



Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit

Alexandre Kojève , Allan Bloom (Editor) , James H. Nichols (Translator)

Download now

Read Online 

Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit

Alexandre Kojève , Allan Bloom (Editor) , James H. Nichols (Translator)

Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit Alexandre Kojève , Allan Bloom (Editor) , James H. Nichols (Translator)

"This collection of Kojève's thoughts about Hegel constitutes one of the few important philosophical books of the twentieth century--a book, knowledge of which is requisite to the full awareness of our situation and to the grasp of the most modern perspective on the eternal questions of philosophy."--Allan Bloom (from the Introduction)

During the years 1933-1939, the Russian-born and German-educated Marxist political philosopher Alexandre Kojève (1902-1968) brilliantly explicated--through a series of lectures--the philosophy of Hegel as it was developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This collection of lectures--originally compiled by Raymond Queneau and edited for its English-language translation by Allan Bloom--shows the intensity of Kojève's study and thought and the depth of his insight into Hegel's *Phenomenology*. More important--for Kojève was above all a philosopher and not an ideologue--this profound and venturesome work on Hegel will expose the readers to the excitement of discovering a great mind in all its force and power.

Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit Details

Date : Published by Agora/Cornell University Press (first published 1947)

ISBN : 9780801492037

Author : Alexandre Kojève , Allan Bloom (Editor) , James H. Nichols (Translator)

Format : Paperback 304 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Nonfiction, Theory

 [Download Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the P ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit Alexandre Kojève , Allan Bloom (Editor) , James H. Nichols (Translator)

From Reader Review Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit for online ebook

Erik Graff says

We read this book along with the complete text of Hegel's Phenomenology of the Spirit in a course on the book taught by Henri Mottu, a visiting professor from French Switzerland teaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. The class was excellent, the reading of the Phenomenology an excitingly intriguing introduction to years of further study, but Kojève's interpretation was too tendentiously Marxist (particularly the part on the Master-Slave dialectic) to be taken very seriously. Still, our arguments about it were fun.

Samelu Binumcole says

I am going to admit straight away that I will never "finish" reading this book because it was too dense for me, but not understanding clearly all of it does not mean that I will not keep coming back.

The first part of the book is about the development of history through the Hegelian Master / Slave dialectic. Which Kojève does a fine job of explaining in the first part of the book. It's a summary of the first chapters of the Phenomenology of Spirit. The next parts I found to be interesting but as I said, considerably more dense.

Kojève's (Marxist) interpretation of Hegel has been incredibly influential to other thinkers who came later in the century which is why I consider this book to be important. What I have come to believe though, is that if your main interest is to understand Hegel, I would not put all my stock in it, as this interpretation is among Hegelian scholars considered to be "Kojève imposing himself on Hegel."

With that in mind, I would still recommend the book. It's a book you can pick up and put down again. But it's far from an easy ride.

Kang says

hands-down the most profound reflections on Hegel in the 20th C I have yet read--and from a Russian Frenchman, no less! which is not to say that Kojève gives us Hegel's philosophy. Kojève shows us what can be done with Hegel rather than what Hegel wished to do/teach. If I were to rate this "book" on the basis of the promise contained in its title, I would have to give Kojève an "F"; this is a *horrible* introduction to the reading of Hegel. But I imagine the title was chosen with no small irony. That Kojève, always a jokester!

Joe says

Review:

July 2006

A Brief Note on Tactics

This book, an 'Introduction to the Reading of Hegel', is a collection of transcripts and notes collected and edited by Raymond Queneau, that is the true beginning of the contemporary 'End of History' debate. But can there ever be a final reconciliation between the innumerable factions of human history? "...[H]e [i.e., Hegel] definitely reconciles himself with all that is and has been, by declaring that there will never more be anything new on earth. (Introduction', p 168.)" Hegel, according to Kojeve, thought that History had come to an end; but the question of course is - exactly what does history 'think' - i.e., do? And that boils down to the question: what exactly is humanity doing? There is a not minor problem with making predictions in public that I would like to mention in this short note; these predictions become but another factor in human interactions. Kojeve, of course, is quite well aware of this; he regarded his 'philosophy' as little more than propaganda for the Hegelian position. This is no modesty, btw, in our posthistoire one can only make propaganda. (Briefly, according to Kojeve, 'History' properly understood ended with Hegel. We live today in a post-history that is nothing but the actualization of Hegelian philosophy throughout the World. When this actualization is complete the Universal Homogenous State then rises.) Thus Kojeve regards (correctly, given his premises) all 'philosophy' today as propaganda. But he has, in my humble opinion. spoken too soon.

