such metaphysical, theological, biological or psychological essence that would force us to act in a pre-determined way. Our freedom is our ability to overcome all such apparent pre-determined limits, to negate any given definition of what it is to be a human being (cf. also Sartre 1983/1992, 69). Kojève presents this as a formula: “freedom = negativity = action = history” (Kojève 1947/1969, 209, 222, 226). For Kojève, freedom is unambiguously negative freedom. However, unlike the other theorists who talk about “negative freedom” he does not claim that freedom is just the *absence* of constraints (Lagerspetz 1998). Rather, freedom consists of action that *aims at removing or overcoming those constraints*, an active negation (Kojève 1947/1969, 156). From this follows a paradoxical result: *When all the constraints of action are removed, there is no freedom*. To formulate the argument in a slightly different way: the moving force of all action is desire. According to Kojève, the specifically human desire is directed towards the other. Human beings, unlike other living creatures, desire recognition from the others, and are even willing to risk their own lives for it. This is the core of their freedom. Because, at the end of history, the human need for recognition is fully satisfied, there are no further reasons for this specifically human form of action (Kojève 1947/1969, 77). Hence, at the end of history, human beings are neither free nor unfree. Rather, they are like non-human animals whose behaviour cannot be described in terms of free/unfree – when these terms are used in their

Kojèvien sense (Kojève 1947/1969, 191–2, 220). When Rubinstein specifies that the thesis of the end of history is incompatible with Hegel’s dialectical method (Rubinstein 1906, 61), Kojève’s reply<sup>10</sup> would be that Hegel’s *method* is not dialectical. Development through negations is not, as in the orthodox Marxism-Leninism, a universal philosophical principle, but a specifically human phenomenon. Dialectics is necessary for Hegel only as long as *the object of his study*, the human reality, is itself contradictory and develops through negations (Kojève 1947/1969, 179, 181, 191). Again, Kojève is fully endorsing a consequence initially presented by others as a *reductio ad absurdum*.

It is, however, clear that Hegel did not accept the Kojèvien-existentialist idea of freedom as pure negativity. In his *Philosophy of Right*, he connects the idea of freedom as the negation of all constraints to the terroristic period of the French revolution. Such a freedom cannot produce anything new (1820/1967, §5, p. 22). In Hegel, “negation” is always positive or productive in the sense that existing things are negated by creating new alternatives. The Hegelian “antithesis” is never just a denial or annihilation of something. Thus, Rubinstein rightly equates Hegelian freedom with *creation* (or “negation of negation”) rather than with simple negation.

## Conclusion

It seems that Rubinstein is right in his counter-critique. The idea of the end of history is incompatible with the fundamental thesis of Hegel’s philosophy of history and political philosophy: the *aim* or *purpose* of history is freedom. It should be added that the textual support

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<sup>10</sup> Kojève never refers to Rubinstein’s work, and we do not know whether he actually read it. In Kojève’s *Introduction*, there are virtually no references at all to the earlier interpretations of Hegel.

for this is much stronger than the support for the interpretation that Hegel would endorse the thesis of the end of history *as the final state*. This means that either Kojève (and his followers like Fukuyama) are wrong in their interpretation or, then, Hegel is internally inconsistent. The modern world cannot simultaneously be the realm of freedom and the end of history (when the “end” means the final state). We should notice that freedom as an “end” or aim is unlike other aims, say happiness or justice. A free society cannot be a static state of affairs, for freely acting human beings continuously change and transform it, and, following Rubinstein, produce new valuable things. However, a Hegelian might still claim that a free society is the aim of history without supposing that it can ever be fully realized; in Kantian terms, it would be a “regulative ideal” we could approximate endlessly.

However, we have not proved that Kojève’s (or Fukuyama’s) thesis of the end of history is meaningless as a possible interpretation of history. Moreover, we admit that even if Kojève’s way to read Hegel is definitely one-sided (and sometimes even “violent”, as some of his critics say) it also contains important insights. Sometimes one-sided interpretations may help us to pay attention to aspects of classical works generally ignored in mainstream readings. Most notably, Kojève’s fundamental insight that “recognition” is central for Hegel’s whole philosophy, not just a single theme in his *Phenomenology*, is now generally accepted. Generally, we have to admit that Kojève’s way to read Hegel, including his controversial and deeply problematic thesis about the end of history, has had a decisive impact on how many philosophers in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century have understood not only Hegel, but also the modern world.

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