



Thinking in circles: Kojève and Russian Hegelianism

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Russian-French philosopher Alexandre Kojève's dialogue with proponents of Hegelianism and phenomenology in Soviet Russia of the 1920–30s. Considering works by Dmytro Chyzhevsky, Ivan Ilyin, Gustav Shpet, and Alexandre Koyré, I retrace Hegelian themes in Kojève, focusing on the relation between method and time. I argue that original reflections on method played a key role in both Russian Hegelianism and Kojève's work, from his famous Hegel lectures to the late fragments of a system. As I demonstrate, Kojève's Hegelianism was significantly shaped by his encounter with Ilyin's 1918 commentary on Hegel, a detailed study of the relation between method and the experience of time. However, in Kojève's hands, Ilyin's ideas were transformed, some radicalized, others abandoned. Comparatively reading texts by these thinkers in their respective contexts, I resituate and evaluate claims that Hegel's method was less dialectical than phenomenological. I finally argue that early Soviet Hegelian discourses not only shaped the trajectory of Kojève's Hegelianism but also radically anticipated concepts of time in French post-structuralism.

Keywords Alexandre Kojève · Alexandre Koyré · Dialectic · Dmytro Chyzhevsky · French theory · Gustav Shpet · Ivan Ilyin · Method · Phenomenology · Philosophy of time · Russian Hegelianism

One century ago, in 1922, Vladimir Lenin arranged the deportation of hundreds of Russian philosophers. Leading intellectuals of the time, including Sergei Bulgakov and Ivan Ilyin, boarded “Philosopher Steamers” from Petrograd to Stettin (Chamberlain 2006, p. 230). Russian émigrés settled first in Germany, then Paris, which became the capital of Russia abroad. Two years before the steamers went to sea, the young Alexandre Kojève, originally Kozhevnikov, left Soviet Russia with his friend Georg Witt.¹ Briefly imprisoned in Poland, Kojève escaped to Berlin, where he met

¹ Filoni (2021) is the latest and most complete account of Kojève's life.

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his uncle, the famous painter Wassily Kandinsky. Not too unusual for a young Russian aristocrat of his generation, Kojève took up studies of philosophy and oriental languages in Heidelberg, graduating in 1926 with a thesis on Vladimir Solovyov.² In the 1920s, immersed in Russian and Eastern philosophies, Kojève had “no time” to study with Husserl and did “not even know who Heidegger was” (Kleinberg 2005, p. 62). Kojève’s pivotal encounter with phenomenology came later, mediated through fellow Russian Hegelian philosopher Alexandre Koyré (Koryansky), whom Kojève met in Berlin’s émigré circles. Born in Russia, Koyré emigrated to Germany to study with Husserl before teaching Hegel’s philosophy of religion at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) in Paris (Geroulanos 2010, p. 54). Leaving for Cairo in 1932, Koyré eventually invited the younger Kojève to take over his teaching position.

When Kojève arrived, the French capital was already a center of Russian philosophy, with prominent figures, such as Lev Shestov and Nikolai Berdyaev. While the Russian émigrés gathered at the St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute,³ Kojève joined the EPHE, a radical alternative to the elitist system of French academia. His predecessor Koyré, founder of the journal *Recherches philosophiques*, had formed an international network of young thinkers, including Emmanuel Lévinas, and Gaston Bachelard.⁴ The arrival of East European émigrés had initiated a radical shift in inter-war French thought. Transcultural mediators, such as Koyré, imported an eclectic mix of Russian religious thought, Marxism, German phenomenology, and psychoanalysis, shaping the formation of existentialism and Surrealism (Kleinberg 2005, p. 49). From 1931, Koyré, later replaced by Kojève, held a series of legendary seminars on Hegel, attracting Georges Bataille, Raymond Queneau, and Jacques Lacan, among others.⁵ Though the turbulent French afterlife of Kojève’s Hegel, often reduced to a blend of Heidegger and Marx (Kleinberg 2005, p. 67), is well-documented,⁶ some of its conceptual roots are still in the shadows. Only recently have scholars acknowledged the significance of Russian thought for Kojève.⁷ A closer look at Kojève’s archives at the French National Library in Paris supports the view that Russian philosophy was pivotal to the formation of Kojève’s Hegelianism. The archives contain extensive correspondence with dozens of Russian intellectuals in exile, including Isaiah Berlin, Georges Florovsky, Boris Jakovenko and Fedor Stepun.⁸ As a letter from Florovsky unveils, in 1928 Kojève was invited to join the Russian Philosophical Society of Paris,

²A manuscript of this dissertation is available at Heidelberg University Library (Kojève 1926).

³On the Paris school of Russian religious philosophy, see Arjakovsky (2013), Evtuhov (1997).

⁴For some excellent historical analysis of the arrival of phenomenology in France, see Geroulanos (2010, 2011).

⁵Find a list of attendees in Roth (1988, pp. 225ff).

⁶Baugh (2003), Descombes (1980), Geroulanos (2011), Kleinberg (2005).

⁷Love (2018), Tokarev (2017, 2018), Weslati (2014), Wilson (2019, 2021). Where Love highlights the impact of Solovyov and Dostoevsky, Weslati points to Kojève’s manuscript “Sofia, filo-sofia i fenomenologia,” written in 1940/41 and sent to Stalin as a dialectical introduction to philosophy. Tokarev and Wilson, on the other hand, explore Kojève’s links to Russian émigré circles in Paris, from his “unnoticed” disciples to the Eurasianists. As Wilson shows, in the 1920s, Kojève was in close contact to Karsavin, publishing several articles in his journal *Evrasiia* (Wilson 2021, pp. 28ff.).

⁸See Kojève’s correspondence in the archives of the French National Library in Paris, NAF 28320 “Fonds Alexandre Kojève” Boîte 22.1.

presided by Berdyaev and Shestov, where in 1931 he gave a lecture on the problem of infinity.⁹ Kojève's library being held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) tells a similar story.¹⁰ Though he would not directly refer to these authors later, between 1926 and 1936, he read most works by Koyré, including *Hegel at Jena* (1934), Lev Karsavin's *On personality* (1929) and *A Poem on Death* (1931)—given to him by the respective authors—Gustav Shpet's *Outline of the Development of Russian philosophy* (1922), and numerous introductions into Russian philosophy.¹¹

Considering these traces of a “Russian Kojève,” it is indeed astonishing that one crucial link remains unexplored: Kojève's reception of Russian Hegelianism,¹² a tradition that culminated in the work of his contemporary Ivan Ilyin (1883–1954).¹³ In 1922, Ilyin settled in Berlin, where he taught at the Russian Academic Institute. His reading of Hegel, theological and pantheistic, became popular in Soviet Russia, influencing Alexei Losev, Semen Frank, and Vladimir Lenin¹⁴. In his most famous work, a two-volume commentary on Hegel, published in 1918 as *The Philosophy of Hegel as a Doctrine of the Concreteness of God and Humanity*, Ilyin explored in great detail Hegel's method, arguing that it has to be distinguished from dialectic (Il'in 2010). Rather than a method, for Ilyin, dialectic is the essence of both thinking and concrete reality. Under the influence of Husserl, Ilyin argued that Hegel's method was in fact not dialectical but intuitionist and phenomenological. Through intuition, the philosopher dwells on the contradictory nature of reality. This is where Ilyin's influential notion of the concrete comes into play.¹⁵ If we want to understand Hegel, Ilyin ar-

⁹Ibid., Boîte 9.