Stanley Rosen, a student of Kojeve, alludes to this possibility in the title essay of 'Hermeneutics as Politics': "Had he remained silent, he could never have been refuted." How does one end History, possess the final knowledge - and then change ones mind? (On Kojeve's changing his mind see, for instance, the enigmatic 'Note to the Second Edition' in the 'Introduction to the Reading of Hegel'.) But there is more to the problem than that. By revealing the 'necessities' of History long before its final consummation (i.e., the rise of the UHS) he has allowed all enemies of the ongoing globalization to rally to any opposed cause, no matter how ephemeral. But it may turn out that these short-lived oppositional movements are well-nigh innumerable. ...So, exactly what should Kojeve, given his intentions, have done? He should have worked in the French Ministry (Kojeve is the true architect of the European Union, a building block of the World State), brought out the unjustly ignored, and posthumously published, 'Outline of a Phenomenology of Right', and told Queneau precisely where he could stick his class notes. By publishing the technical, legal and economic 'Outline' and keeping his philosophical speculations permanently to himself he could have (perhaps!) prevented his followers from squabbling over issues that cannot even be decided until the UHS rises...

For as Kojeve admitted in a letter to Leo Strauss, "Historical action necessarily leads to a specific result (hence: deduction), but the ways that lead to this result, are varied (all roads lead to Rome!). The choice between these ways is free, and this choice determines the content of the speeches about the action and the meaning of the result. In other words: materially history is unique, but the spoken story can be extremely varied, depending on the free choice of how to act." (On Tyranny, p 256). Thus the propaganda (i.e., 'the spoken story', theory) is not essential, and here Kojeve remains true to his (peculiar) Marxism, what is crucial is 'material' History. By this Kojeve means the technical, economic and legal forces that inexorably (or so it seems) drive us towards the World State (i.e., UHS). Thus Kojeve's propaganda and predictions, best embodied in the 'Introduction', were always secondary. ...Would we be closer to the UHS if the 'Introduction' never saw the light of day? Of course we will never know. But this possibility can never be discounted either.

Review:

April 2005

Four and a half stars, Five reserved for Hegel

What has really been puzzling so many readers of the Introduction is the so-called 'Japanization' note (p 159) added to the second edition of the Introduction. It is this perplexing note that I would like to address in this review. This note is where Kojève first admits that posthistory, as he originally conceived it, was contradictory, that if "Man becomes an animal again, his arts, his loves, and his play must become purely natural again." Humans would "construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas, would play like young animals, and would indulge in love like adult beasts."

Truly frightening. -Men as beasts! It reminds one of the myth of Plato's (269bff) Reversed Cosmos in the Statesman; men living as contented animals, growing ever more ignorant under the care of the gods/who Kojève would say equal nature. But it gets worse! ""The definitive annihilation of Man properly so-called" also means the definitive disappearance of human Discourse (Logos) in the strict sense." After comparing the ruins of language (in posthistory) to the language of bees Kojève says "[W]hat would disappear, then, is not only Philosophy or the search for discursive Wisdom, but also that Wisdom itself. For in these post-historical animals, there would no longer be any "[discursive] understanding of the world and of self."" The Wisdom gained for humanity by the correct understanding of the ruses of History - Hegelianism/w Kojève - would be lost forever. Thus there would be no Sages contemplating the History that could only (perhaps!) have led to them.

Then he goes on to say that this view was mistaken, he came to realize (1948-1958) that posthistory was already here and that Americans(!) most closely embodied it. By posthistory he means that all history, since the publication (1806) of the Phenomenology, has simply been the activity of 'backward' nations becoming more like what Hegel envisioned for them (embodying the laws/institutions of the French Revolution) and various anachronisms (in all states) being gradually eliminated. Obviously, since 1806, Logos (discursive understanding) has not disappeared entirely from the face of the earth - even in America! (Kojève appears long after 1806, and he has American readers, and Kojève is indeed a Sage. ...Whew!) "I was led to conclude from this that "the American way of life" was the type of life specific to the post-historical period, the actual presence of the United States in the world prefiguring the "eternal present" future of all humanity. Thus Man's return to animality appeared no longer as a possibility that was yet to come, but as a certainty that was already present." The problem and contradictions of his first understanding seem to be solved with this second (Americanization) understanding. Discursive understanding endures, the Sages will come, the Circularity of the Whole will be comprehended (if only by the Sages) and Kojève will be remembered. - Problem solved.

...But he doesn't end the note with that. He next speaks of Japanization - but why? His 'contradictory' understanding has been corrected by the above. The possibility of discursive understanding remains; the Hegelian/Kojèvean Sages can continue to discuss the History that leads to Them and Their Understanding. So why does Kojève continue his note? He doesn't exactly tell us why. We need to ferret it out. "Now, the existence of the Japanese nobles, who ceased to risk their lives (even in duel) and yet did not for that begin to work, was anything but animal." But he had just shown, thanks to the 'Americanization' thesis, that, strictly speaking, animality would not occur. Why is the 'Japanization' Thesis necessary?

...Hmmm. The Japanese had experienced the End of History by isolating themselves for 300 years. But they kept a nobility! America hasn't done that. (Is this why Japanization is superior to Americanization? It keeps a nobility? Is this merely a sop to 'exceptions' + sophists that will not become Sages? But why even bother with a concession? Can History actually be restarted - remember, according to the 'Americanization' Thesis History has already ended - again?) How did Japan keep a nobility? Through snobbery! Kojeve says there is no Religion, Morals, Politics in the European or historical (by this he means the dialectically expansive Hegelian) sense in Japan. Are we to understand by this that there is "Religion, Morals, Politics" in some non-European, non-historical sense?

The last sentence made us pause; the next sentence makes us stop. "But Snobbery in its pure form created disciplines negating the "natural" or "animal" given which in effectiveness far surpassed those that arose, in Japan or elsewhere, from historical Action - that is, from warlike and revolutionary Fights or from forced work." What exactly does Kojeve mean here by effectiveness? How could Snobbery surpass in effectiveness the "historical Action" so unforgettably understood in Hegel's Phenomenology? ...Examples of Snobbery (which are "peaks equaled nowhere else") listed by Kojeve, which one would hope answer our question about effectiveness, are Noh Theater, the tea ceremony and the art of flower display!

I do not mean to sound like a Snob :-) but all this (Noh Theater, etc) does seem to somewhat lack the drama and import (to say the least!) of Hegel's Phenomenology or even Kojeve's commentary. ...So, what is the effectiveness that Kojeve speaks of? He continues by saying that "all Japanese without exception are currently in a position to live according to totally formalized values-that is, values completely empty of all "human" content in the "historical" sense." What Kojeve is indicating is that some form of humanity (values) is still possible after history ends, after no one any longer Fights or risks their life. There still is perfectly gratuitous suicide - hari-kari - but as Kojeve points out, this suicide "has nothing to do with the risk of life in a Fight waged for the sake of "historical" values that have social or political content."

Again, we ask, why does Kojeve find all this so effective? Japanization seems, if anything, thanks to its ahistorical nature, to be the exact opposite of effectiveness from a Hegelo/Kojevean perspective. Kojeve continues, "This seems to allow one to believe that the recently begun interaction between Japan and the Western World will finally lead not to a rebarbarization[!] of the Japanese but to a "Japanization" of the Westerners (including the Russians)." We need to be more than surprised when Kojeve refers to the Westernization of Japan as a rebarbarization. The rebarbarization that Kojeve is speaking of is the bringing of Japan into line with the Hegelian/Kojevean History. ...One is left wondering if Kojeve believed his theory as little as Leo Strauss did.

...Or perhaps only the human consequences of his theory are what troubled Kojeve, not its correctness. "Now, since no animal can be a snob, every "Japanized" post-historical period would be specifically human." But how can the animal Man, as Snob, remain Human when he no longer Fights or Works? Kojeve, in the penultimate sentence of this note says, "To remain Human, Man must remain a "Subject opposed to the Object," even if "Action negating the given and Error" disappears." For the Sages there is no longer Error in posthistory because there is no more historical change. (Man does not live temporally any longer, now, at the End of History, he lives spatially, he is only another piece of nature.) But how can man live non-temporally?