¹⁰Kojève's books often include handwritten notes, dedications, and the dates of reading. As such, they are valuable documents in tracing his intellectual trajectory.

¹¹See Kojève's library in the BnF.

¹²On Russian Hegelianism, see Kliger and Bakhurst (2013). Dmitry Tokarev first pointed out the lacuna in Kojève scholarship on his interest in Russian Hegelianism (Tokarev 2017, p. 496).

¹³A valuable analysis on Ilyin's life and work can be found in Grier (2010). In the last decades, Ilyin had a problematic revival in contemporary Russia, as a predecessor of neo-Eurasianist, nationalistic, and other far-right ideologies. In fact, initially a liberal aristocrat, in exile Ilyin embraced fascist ideas, particularly from the 1930s onwards. Throughout his life, like many other White Russians, Ilyin remained a fervent anti-communist and monarchist. However, I agree with Snyder, who argued that it would be misleading to label Ilyin a clear-cut fascist (Snyder 2018). As Marlene Laruelle insists, “Ilyin's ideological legacy in contemporary Russia is more complex than that of ‘fascism’” (Laruelle 2018). Ilyin's early work, especially the commentary on Hegel, had a lasting influence on leading Soviet Marxists, including Lenin. Ilyin's ideas were influential across political divides and, as I argue in this paper, pivotal to understanding the formation of Hegelianism in interwar France. Of course, a critical contextualization of Ilyin's Hegel does not mean to sugarcoat problematic legacies. And yet, it might contribute to a broader picture of both Western and Soviet modern thought and its ambiguous afterlife today.

¹⁴According to Chyzhevsky, Lenin began reading Hegel's works, including the *Logik* and the book on Heraclitus, during World War I; he took notes, made excerpts and researched secondary literature (Chyzhevsky 1934, p. 373). Even during the Revolution, he studied Hegel! In 1921, he read the *Logik* again in Russian translation along with Ilyin's book (ibid., p. 374). After finishing Ilyin's book, he arranged his release from prison—only to expel him from Russia the year after. Lenin's Hegel, for Chyzhevsky, is radically atheist and materialist, with a special interest in concreteness (ibid., p. 375). On Lenin's Hegelianism, see Pavlov (2016).

¹⁵Following Hegel, Ilyin defines the concrete as “unity in multiplicity” (Il'in 2010, p. 20). For a more detailed interpretation of his complex notion in Ilyin's work, see Grier (2010, p. lxvi). For an analysis of the concrete in Kojève, see Jacobs (2022).

gues, we have to first grasp his philosophical “attitude toward the concrete empirical world” (Il’in 2010, p. 17). For Ilyin, Hegel’s method is intricately related to the experience of time. Mediating between infinity and finitude, the concrete captures time itself: it is both the process of thinking and its highest goal.

In this paper, I explore Kojève’s dialogue with Russian Hegelianism through the lens of these two crucial themes: method and time.¹⁶ Recurring leitmotifs in works by Russian Hegelians, the relation between method and time prominently resurfaces in Kojève’s reading of Hegel, from the seminars (1933–39) and his “Note on Hegel and Heidegger” (1936) to his volumes on pagan philosophy (vol. 1, 1968; vol. 2 and 3, posthumously published), the book on Kant (1952; post.) and the late *Concept, Time and Discourse: Introduction to the System of Knowledge* (1956; post.). Though Kojève’s work is still often reduced to his famous reading of the master-slave dialectic, I argue that it is in fact an original conception of time that holds his system together. More specifically, I suggest to read Kojève’s influential interpretation of Hegel in the light of his acquaintance with the works of Russian philosophers Ivan Ilyin, Gustav Shpet, and Alexandre Koyré. However, I argue that Kojève did not merely import his reading of Hegel from his Russian predecessors. In Kojève’s creative reappropriating, reflections on method and time undergo some important transformations. Developing his conception of the end of history, Kojève radicalizes Ilyin and Koyré’s views on method, stating that Hegel was the first philosopher who *voluntarily* abandoned method as such.

Philip T. Grier convincingly argued that Ilyin’s Hegel commentary had an unnoticed yet lasting impact on neo-Hegelians in 1930s France, such as Koyré, Kojève, Wahl, and Hyppolite (Grier 2010, pp. lvii–lxi). In fact, in a 1967 letter to George Kline, Kojève claims he had “read Il’in’s Hegel, but without comprehending much (I was too young then)” (quoted after Grier 2010, p. ix). However, as early as in 1926, Nikolai von Bubnoff wrote a letter to Kojève, asking him to send over Ilyin’s Hegel book.¹⁷ As Grier rightly observes, it was typical for Kojève, as for many contemporaries, to conceal his sources rather than to credit them. The archives clearly document that Kojève was not only aware of the most important Russian Hegelian of his generation but also familiar with Ilyin’s main ideas, not least through his mentor Koyré, who was personally acquainted with Ilyin after both had studied with Husserl in 1911 (Grier 2010, p. lix).¹⁸ Also acquainted with the work of other Russian Hegelians, including Alexei Losev and Gustav Shpet, Koyré is a well-documented link between Kojève and the Russian Hegelian tradition.

Expanding on Russian Hegelianism, Kojève emphasized how crucial temporality was for any understanding of philosophical method. The philosopher, on the other hand, still entwined in the process of history, relies on dialectic; method as such is negated at the end of history. The Wise Man, as Kojève suggests in his writings on Hegel, merely contemplates the unfolding of the Concept, hence turning into a phenomenologist in the truest sense. But what was Kojève’s own method that paved the

¹⁶Thanks to Galin Tihanov, Trevor Wilson, Kyle Moore, and the two anonymous reviewers for their invaluable criticism and feedback at different stages of this paper.

¹⁷Letter from Nikolai von Bubnoff, sent 13 April 1926, NAF 28320 Boîte 22.1.

¹⁸In a letter to Husserl, written in April 1924, Ilyin recalls how Koyré was the only fellow Russian welcoming him in Germany after his arrival.

way for such presumptions? After all, though proclaiming the death of philosophy at the end of history, Kojève himself never abandoned philosophical discourse. If Kojève had a method, how does it differ from the approach introduced by Hegel in the *Phenomenology*? In a letter to Vietnamese Marxist philosopher Trần Đức Thảo, written in 1948, describing the method of his Hegel seminar, Kojève claims he “taught a course in philosophical anthropology using Hegelian texts, but saying what I considered to be the truth, and dropping what seemed to be, in Hegel, an error.” Furthermore, his lectures were supposed to be “a work of propaganda,” an interpretation “rather than a commentary on the *Phenomenology*.” In other words, Kojève “tried to find the buried premises of the Hegelian doctrine, and to construct it by logical deduction from these premises.” (Kojève and Trần Đức Thảo 1990, p. 134.) Later, he would insist on his own radical unoriginality, claiming he had merely transposed Hegel’s text into his own time. Until now, prominent Kojève scholars, such as Boris Groys, have taken this claim literally, stating that Kojève repeated Hegel’s text without adding anything to it (Groys 2012, p. 47). My paper proposes an alternative account of Kojève’s method. Widening the perspective on Kojève’s interlocutors, I retrace how key themes, such as the relation between method and time, the end of history, and ontological dualism, stem from Kojève’s dialogue with the Russian tradition.¹⁹ Finally, my paper suggests to shift perspective on Kojève as a thinker at the crossroads of Russian Hegelianism and phenomenology, helping to import both currents into modern French thought.

Hegel in Russia: Chyzhevsky, Ilyin, Shpet

We did not learn our dialectics from Hegel. In the roar of combat it broke into verse... (Vladimir Mayakovsky, *At the Top of My Voice*, 1930)

One of the missed encounters of twentieth-century intellectual history is between Alexandre Kojève and Ukrainian-born scholar Dmytro Chyzhevsky. In 1933, Chyzhevsky submitted his dissertation *Hegel in Russia*, the same year in which Kojève began his Hegel lectures in Paris. A graduate of St. Vladimir University of Kyiv, Chyzhevsky had emigrated from Soviet Russia to Germany, continuing his studies at the University of Heidelberg, 1921–1922, the same term in which Kojève studied Neo-Kantianism with Rickert and Indology with Walleser (Filoni 2021, pp. 87ff.). When Kojève went to Paris, Chyzhevsky taught at the Ukrainian university in Prague, where he joined Roman Jakobson’s circle. Chyzhevsky’s dissertation *Hegel in Russia* was published in 1934.²⁰ Kojève arguably read *Hegel in Russia* in *Sovremennye*

¹⁹It would be fruitful to dedicate another study to analyzing the concepts that Kojève borrowed from Russian Hegelianism against Hegel’s original texts. However, this task would go beyond the scope of this paper. When exploring Hegelian motifs in Ilyin, Shpet, Koyré, and Kojève, Hegel’s own voice will therefore be less audible.

²⁰The dissertation is one chapter in a volume he edited on Hegel’s reception in Eastern Europe, published by the German University in Prague. All translations from the original German edition (Chyzhevsky 1934) are my own. A Russian book version appeared in 1939, in the journal *Sovremennye zapiski* in Paris (Chyzhevsky 2007, p. 7). As Ermichev elaborates in his introduction, Chyzhevsky can be considered an important predecessor of the Hegelian revival in Soviet philosophy of the 1960–1970s, including Evald Ilyenkov, Merab Mamardashvili, and G. S. Batishchev (Chyzhevsky 2007, p. 14f.). Most likely, his book was also widely read by Russian philosophers in French exile.

zapiski, a leading émigré journal in the French capital. In Kojève's philosophical library, we find a copy of a later work by Chyzhevsky, *Europe and Russia*, co-edited in 1959. Although Chyzhevsky is remembered for his enlightening study of the Slavic Hegel, Kojève's Hegelianism is still almost entirely read in the French context, not least because he was himself largely responsible for the "French Hegel." In fact, both Russian thinkers, occupied with Hegel throughout their work, emerge from the same *Zeitgeist* shaped by revolution and exile. They both deal with the transformations that German idealism underwent in the hands of Russian philosophers, in Kojève's case, his own.

In *Hegel in Russia*, Chyzhevsky reconstructs the nineteenth-century Russian reception of Hegel (Kireevsky, Herzen, Fedorov) and contemporary Hegelian speculations (Lossky, Ilyin, Losev). An important section emphasizes Hegel's influence on Vladimir Solovyov, mediated through his teacher, Ukrainian philosopher P.D. Jurkevych. In the 1920s, Solovyov was enthusiastically studied by young Russian émigré scholars in Germany, with two dissertations defended in Heidelberg, Chyzhevsky's alma mater, one by Fedor Stepun, the other by Kojève. In his dissertation, Kojève aims to deliver the first *Gesamtdarstellung* of Solovyov in the light of German philosophy. Kojève argues that Solovyov was not an original philosopher but a mere acolyte of Hegel and Schelling, an anticipation of later claims of his own unoriginality, concealing himself behind the mask of "repeating" Hegel.

Unlike in France, where Hegel was largely forgotten until the 1930s, Hegelianism was "never dead" in the Russophone world (Chyzhevsky 1934, p. 352). For Chyzhevsky, Ilyin's two-volume commentary is "the best and deepest representation of Hegel in Russian (and one of the best in world-) literature" (ibid., p. 367). Less an interpretation than a creative exploration of Hegel's method, Chyzhevsky argues, Ilyin's book is a practical exercise in Hegelian thinking: "The demand that Ilyin makes of the reawakened Hegelianism is that its *rebirth* should in no way become a mere *repetition* of Hegel. Rather, one should *learn to think independently and objectively* with Hegel!" (ibid., p. 361). For Ilyin, Hegel's dialectical attitude anticipates Husserl's "logical objectivism" (ibid., p. 363). Chyzhevsky continues:

Ilyin, however, refuses to see *dialectic* as the main content of Hegel's philosophy. Above all, Hegelian dialectic is not a method, or better, it is the "method of the object to be recognized itself." Dialectic is "method-life" or "method-realisation." Therefore Hegel's method is better called *not dialectical* but *intuitive*. (ibid., p. 364)