Kojeve ends this note thusly; "This means that, while henceforth speaking in an adequate fashion of everything that is given to him, post-historical Man must continue to detach "form" from "content," doing so no longer in order actively to transform the latter, but so that he may oppose himself as a pure "form" to himself and to others taken as "content" of any sort." This then, of course, is what Kojeve means by the "effectiveness" of 'Japanization.' The Sages keep their discursive understanding of the Circularity of the Concept while the 'nobility' (exceptions, sophists) unfortunate enough to live at the End of History will

continue to struggle, but fundamentally only with(in) themselves. There will be exactly zero Historical import to these struggles. History has ended but the struggle for recognition, in an entirely non-Historical sense, continues thru Snobbery. Thus we have Absolute Knowledge and (a rather peculiar) Humanity at the same time. Kojeve thus sets the table, in the 'eternally present future' of the End of history, for us to always have our cake (our Humanity) while eating it (Knowing this Humanity in a complete, absolute, unchanging and adequate manner) too. ...This is what Kojeve is pleased to call 'effectiveness'.

At this point some minor observations may be in order. This note we have been considering is an addendum to a note that began on page 157. The paragraph that the first (or original) note attempted to clarify had at least one remarkable statement (p 156) in it: "The Real resists Action not Thought." If this is true (and I believe it is) we see another example of the effectiveness of the 'Japanization' thesis. While material/institutional History may End exactly as Hegel/Kojeve say it will end it would seem there is more than one way to 'discursively understand' this End.

Kojeve had indicated something similar to this in an earlier letter to Strauss (Sep 19 1950) that says:

"Historical action necessarily leads to a specific result (hence: deduction), but the ways that lead to this result, are varied (all roads lead to Rome!). The choice between these roads is free, and this choice determines the content of the speeches about the action and the meaning of the result. In other words: materially history is unique, but the spoken story can be extremely varied, depending on the free choice of how to act."

The similarity between this note (in a letter) to Strauss and the remark quoted above is that material history is unique (because the Real resists Action, erroneous action is purged by the very Real process of History) but the difference is that in this letter Kojeve seems to be insisting that speech follows the (material) results of Action. This is in fact contradicted by the statement: The Real resists Action not Thought. This says, for those that have ears to hear, that even though (or if) History ends exactly as Hegel/Kojeve say it must end there is no guarantee that the discursive (ahem) 'understanding' of this unique and necessary End will be 'correct' - by 'correct' I merely mean Hegelo-Kojevean.

This is perhaps where the 'effectiveness' of the 'Japanization' Thesis really lies. Whatever 'chatter' arises - after the unavoidable Unique + Necessary End of History in the Hegel/Kojevean sense - among the non-Sages can be understood as a form of Snobbery! Even a non-historical Religion/Politics/Morals, as Kojeve indicates in the Note (P 161) to the Second Edition, would seem to be possible! Thus the Japanization Thesis is not merely a concession to the exceptions/sophists that cannot (or will not) become Sages; it is also (more profoundly) a concession necessitated by the fantasy-like nature of thought itself. The material (and institutional) End of History, as envisioned by Hegel/Kojeve, may well be unavoidable and unique but, given the fact that the Real doesn't resist Thought, exactly anything can be said (or thought, which inevitably becomes speech) of this unavoidable End. And the Sages, at the end of this Unique History, point to the chattering sophists/exceptions and they say - Snobbery! The only unanswered question these Sages now face is can these thoughtful fantasies, when spoken, restart History? Or to put this another way, is it thru these thoughtful snobbish dreams that Mastery, in the Historical sense, re-enters the world?

Randal Samstag says

The most straightforward summary of the *Phenomenology* giving the materialist interpretation of Hegel. The

book is edited by Allan Bloom, the intellectual father of Fukuyama and *The End of History*.

Peter says

Kojeve's commentary on Hegel's *Phenomenology* is a brilliant example of what Emerson termed "creative reading"--a skill cultivated by far too few. That said, the book is not for everyone. One reads Kojève to discover a living Hegel; most people are content to know that the man and his system are dead. As a devotee of Kierkegaard in my youth, I was among those who felt that Hegel's ghost was best avoided. In middle age, I am not so sure. The system I can do without (I remain Kierkegaardian in that sense); but the man, his insights, his intelligence...the *Phenomenology* is itself required reading for those aspects alone. Then read Kojève for ideas about what to do with them.