Chyzhevsky goes into the heart of the matter here: the signature of Ilyin's reading is his insistence that Hegel's method is not dialectical but grounded in *intuition*. Rather than in a strictly Hegelian sense, Ilyin follows Husserl in defining intuition as what is immediately given to a subject through experience. The aim of Hegel's intuitionist method is the "concrete-speculative" which is "an in itself *circling* movement of infinity." This infinity is understood as "unconditional concreteness." Ilyin stressed how intricately connected Hegel's method is to the experience of time. Such intuition, as Grier puts it, "could be best comprehended in connection with Husserlian phenomenology (understood in terms of eidetic intuition)" (Grier 2010, p. xxvi). In other words, for Ilyin, Hegel's method was not only non-dialectical but *phenomeno-*

logical in a Husserlian sense.²¹ Though dialectic was of course crucial to Hegel, Ilyin shifts the function it occupies in Hegel's system. Rather than a method, Ilyin claims, Hegel's dialectic describes the nature of both the thinking process and reality. The philosopher observes—in other words, *intuits*—the self-development of the “concrete-universal” concept, “merely *letting* [it] develop itself before him” (quoted after Grier 2010, p. xxxi). This does not mean that philosophizing for Ilyin is passive; by contrast, he considers thinking a *philosophical act*.²² Before exploring Ilyin's understanding of method in more depth, let us briefly turn our attention to another Kyiv-born philosopher who commented on the commensurability of Hegel and Husserl's phenomenological method: Gustav Shpet (1879–1937).

Jump into the water: Shpet on Hegel's unmethod

After studying with Husserl in 1912–1913, Shpet went to Russia, where he spent most of the 1920s popularizing phenomenology.²³ As we have seen above, examining Kojève's library at the BnF, Shpet was popular among Russian exiled intellectuals in France. Especially Shpet's *Outline of the Development of Russian philosophy* (1922) was enthusiastically received, for example, by Koyré (Tihanov 2009, p. 3). During the Great Terror, Shpet was arrested, charged with anti-Soviet activities, and sent into Siberian exile, where he dedicated his final years to a new translation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In October 1937, he was arrested once again with charges of monarchy and executed a month later. Largely forgotten after his death, Shpet's work was the most significant expression of Husserlian phenomenology in Soviet Russia. If we compare Ilyin and Shpet's reflections on method, we can detect some shared premises. However, unlike Ilyin, Shpet was not a Hegelian per se, although both were “well acquainted professionally” (Grier 2010, p. xxxviii). Whereas Ilyin reintegrated Hegel into contemporary phenomenology, Shpet emphasized the hermeneutic aspects of Husserl's phenomenology. Furthermore, Shpet remained loyal to his teacher's method for the rest of his life. Situated at the margins of Russian Hegelianism, Shpet did not abandon Husserl's method in favor of returning to Hegel. Nevertheless, I argue that Shpet makes a significant contribution to our investigation of Russian Hegelian motifs.

Shpet's phenomenological view on method strikingly resonates with later ideas by Koyré and Kojève. As we will see, Shpet's analysis of intuition, restlessness, and the here-and-now most likely left traces in Koyré's essay on Hegel's Jena writings. Shpet's 1914 *Appearance and Sense: Phenomenology as the Fundamental Science and*

²¹It is important to signal that the Husserl at stake for Ilyin is the author of the *Logical Investigations* rather than the late Husserl, after his transcendental turn to idealism (see Zahavi 2003, pp. 43–78). As we will see, like many contemporaries, including Koyré, Ilyin refused to follow Husserl through his turn. For a more detailed analysis of Husserl's students in Russia and their shifting attitudes towards his trajectory, see Haardt (1992), Plotka and Eldridge (2020).

²²It would be an interesting undertaking to read Ilyin's notion of the act in the light of another project, namely Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy of the act (*postupok*), developed at precisely the same time in Vitebsk. Like Ilyin, Bakhtin emphasized the event-ness and performativity of the thought process itself (Bakhtin 1993).

²³On phenomenology in Russia, particularly Shpet's contribution, see Haardt (1992).

its Problems dedicates a whole section to “The Problem of Method” (Shpet 1991).²⁴ Referring to Husserl’s method, Shpet argues here:

Being the “pre-theoretical” science, phenomenology rests not on discourse but, as we saw, on intuition. Consequently, its way of securing for itself the correct path and method must be intellectually seen in intuition itself. And since phenomenology is concerned not with sense intuitions but with ideal intuitions, its method, too, must be *intellectually seen* in the essence of ideal intuition itself. This by itself is perfectly clear. (Shpet 1991, p. 69)

Referring to Hegel’s *Encycloedia* (Hegel 2010a), Shpet claims that Husserl’s method was “the fulfillment proper of Hegel’s demand: Jump into the water!” In other words, phenomenology has to justify and establish its method within the very process of phenomenological work itself. Phenomenology does not require a discursive method but satisfies itself in concrete analysis. Both practical and intuitive, it is “the fundamental *non*-theoretical science” (Shpet 1991, p. 70). But how does this work of intuition look like? Shpet describes “the method of clarifying intuitions themselves” as a process of *translation*. The phenomenologist translates intuitions from obscurity to clarity: what he calls “self-givenness” or “evidentness” (*ibid.*, p. 73). Method for Shpet means to make intuitions self-evident, until the highest degrees of clarity is reached. This translation into clarity “must be and always remains in its essence *concrete* [...]” (*ibid.*, p. 87) concerned with what is immediately present. However, this here-and now (*hic et nunc*) is in itself a problematic object of phenomenological study, for it “escapes once and for all both theoretical as well as descriptive conceptual formulation.” Actuality, or the here-and-now, is *restless*; it cannot be brought to halt by concepts that treat it as “a hardened form or cinematographic picture” (*ibid.*, p. 89). The main goal of phenomenology is hence to develop concepts that capture the “now” without destroying its “timeliness” (*ibid.*, p. 90). Shpet’s text on method, itself written “in remarkable haste” (*ibid.*, p. ix), anticipated some of the problems that Ilyin was to tackle in more depth in his Hegel book, was published four years later.

Concrete dialectic: Ilyin’s philosophy of paradox

In his Hegel commentary, Ilyin delves deeper into the significance of time for Hegel’s method, comparing the ideal of absolute description with a black hole. If we attempt to think the infinite, we get drawn into a “vortex” in which everything “will decay (*vermodert*) before the description can be completed” (Ilyin 2010, p. 25). The world as concrete totality cannot be grasped by concepts, it has to be attained through sensuous, finite intuition. This means, the “now” can only be thought as “today, this moment, eight o’clock in the evening” (*ibid.*, p. 27). For Ilyin, Hegel’s system is held together within “*cognitive experience*” (*ibid.*, p. 46). In the act of thinking, I participate sensually in the object of thought. In the same way, we have to read Hegel: “in order to comprehend Hegel one must attempt to approach his philosophizing *phenomenologically*, i.e., to reveal the internal structure of his thought act.” Understanding Hegel

²⁴ Shpet’s work on the problem of methodology continues into *Hermeneutics and Its Problems*, completed in 1918 and published posthumously 1990–1993 (Shpet 2019).

means “to grasp his *mode of thinking* in order to then reenact this mode with one’s own soul and assimilate it.” Only once we have learned to “see in a new way,” a way paved by Husserl’s phenomenology, can we understand Hegel. In other words, “a renovation of the tool will make the object of study accessible” (ibid., p. 47). But what, if not a method, is the Hegelian dialectic? For Ilyin, dialectic as “inner contradiction” is the intrinsic nature of concepts. Philosophy does not overcome contradictions²⁵ but should be “seeking them and dwelling in them” (ibid., p. 113). Hence, the task of the “true philosopher” is to “cognitively enjoy” paradox, participating in the very same “touch of madness” that Hegel experienced (ibid., p. 114). This paradoxical attitude, for Ilyin, is truly *dialectical*. Hegelian dialectic is not the search for logical synthesis but a dwelling in contradictions:

Thus, according to the method of *his philosophizing*, Hegel must be recognized not as a “dialectician” but as an intuitivist, or, more precisely, as an intuitively thinking clairvoyant. If by “method” is meant the “type and mode” of cognizing subjectively practiced by the philosopher, then one may regard Hegel as “Dialectician” only given a completely superficial, abstractly rationalistic approach. He neither “searches” for contradictions in concepts nor “strives” to reconcile them afterward; he doesn’t think “analytically,” and then “synthetically.” He continuously intuitively in a concentrated way and intensively describes the changes taking place *in the object itself*: he intuitively by means of thought. In this consists his “subjective” method of cognizing. It is *not he* who practices “dialectic” but *the object*. (ibid., p. 115f.)

Probably Ilyin’s most striking argument is this twist of perspective: the philosopher does not practice dialectic but rather the object itself does. Dialectic, as contradiction, thus exists *objectively*; it is not a method, but actuality (*Wirklichkeit*). Ilyin expands here directly on a claim that Hegel made in the Introduction to *The Science of Logic*, where he states that philosophy “cannot borrow its method from a subordinate science, such as mathematics.” Philosophy, as scientific inquiry, starts instead from its object “which is responsible for movement in scientific knowledge, for it is the content’s own reflection that first posits and generates what that content is” (Hegel 2010b, p. 9f.). The self-development of this content is “the absolute method of cognition and at the same time the immanent soul of the content” (ibid., p. 10). In Ilyin’s words, the philosopher lets this self-development happen, merely contemplating its unfolding. Most likely, Ilyin’s view on method was at odds with various contemporaries: first, Neo-Kantians, who were keen to reintegrate Hegelian logic into their scientific frameworks (Rickert); second, Husserlians, who developed increasingly idealistic views on reality (Shpet); third, Soviet Marxists, who considered dialectic an objective law of history rather than an intuitive, cognitive experience (Plekhanov²⁶). Furthermore, Ilyin’s unique, theological views on method have a deeper significance when it comes to his conception of humanity, the central theme in the second volume of his study. Here, the human being itself, possessing “a *dual* nature,” is characterized as dialectical. Whereas the dialectical philosopher dwells in contradictions, man dwells in his

²⁵On different aspects of contradiction, see ibid., pp. 125ff.

²⁶On Plekhanov’s understanding of dialectic, see Pavlov (2016, p. 163).

own finitude, being “a prisoner of earthly temporality” (Ilyin 2011, p. 22). The dualist subject “is limited in space and in time: he is no more than a tiny particle, and outside of him lies the whole of infinite space; his life lasts for a short interval of time which is an instant by comparison with the infinity of time” (ibid., p. 23). Thus dualism and imperfection (*Mangelhaftigkeit*) are intrinsic to man as finite being. Man’s struggle with infinity, for Ilyin, is the great “tragicomedy of the human” (ibid., p. 119). Ilyin concludes that genuine recognition of the subject is only realizable through a fusion with the union of humanity, a divine “growing-together (*Concretion*)” (ibid., p. 124).

Not surprisingly, Ilyin’s commentary²⁷ was among the books Shpet requested for his final project, a translation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, completed under dire circumstances in Siberia (Kline 2009). Working closely with Radlov’s translation (ibid., p. 144), Shpet put his *Unmethode* in action, progressing from obscurity to clarity through translating Hegel’s text. In his analysis of Shpet’s translation, George Kline appreciates how he balances accuracy and attention to Hegel’s irony and wit (ibid., p. 146), an esteem that some readers share when it comes to Kojève’s eclectic “mis-reading” of Hegel.²⁸ The problem of *intuition* (*Anschauung*) remains crucial in Shpet’s translation project. As Kline analyzes, Shpet captures the different connotations of intuition by translating it, respectively, as *sozertsanie*, *vozzrenie* and *intuitsiia* (ibid., p. 153). For the late Shpet, intuition is the unmethod par excellence, capturing all kinds of philosophical operations, from *contemplation* to *point-of-view*. As our brief survey has revealed, some key signatures of Russian Hegelianism, between 1917 and 1937, are the relation between method and time, a striving for concreteness, and the insistence that Hegel’s method was not dialectical but intuitive and phenomenological in a Husserlian sense. For both Ilyin and Shpet, Hegel’s phenomenology unsettled traditional philosophical frameworks and provided an instigation to learn how to think.

Method as time: Koyré and Kojève

In what follows, I retrace how this tradition of Russian Hegelian speculation was prolonged and radicalized in exile, culminating in Koyré and Kojève’s projects. As a document from the archives at the EPHE reveals, Kojève early on felt the urge to explain his own method. In the annual report of the academic year 1934–1935, clearly responding to both Ilyin and Koyré, Kojève describes his approach towards Hegel’s text as phenomenological:

My Monday lecture was conceived as an extension of M. Koyré’s lecture on Hegel’s religious philosophy, given the previous year. M. Koyré analyzed the texts prior to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. I have devoted my lecture to the study of the *Phänomenologie*, following M. Koyré’s method of interpretation and basing myself on the results of his analysis. It was primarily a question of identifying Hegel’s religious ideas. But the method Hegel uses in the

²⁷Grier refers to a recent discovery of an unfinished review of Ilyin’s book that Shpet wrote in 1918. In the draft, Shpet emphasizes Ilyin’s shift from dialectic to intuition when describing Hegel’s method (Grier 2010, p. xliii). Here, Shpet describes intuition not as a method “but precisely *eine Unmethode* as a German would say; only as a joke can one call intuition a method!” (Quoted after Grier, ibid., p. xliii).