Pascal says

I really enjoyed this book a lot. It pushed me to finish the *Phenomenology* earlier as I would refer to it after reading significant parts of the book. I learned about Kojève via my Lacan readings. I really enjoyed this book a lot, and it is very helpful for my path as a philosopher becoming a counsellor. Teach psychoanalysts how to be. Hegelian psychoanalysts. This is amazing work.

Karl Hallbjörnsson says

This is more like a 2.5 — reasons include Kojève's tendency to overcomplicate Hegel, as well as my disagreement with him on a couple of factors of interpretation. Not a bad work by any means, the first chapters were very good — the later ones felt overly drawn out and a little too exegetical. I'm no expert on Hegel, so I could be wrong, but I'm not so sure that Kojève's teleological „End of History“ interpretation is the correct one. His rationalization, for example his use of the Owl of Minerva quotation, doesn't seem adequate to me. Also I don't think he's right in interpreting Hegel as an atheist. It's more complicated than that. Dates read do not reflect reality — I don't remember when I started reading and did so sporadically.

Jed says

Rarely have I read a book that I thought was so good and so bad all at the same time. There are moments of absolute brilliance here, particularly in his reading of the master/slave dialectic. However, once Kojève gets going about the "Wise Man" and the "End of History" I had the complete opposite reaction. It's as if for every great idea and interpretation of Hegel here there's a bad one waiting to balance it out a few pages later. It's definitely worth reading and is an important text in the philosophy of the 20th century, but it's definitely not all great.

I also want to say that there is a great deal of repetition in this text. It is poorly edited. So much of it boils down to the same three or four stories told over and over again. The last section in particular could have lost 20 pages without missing anything.

David M says

So good I wonder if there's even any need to read Hegel (the answer, most likely, is YES, you fool!). The stuff about the end of history and the master-slave dialectic has really stuck with me.

Tony Poerio says

Read this years ago because Zizek and Deleuze and all the other hip post-everything philosopher types kept referring to "Kojeve's Hegel". Some people will argue that Kojeve is projecting here, combining his own views with Hegel's and creating an entirely new work of philosophy altogether. Not Hegel but "Kojeve's Hegel": interesting, but best taken with a grain of salt if you want to understand what Hegel actually means.

I don't like to think of it that way. Think of Kojeve as Hegel's editor. And think of 'Kojeve's Hegel' as the version of Hegel that you need to understand to really get where Zizek and Deleuze and many other contemporary philosophers are coming from. This is the modern interpretation. Maybe not what Hegel meant at the time, but--because of Kojeve's work--what he means today.

Eduardo Goye says

It makes me really sad this is one of the most influential lectures on the subject, while at the same time being one of the most distorted readings of Hegel. Takes the Master/Slave dialectic and pretends like it's "the key" of the system (spoiler alert: it's not). Constantly claims "Hegel says..." and "Hegel believes..." without ever quoting the author. If you have not read the Phenomenology of Spirit, you just have to believe Kojeve. The problem is that he completely misses the point of the ontological goal of the book, pretends like Hegel thought he was the ultimate self-conscious subject and an apologetic of Napoleon and the Prussian State, and (worst of all) the Hegelian system was tautological. Once you read this mess, you'll see all the myths about Hegel are based on Kojeve's poor reading.

A disaster of a book. One of the worst.

If you want a real perspective on Hegel, read Jean Hyppolite or Stephen Houlgate. They may not be perfect (no one is), but at least they are honest.

This is just awful. If I could rate negative stars, I would.

Niklas says

This was a revelation. Thanks to ooiar for the rec. When I first read Hegel's Phänomenologie, I got nothing. Now, I do get everything. Thanks Mr. Kojève.

Ram says

Jesus H. Deceased Christ. Kojève makes everything far more difficult than I think it has to be. So, while this book was at times revelatory and made me feel like I was this close to "knowing" Hegel's mind, Kojève always then launched into a 10 page (might as well have been 1000 page) discussion of how we can draw "The Idea" "IN Time" or "OUTSIDE of Time" as a circle, or two circles, or a square with a dildo glued on it, or whatever. The whole book was like that. Plus, Kojève doesn't use modern words to talk about things. He uses some other vocabulary, one that looks like normal words but where the words don't mean anything but what he wants them to, when he wants them to. You can go pages and pages without figuring out that he was trying to make a key point. Of course, as the cover explains, Kojève was a philosopher, not an ideologue, so his interpretation is "brilliant" (and Hegel is, what? Shit?). No wonder philosophizing so closely resembles sitting around and doing nothing!