²⁸On Shpet and Kojève, see Azarova 2008.

Phänomenologie does not allow the religious parts to be isolated, and it is therefore the whole work that had to be commented on. [...] The *Phänomenologie* turned out to be a philosophical anthropology. More exactly: a systematic and complete description, phenomenological in the modern (Husserlian) sense of the term, of man's existential attitudes is made in view of the ontological analysis of being as such, which is the theme of the *Logik*. (Koyré and Kojevnikoff 1933, p. 54f.; my translation)

Claiming to merely apply Koyré's method, Kojève set out to read Hegel's *Phenomenology* as "the phenomenological description of all the religious attitudes that man can assume while living as a historical being in the space-time world." These various attitudes are already observed by someone "who has fully and perfectly understood himself, that is to say, the absolute philosopher living at the end of history, in short, Hegel, who is and can only be what he is by the fact of having written the *Phenomenology* [...]" (ibid., p. 55). But what was Koyré's method that Kojève claimed to base himself upon?²⁹ The key to that can be found in Koyré's extraordinary essay "Hegel at Jena," published in *Recherches Philosophiques* in 1934.

Koyré's Hegel at Jena

Though the text is lesser known than Kojève's seminars, it contains the seeds of Kojève's most famous ideas: the end of history thesis, the dialectics of the real, the ghostly temporality of desire. Primarily, however, "Hegel at Jena" is a reflection on method, clearly written under the influence of Ilyin and Shpet. Like his fellow Russian Hegelians, Koyré focuses on the relation between method and time. From Ilyin, Koyré takes the idea that Hegel's method was less dialectical than phenomenological, emphasizing the importance of dwelling in contra-diction. In Koyré's hands, however, Ilyin's reflections on method are given a more existentialist flavor. For him, Hegel's *unmethod* offers a unique access to man's experience of time shaped by finitude. In this regard, "the young romantic Hegel" particularly appeals to a Russian exile living in restless times: "He is closer to us; he seeks, he is restless, like us. And we understand him" (Koyré 2018, p. 378). Reading the *Jenenser Logik*, Koyré sets out to grasp Hegel's method:

Indeed, through the texts of the lectures taught by Hegel at Jena, one is in some way admitted into the philosopher's laboratory, one can follow step by step Hegel's efforts, renewed three times, to put order into the universe of his thought, one can attend the elaboration of the Hegelian method, one sees it forming itself not *in abstracto*, but rather *in concreto*, in and through the analysis of concrete issues that he was faced with. On the road which, from the *Systemfragment* of Frankfurt, leads to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, one sees, actually realized, the coming to consciousness ("prise de conscience") that will form the dialectical engine of the *Phenomenology*. (ibid., p. 379)

Those lectures, Koyré continues, "enable us to realize the duality in the steps ('*les démarches*') of Hegelian thought: first, the concrete application of a phenomenological

²⁹On Koyré, see Zambelli (2019).

method of analysis, then sublation, like a useless staging of his analyses which yet underlie the construction” (ibid., p. 379). Following Ilyin, Koyré argues that Hegel’s method “is a phenomenology.” This means, he “only needed to realize what he was actually doing in order to conceive the idea of *Phenomenology of Spirit* which is, at least in its best parts, nothing else than a visionary description of spiritual reality” (ibid., p. 393). It is not deduction but *intuition*, not analysis but *vision* that holds Hegel’s method together. As Shpet put it, however, “only as a joke can one call intuition a method!” (quoted after Grier 2010, p. xliii). In the same vein, Koyré argues “that Hegel did not reveal to us the principles of his method and that, having masterfully practiced the dialectical method, he did not do anything to teach it.” Hegel’s thought has “a rhythm different from ours,” he thinks “in circles” (“*en cercle*”) instead of “in straight lines” (“*en ligne droite*”) (Koyré 2018, p. 377f.). Thinking with Hegel, to echo Shpet, means jumping straight into the water and learning how to think in circles.³⁰

In revolutionary times, Hegel “had understood better than anyone else the significance of the events unfolding in front of him; he certainly understood that he was attending the crumbling of a world” (Koyré 2018, p. 380). Hearing the “gunshots from Napoleon’s cannons at the Battle of Jena” (Kojève 1969, p. 34), Hegel experienced “the atrocious suffering of tearing, isolation, opposition, unresolved contradiction.” Hegel strived for a system that was able to *destroy* these separations (*déchirement*) (Koyré 2018, p. 383). Paradoxically, aiming at reintegration, Hegel’s method was *destructive*, mirroring Napoleon’s wars, which concluded history (ibid., p. 390). In response to Hegel’s early *Theologische Jugendschriften* (Hegel 1988), Koyré states that “[p]hilosophy has to reveal the finitude of all that is finite, to do the work of *critique*, of negative theology, and to reject the truly infinite, the infinite of life outside the circle of thought” (Koyré 2018, p. 382). At Jena, Hegel set himself the task to develop a method that goes beyond Fichte or Schelling’s:

Hegel thinks that one needs to go further, higher. Placing the *no* within the *yes*; making the many be seen within the one itself, making the finite be seen within the infinite itself; in the eternal, time, movement, the *unrest* (“*l’inquiétude*”) that is for him the very essence of the real. One must therefore start all over again. Destroy all the fixed notions of the understanding, reforming concepts. Making a system simultaneously complete and mobile, as complete and mobile as the Absolute that it ought to represent and complete. (ibid., p. 384)

In a Romantic fashion, catalyzing *unrest*, Hegel’s method “is about clearing and discovering—rather than hypothetically placing—in and for consciousness itself, for the moments, steps, spiritual acts in which and through which the concept of time constitutes itself, in and for the spirit” (ibid., p. 390). This process of intuitive discovery is driven by *difference*, not as static opposition but as the *act* of differing, or, in a Derridean sense, deferring.³¹ Any conception of method, for Koyré is tied to a

³⁰In fact, Kojève was to go as far as saying that *circularity* is Hegel’s only original contribution to philosophy (Kojève 1969, p. 93). However, and this paradoxical tension was to be crucial for Kojève, he states that “the non-circularity of Hegel’s system is perfectly obvious” (ibid., p. 98). Thinking in circles, while never reaching absolute circularity, characterizes Hegel’s method for Kojève.