Now, I shall read the actual Phenomenology of Spirit and we'll see if Hegel was indeed so impenetrable that he needed an interpreter to torture undergrads for 6 years explaining a book of only 500 pages.

This book is really better than I make it sound. But goddammit, I had to read the same pages over and over again for no reason except that Kojève wanted to be a dick and confuse me.

Roy Lotz says

Generally speaking, there is a tendency to underestimate the difficulties of satisfaction and to overestimate those of omniscience.

Alexandre Kojève is easily one of the most influential thinkers of the last century. This is peculiar, considering that his reputation rests mainly on his interpretation of Hegel, an interpretation which he developed and propounded in a series of lectures in 1933-39. Many who attended these lectures—Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Lacan, to name just two—went on to be important intellectuals in their own right, reinterpreting Kojève's ideas for their own purposes.

Kojève's thinking extended beyond the lecture hall, shaping his whole intellectual milieu—deeply affecting Sartre, who may never have attended the lectures—and even extended to the United States. This was largely thanks to Leo Strauss, who sent his disciples to study under Kojève. One of these disciples was Allan Bloom—of *The Closing of the American Mind* fame—and, in turn, Bloom taught Francis Fukuyama, who heavily relied on Kojève for his controversial bestseller, *The End of History and the Last Man*. Once again, Kojève was influential.

It is too bad, then, that I found his most famous book to be of little merit. Frankly, I failed to see anything of serious interest in these pages: either as textual interpretation or as philosophy. Admittedly, the former did not surprise me. By common consent Kojève was a heterodox interpreter of Hegel, mixing Hegel's ideas with those of Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger to create something quite different from what Hegel intended (whatever that was). But I did not expect this book to be so devoid of intellectual interest. Indeed, I am somewhat at a loss as to why or how it became so influential.

For one, Kojève's writing style will be irksome to any who prize clarity and concision. He is boorishly

repetitious, persistently vague, and pompously obscure. Every other word—when it isn't an unnecessary foreign expression—is capitalized, italicized, wrapped in scare-quotes, or set aside in parentheses, as if simple words and commas were not enough to convey his subtle message. Meanwhile, his meaning, stripped of its pretentious shell, is either a banal truism, nonsense, or obviously wrong. This, by the way, is so often the case with turgid writers that I have grown to be deeply suspicious of all obscurity. In academic circles, dense prose is easily self-serving.

I cannot make these accusations without some demonstration. Here is Kojève on work: “Work *is* Time, and that is why it necessarily exists *in* time: it requires time.” Or Kojève on being: “Concrete (revealed) real Being is neither (pure) *Identity* (which is Being, *Sein*) nor (pure) *Negativity* (which is Nothingness, *Nichts*) but *Totality* (which is *Becoming*, *Werden*).” Another insight on the nature of existence:

One can say, then, that Being is the *being* of the concept “Being.” And that is why Being which *is* (in the Present) can be “conceived of” or revealed by the Concept. Or, more exactly, Being *is* conceived of at “each instant” of its being. Or else, again: Being is not only Being, but also *Truth*—that is, the adequation of the Concept and Being. This is simple.

Very simple.

As I said above, Kojève's interpretation of Hegel is distinctly implausible. Kojève sees the Master-Slave dialectic as the key to Hegel's whole system, whereas it is only one stage in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, and Hegel does not frequently refer back to it. This focus on the issue of subjection, alienation, recognition, and work allows Kojève to read Hegel as a quasi-Marxist. Kojève also has lots of things to say about space, time, mortality, and freedom, most of which is derived from Heidegger and which are totally alien from Hegel's thought. Kojève's originality is not in any ideas unique to him, but to the conglomeration of these German philosophers that he conveys in these lectures.

I found all this to be academically slipshod. The attempt to make Hegel into a quasi-existentialist, deriving freedom from the cognizance of death, is especially unconvincing: Hegel was anything but an existentialist. Generally speaking there are not nearly enough citations of Hegel, nor is there any discussion whatever of Hegel's background, development, or intellectual influences. Thus as an introduction to Hegel, the text is basically useless.