³¹In her translation of the essay, Tazi analyzes how Derrida, in *Margins of Philosophy*, traces the birth of his deconstructive method directly back to reading Koyré’s “Hegel in Jena” (p. 365). Derrida claims there

peculiar conception of time: one that favors unrest, absence, and deferral over continuity. Like Ilyin, Koyré considers dialectic less a method than the self-revelation of time. In short, Hegel's philosophy of time is where his *unmethod* becomes graspable. In Hegel's *Jena Logic*, Koyré argues, time appears as the dialectic between the finite and the infinite, which is driven by *unrest* (*l'inquiétude*). Analyzing the notion of *now*, while extensively translating from Hegel's text, Koyré makes an interesting observation: in the German term "Gegen-wart," the now is already defined as opposition, alterity, or what he later calls *contra-diction* (ibid., p. 387). This paradoxical instant of now sublates (*aufheben*) itself, in such a way that it becomes the future, the "yet-to-come" (ibid., p. 388). Simultaneously, and that becomes absolutely crucial for Kojève, the future also sublates the present. In other words, the Hegelian *now*, in itself empty, only realizes itself as future.

Kojève on concept, wisdom, time

In the seminar of the academic year 1934–1935), titled "The Dialectic of the Real and the Phenomenological Method in Hegel" [La dialectique du réel et la méthode phénoménologique chez Hegel], Kojève reacts to and radicalizes these reflections on method and time. In this text, which already bears the hallmarks of Kojève's own system, Hegel's "dialectical logic" (Kojève 1969, p. 169) is defined as onto-*logy* rather than method; logic in this sense is the revelation of everything that exists. Hegel's Concept (*Begriff*) is "not an 'abstract notion' detached from the real entity to which it is related, but 'conceptually understood reality'" (ibid., p. 170). Hegel's method is nothing but the self-revelation of reality; in other words, it is conceptualized being or realized concept. In this sense, method is only dialectical insofar as reality remains dialectical. If the dialectic of the Real is completed, however, when the End of History is reached, dialectic itself is suspended. It is not the philosopher who uses a dialectical method but History unravels itself dialectically:

If one wants to speak of a "dialectical method" used by History, one must make clear that one is talking about methods of war and work. This real, or better, active, historical dialectic is what is reflected in the history of philosophy. And if Hegelian Science is dialectical or synthetical, it is only because it describes that *real* dialectic in its totality, as well as the series of consecutive philosophies which corresponds to that dialectical *reality*. (ibid., p. 185)

At the End of History, reality is fully conceptualized, and the satisfied, Wise Man who has Absolute Knowledge emerges. Following Ilyin, Kojève insists that "the attitude of the philosopher or the 'scientist' (= the Wise Man) with respect to Being and to the Real is one of purely passive *contemplation*." The philosopher gives himself to the world. This contemplation, Kojève argues, is not dialectical, but phenomenological: the philosopher observes—*intuits*, in Ilyin's words—the world without taking

that his notion of *différance* directly responds to Koyré's *différente Beziehung*, a concept that emphasizes "that different has an active sense that portrays the present as divided against itself, and thus a present constantly deferred" (ibid.) Like the peculiar temporality that Koyré discovered in the early Hegel, Derrida's *différance* oscillates between present and absence, it is "always shattered, always à-venir, 'yet-to-come,' and thus never present."

action to transform it. Without any mentioning of Ilyin or even Koyré, Kojève then develops a view on method strikingly close to Russian Hegelianism. Following Ilyin, Kojève considers Hegel's method "not at all 'dialectical': it is purely contemplative and descriptive, or better, *phenomenological* in Husserl's sense of the term" (ibid., p. 171). To borrow Ilyin's words, the Wise Man merely intuits the concept, "*letting [it] develop itself before him*" (Ilyin 2010, xxxi). And yet, while heavily drawing on the Russian tradition, Kojève's view on post-historical reality is already distinctly his own here. Kojève radicalizes previous claims, stating that Hegel's method was not only not dialectical but that he was in fact the first to voluntarily *abandon* dialectic, "with full knowledge of what he was doing" (Kojève 1969, p. 179). Where Ilyin and Shpet speak of *intuition*, Kojève introduces the notion of *Discourse*. The aim of Hegel's method is to create a coherent, circular Discourse that reveals reality "as it is and *exists* in the totality of its objective-Reality (*Wirklichkeit*)" (ibid., p. 171). Concrete reality "is both Real revealed by a discourse, and Discourse revealing a real" (ibid., p. 178). What Ilyin called *concept* resurfaces in Kojève's text as the *reality* that reveals itself in front of the philosopher who "*forgets himself*" (ibid., p. 37), absorbed by the dualist object of his contemplation. After history, post-Hegelian "dialectical discourse" takes on a pedagogical function, while maintaining its paradoxical essence: stating the end of revolutionary struggle and war, this discourse still aims to instigate revolutionary unrest. The philosopher after Hegel, the Wise Man, dwells in this paradox, as first set out by Ilyin.

Kojève's Wise Man intuits the dialectic of the Real because "having nothing more to do, he has no *method* of its own" (ibid., p. 186). Without any method remaining—or what Shpet called the *Unmethode*—post-revolutionary philosophy turns into "pedagogical dialectic or dialectical pedagogy" (ibid., p. 187). "When all is said and done," Kojève concludes, "the 'method' of the Hegelian Scientist consist in having no method or way of thinking peculiar to his Science" (ibid., p. 176). Only Hegel, who witnessed Napoleon ending history, was able to close philosophical discourse once and for all.³² History, as human time, constituted man, while Hegelian dialectic brings humanity to its end. As Koyré already emphasized, "[p]hilosophy of history—and through it Hegelian philosophy, the 'system'—, would only be possible if history ended, if there were no longer any yet-to-come (future), only if time could stop." As Koyré suggests, Hegel was able to complete his system, because he accomplished the history of philosophical Discourse; and since he did not have a method, this final synthesis was unpredictable: "one cannot construct it; one can only analyze it" (Koyré 2018, p. 398f.). If time and method are interrelated, the suspension of time also negates method as such. At the End of History, Kojève elaborates, dialectic becomes the signature of reality rather than a *style of thinking*, as Ilyin would have framed it. In that sense, Hegel abolished the dialectical method because "the real Dialectic of Fighting and of Work" (Kojève 1969, p. 191) has expired.