Even more intellectually irresponsible is his habit of deferring to Hegel's text right when any argument is necessary. Statements like these are common: “Once more, I am not concerned with reproducing this deduction here, which is given in the *entirety* of the first seven chapters of the *Phenomenology*. But I shall say that it is irrefutable.” He does this quite often, merely asserting something and then insisting that, to prove it, one must read and understand the whole *Phenomenology of Spirit*. (This habit of deferring to infallible texts, by the way, is a typical move in religious arguments, and has no place in philosophy.) As a result, this book is one bloated series of unfounded assertions—seldom citing the text or providing anything resembling an argument—which makes it worse than useless.

Now, in case you think I am being overly harsh, let me quote one section where he does seem to be making an argument:

Let us consider a *real* table. This is not a *Table* ‘in general,’ nor just *any* table, but always *this concrete* table right here. Now, when ‘naive’ man or a representative of some science or other speaks of *this* table, he isolates it from the rest of the universe: he speaks of *this* table, without speaking of what is not this table. Now, *this* table does not float in empty space. It is on *this*

floor, in *this* room, in *this* house, in *this* place on Earth, which Earth is at a determined distance from the Sun, which has a determined place within the galaxy, etc., etc. To speak of this table without speaking of the rest, then, is *abstract* from this rest, which in fact is just as real and concrete as this table itself. To speak of *this* table without speaking of the whole of the Universe which implies it, or likewise to speak of this Universe without speaking of *this* table which is implied in it, is therefore to speak of an *abstraction* and not of a *concrete reality*.

This argument is part of Kojève's general thesis that only holistic knowledge (which he calls "circular") is true "Knowledge." Putting aside the dreary, bombastic pointing out of the obvious—made to seem non-obvious with the use of insistent italics—this passage, insofar as it makes any point at all, is obviously incorrect. Kojève is saying that it is impossible to refer to concrete reality without having a complete, total knowledge (knowing everything about the table involves knowing everything about everything). This is false. To show this, as well as to demonstrate that philosophy need not always be written so badly, I will quote Bertrand Russell:

The fact is that, in order to use the word 'John' correctly, I do not need to know *all* about John, but only enough to recognize him. No doubt he has relations, near and remote, with everything in the universe, but he can be spoken of truly without taking them into account, except such as are the direct subject-matter of what is being said. He may be the father of Jemima as well as James, but it is not necessary for me to know this in order to know that he is the father of James.

Now, if this book were truly as devoid of value as I am making it out to be, it would lead to the question of how it became so popular and influential. Well, I can only guess. Perhaps Kojève's dazzling obscurity, along with his sexy combination of the works of Marx and Heidegger—the two most influential thinkers in France at that time—allowed him to touch the Zeitgeist, so to speak. The attempt to reconcile a philosophical understanding of freedom and death (taken from Heidegger) with an understanding of oppression, historical progress, and work (taken from Marx and ultimately Hegel), may have given Kojève's students an exciting impetus in the hectic days after the Second World War, when Europe was busy rebuilding itself. To any Kojève enthusiasts out there, please do let me know what you see in him. I remain blind.

xDEAD ENDx says

If anything, I now feel more confident making jokes about how "I know the Totality."

I was expecting this book to clarify and give summaries of the chapters in the Phenomenology. Instead, it seems to be elaborations on Hegel's thought, which I still found fairly useful. The chapter on the Master-Slave was pretty good, though sort of sketchy due to Kojève's Stalinist (?) perspective and a literal appeal to the killing and death of the masters. This sort of politic also came out again in the final chapter on Hegel's dialectical method (which also gave me insight) with the claim that Man distinguishes himself as Man through Fighting and Work.

Anyhow, despite my disagreements with Kojève's conclusions, this book gave me clarification and clarity on the background and hidden dimensions within the Phenomenology. At times I even had to question if Kojève and I had read the same book, since he does an excellent job parsing Hegel's jargon and explaining the historical situation in which Hegel existed (ie. certain parts being about Napoleon, despite him never

being mentioned by name or action).