Another crucial concern for Russian Hegelians, the compatibility of Hegel and Husserl's phenomenology, takes center stage in Kojève's numerous book reviews,

³²On Kojève's view on the end of history, see the two famous footnotes he later appended to his Hegel lectures (ibid., pp. 158ff.).

written in the 1930s initially under Koyré's name, then as A. Kojevnikoff.³³ Kojève's reviews, published in German, Russian, and French journals, were dedicated to phenomenological works by Karl Jaspers, Alfred Delp, Vasily Seseman, and others. They offer a rare glimpse into the formation of Kojève's understanding of method. Though Kojève rarely refers to Husserl or Heidegger in his late work, here he participates in the same discourses as Ilyin and Shpet. Like Ilyin, Kojève insisted that Husserl's phenomenology had lost its value as a descriptive method after Husserl's transcendental turn (Kojève 1933–1934). For Kojève, that meant a return to Hegel as the original representative of phenomenology (in a similar way, Lacan would later “return to Freud”).³⁴ In a particularly interesting review, known as the *Note on Hegel and Heidegger*, Kojève argues that Hegel's method was built on “his phenomenological description of the finite, annihilating, negating man who *is* time” (Kojève 2020, p. 211). Again, this conception of time can already be found in Koyré's essay on the early Hegel. Referring to Hegel's notes of the 1803–1804 lectures, Koyré highlights a line from the margins: “Hegelian spirit is time and Hegelian time is spirit (*Geist ist Zeit*)” (Koyré 2018, p. 393). The identification of time and *concept*, replacing method, becomes the main concern in Kojève's eighth lecture of the academic year 1938–1939, where he mentions Koyré's article as “the source and basis of my interpretation of the *Phenomenology*” (Kojève 1969, p. 134). However, radicalizing both Ilyin and Koyré's analysis, Kojève claims here that in fact Hegel's whole project can be summed up by the identification of concept and time (ibid., p. 132). Only through this identification can we understand History as “the history of human *Discourse* which reveals Being” (ibid., p. 133). The claim that time and concept fall into one is further explored in Kojève's late work *Concept, Time and Discourse: Introduction to the System of Knowledge* (1956; published posthumously). Here, “introducing” and “updating” the Hegelian “point of view” becomes the method of philosophical inquiry (Kojève 2019, p. 26). This “method of introduction seems to be imposed all the more since the *Phenomenology* has been recently translated, commented on, and in deed interpreted (that is, precisely, ‘updated’) in France” (ibid., p. 41). Paradoxically, although Kojève insisted on the End of History, philosophy had moved forward since his Hegel seminar. In France of the 1950s, after the Hegelian discourse was updated, the method of *introduction* had replaced interpretation.

Conclusion: Philosophy as project

What remains from these reflections on method? As Shpet wrote, the here-and-now is *restless* and cannot be brought to halt by any method. This ghostly absence of a *now*, traversing Russian Hegelian discourse, was to be taken up by French postmodernists half a century later, from Derrida to Baudrillard.³⁵ Arguably under the influence of Shpet, Koyré wonderfully describes the fragility of presence:

³³These reviews, appearing in German, Russian and French journals, were mostly dedicated to phenomenology, discussing works by Karl Jaspers, Alfred Delp, Vasily Seseman, and others.

³⁴In his Hegel lectures, Kojève makes the claim that Husserl was only opposing his own method against Hegel's, because he was not familiar with it (Kojève 1969, p. 195).

³⁵This strange temporality also shapes Kojève's philosophy of Desire which gravitates towards absence, emptiness, and lack. The structure of Desire in Kojève mirrors the ghostly reality of Hegelian time, always

The “now” is essentially unstable, ungraspable, and perishable. This “now” is never here. It transforms itself immediately into something else. It denies itself by itself and sublates itself by itself. [...] It is this very yet-to-come (“*avenir*”) which, first of all, presents itself to us as yet to come (“*à-venir*”), which rejects towards the “is no longer” what was for us “now,” in order for it, in its turn, through a new yet-to-come, to be rejected towards the “is no longer,” and transform itself into the “former-now.” (Koyré 2018, p. 391f.)

In this sense, time comes from the future which is “in some way, anterior to the past” (ibid., p. 392). This primacy of the future over the past is condensed in Koyré’s notion of the *project*, inspired by German Romanticism. After philosophy has abandoned its method, failing to bring restless time to a halt, the project becomes the final horizon of philosophical speculation. We “project ourselves in the yet-to-come, by negating our present and by making it a past.” The dialectic of time is our very own experience of time when we, “in our memory, take back and revivify this dead and accomplished past” (ibid., p. 397). Existing at the thresholds of finitude, man lives through “this continuous transformation of the yet-to-come in the now, and who ceases to be [as such] the day he no longer has a yet-to-come (or a future), when nothing is any longer to come (*à venir*), when everything is already *avenu* (already void; ‘has already come’), when everything is already ‘accomplished’” (ibid., p. 392). Rather than the now projecting itself in the future, it is the future that projects itself into the present and thereby negates it. Through this act of negation, the future realizes itself as present, in an eternally deferred “as-if” mode (Kojève 1973, p. 88). The *project*, understood as an As-if of Action, becomes a key motif in Kojève’s late book project on Kant, written in the 1950s. Here, once again drawing on Koyré, Kojève defines the project as “an awareness of the *Future* in view of its active or acting insertion in the Present”³⁶ (ibid., p. 173). After the end of philosophy, the project is the final horizon of any action, defined from the future:

A man wants to live *as if* it were *true* that he can fly in the air [that there is no King in an absolute monarchy]. [...] If he works in such a way as to realize his Project, he is a great Technician [a great Revolutionary]. And what is true for one man is true for the whole of humanity, i.e., for that famous “great individual who is always learning.” (ibid., p. 100f.)

This revolutionary individual has “made substantial contributions to the realization of this project, i.e., to the transformation of this erroneous As-if into truth properly so-called” (ibid., p. 101). After the end of method, truth itself remains only as project, circling in a never-ending play of discursive differences. As we have seen, one path towards postmodernism stemmed from the rich tradition of Russian Hegelianism, revived in French exile by Koyré and Kojève. Time and method, notions appropriated from Russian predecessors, such as Ilyin and Shpet, played a pivotal role in the formation of Hegelianism in France and contemporary continental theory.

yet-to-come and simultaneously already accomplished: “Desire determined by the *Future* appears, in the *Present*, as a reality (that is, as satisfied Desire) only on the condition that it has negated a real—that is, a Past” (Kojève 1969, p. 135f.).

³⁶This and all following quotes are taken from Kyle Moore’s excellent unpublished English translation of Kojève’s book on Kant.

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