Mavaddat says

In the first part, Kojève is concerned with rendering accessible Hegel's master-slave dialectic and giving a mythical account of it as the first meeting of two persons. My interpretation of Kojève's mythologized account was that the encounter is supposed to represent the inevitable power struggle that happens between peoples with competing interests. Kojève spends quite a few pages developing the master-slave dialectic theme and drawing out its consequences. I was hoping Kojève would give us some insight into understanding Hegel's use of language, but such insights were mostly operational (learning through use rather than explicitly examining the words to get at their meanings). Kojève then proceeds to the relation of Hegel's system of absolute knowledge to the systems offered by Parmenides-Spinoza, Aristotle, Plato, and Kant. This part was extremely hand wavy. The characterizations of the various ideas and the reasoning given in support of Hegel is fast and flimsy. It reminded me very much of C.S. Lewis's attempt at philosophy in his "Mere Christianity." I stopped reading at this point not because the text was uninteresting, but because I felt I could use my reading time more effectivity.

Andrew says

read this not the Hegel original. if you like it, try hegel

Dmitry says

"Introduction to the Reading of Hegel" is the most famous text of Alexandre Kojève, which is, from a purely compositional point of view, transcripts and summaries of lectures given during 1933-1939 in Paris: these lectures, by the way, at various times visited people like Raymond Aron and Maurice Merleau-Ponty - not the last persons in the European philosophy. In his lectures, Kojève explains the first and one of the most famous works of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel - the book "Phenomenology of Spirit", published in 1807. His meticulousness is impressive: he is often able to explain the meaning of one or two sentences for half the lecture (he does so, for example, with one Hegelian observation of the Time and Being which consists of one and a half lines: Kojève parses it for three lectures).

Throughout the whole course Kojève focused on the issues arising from Hegel's text - the interpretation of history as the development of man and antropogenic meaning of struggle for recognition, which appears as the prime engine of human history itself. For many modern readers perhaps the most important are the places where Kojève develops (often quite freely interpreting) Hegelian words about History as a process of Geist's self-development - here one can easily find the origins of an idea that thundered throughout the world in the 1990's, the idea of ??the "End of History." Developing Hegelian thought, Kojève says (I'd like to remind: there's 1930's on calendar, the Second World War, the Holocaust and Hiroshima are right at the doors) that history actually nearing to its completion. The victory of basic liberal ideals of the French Revolution (embodied in the battle of Jena in 1806) along with the spread of the democratic form of government (and, more broadly, the idea of ??freedom as a value in itself) means that a Man has reached (not yet finally, but only in principle, in project, which is continue to realize) the form of social organization, which is able to give him a complete and universal recognition.

Another important detail: Kojève believes that the Last Man, which arises (and creating) a Homogeneous

and Universal state, necessarily atheistic, since he finally (after thousands of years of Struggle and Work) understands that history is a process exclusively materialistic, devoid of external Other (anthropomorphic God or Nature) - Hegelian "Weltgeist" is the "Geist" of a human, not divine, being. It's a very radical, I must say, interpretation of Hegelianism, which is usually interpreted as the apotheosis of idealism ("absolute idealism"; the term which Kojève also concerns, saying that its misunderstood, and the system of Hegel actually has little to do with idealism).

I could tell much more about this book. But instead I'll just focus on fact that it's is a key text for understanding not only the philosophy of the twentieth century, but also (and especially) a modern political philosophy. Kojève is amazing. He looks like titan, standing over the great mass of interesting, boring, pretentious authors - titan, who shaped the most important vector of social and political thought in the twentieth century, and still and he helped to implement it.

Alex Obrigewitsch says

Kojève's importance in bringing Hegel, and a particular reading of Hegel, to France cannot be overlooked. It is noticeable in the weighty influence he had on thinkers such as Lacan, Sartre, and Blanchot, to only name a few examples.

Kojève's work is excellent in interpreting and expressing Hegel's often maddening thought. He had a great grasp of Hegel's thought, mixing in a sprinkling of Marx and viewed through a heavily Heideggerian lens (albeit anthropologically rendered).

His major stumbling block is his overly anthropological reading of Hegel. While he may elucidate the dialectic of Hegel wonderfully, his Marxian tendencies influence his understanding. He equates Geist many times with Man. While Man is a manifestation of Geist, Geist does not equal Man.

Man is a working-out of Geist, in and through History, as History. But Man is certainly not equal to Geist. Man is but a moment, a constituent-element, in the dialectical motion of Geist, for through Man Geist attains self-consciousness.

Kojève interprets Heidegger anthropologically as well (as many thinkers of that time were wont to do). But Kojève had a very important part to play in the tradition of philosophy and thought, and this book is well worth the read for those struggling through the apparently labyrinthian thought (or at least writing) of Hegel.
