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# Work, recognition and subjectivization: some remarks about the modernity of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel

*Richard Sobel*

**Abstract:** From the analytical point of view of Hegel's philosophical anthropology, in Kojève's interpretation, work is an existential structure through which the dual process of subjectification and socialization unfolds. For Hegel, however, this process is not taken for granted: its possibility is understood in terms of the culmination of man's conquest of humanity, taking as a point of departure the relation of mastery to servitude and the undertaking to transform this relation precisely from within the perspective of servitude. The goal of this article is to reconstruct the conceptual framework of this philosophical moment, to our mind an indispensable precondition for the apprehension of our modern societies' functioning at the most fundamental level, to the extent that they consider themselves to be 'work based societies.'

**Keywords:** Hegel, Kojève, work, servant, master, anthropology

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## **Introduction: The philosophical anthropology of Hegel at the heart of the modern experience of work**

In his inaugural class at the Collège de France, and in the midst of a period in social science clearly dominated by the structuralist paradigm, Michel Foucault reminds us of Hegel's still considerable place in western thought:

Our entire epoch, whether in logic or epistemology, whether through Marx or Nietzsche, is trying to escape from Hegel... Yet to make a real escape from Hegel presupposes an exact appreciation of what it costs to detach ourselves from him. It presupposes a knowledge of how close Hegel has come to us, perhaps insidiously. It presupposes a knowledge of what is still Hegelian in that which allows us to oppose Hegel, and an ability to gauge how much our resources against him are perhaps still a ruse which he is using against us, and at the end of which he is waiting for us, immobile and elsewhere. (Foucault 1971, pp. 74-75, our translation)

In this article, we would like to illustrate the profundity of this judgment when considering the role of work with respect to the human condition in general, and to the condition of modern human beings in particular. Our initial hypothesis is that the French philosopher Alexandre Kojève best understood this dimension of Hegel's work, making it the cornerstone of his entire interpretation (Kojève 1947). [1]

It is not here a question of proposing a systematic evaluation and an exhaustive examination of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel. Instead, we intend to approach it from a precise angle, the epistemological problem of the status of this interpretation as an interpretation. If it is only an interpretation firmly rooted in the heart of what it is interpreting, seeking to extend it by clarifying it, how exactly does it contribute to the greater or improved comprehension of our experience of work? If it goes beyond what it is interpreting, how and to what degree does it modify this understanding?

We will attempt to resolve this question in the conclusion. But first it is important to specify the manner in which we will explain Kojève's reading of Hegel. [2] In our view, Kojève only envisaged Hegel's philosophy from the perspective of general anthropology, that is— to use phenomenological vocabulary— from the viewpoint of the analysis of basic existential structures fundamental to the human condition. From this

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perspective, Hegel can easily communicate with the social sciences of work (economics, sociology, social psychology, labour law, etc...), which were flourishing when Kojève was developing his interpretation of Hegel. Yet this point of view neglects the logical, ontological and metaphysical developments also present in Hegel's work and which constitute the core of other major contemporary interpretations of this work.

The anthropological reading of Hegel is essentially a retrospective construction whose principle advocates are Marx, followed by Kojève. In *The 1844 Manuscripts*, Marx situates the 'greatness of the *Phenomenology*' in the fashion in which Hegel '[...] grasps the essence of labour, and conceives of objective man, true man because real man, as the result of his own labour' (p. 202). Thus, in the famous figures of master and servant, he locates the codetermination of the generic essence of human work, on one hand, and the historical process of the humanization of nature, on the other. Taking this logic further, Kojève (1947) radicalizes the anthropological interpretation of Hegel by developing a theory of historical man understood essentially as a negating subject, [3] exercising his negativity conjointly through the existential forms of struggle and work. For Kojève reading Hegel, it is

(the) transformation of nature in view of a non-material idea, work in the most fundamental sense of the term, work in which a non-natural world is created, one which is technical, humanised, adapted to the human Desire of a being which has demonstrated and realized its superiority over Nature in risking his life for the non-biological goal of Recognition. (Kojève 1947, p. 147).

It is on the basis of this anthropological perspective that we would like to highlight the salient features of Hegel's philosophy of work without, however, focusing exclusively on the *Phenomenology of Spirit's* 'Domination and Servitude,' as is basically the case in Kojève's text. For us, it is a matter of showing the scope of Kojève's interpretation, and not of indicating its limitations. Inquiries into the dimension of work are also to be found in the earlier texts of the Jena period (the *System of Ethical Life* and *Philosophy of Spirit*) and, of course, also in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* and in the *Principles of the Philosophy of Right*. We aim to unite this somewhat disparate corpus in pursuing the objective link which it suggests between the activity of work and the problem of inter-subjective recognition. In effect, Hegel brings to conceptual clarity the two-sided character of the universal dimension of work in modern society, in which each individual gains

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consciousness of himself, to the extent that he achieves recognition as an integral member of a human community. To use more sociological terminology, we could say that the Hegelian notion of work finds its most essential role in both the constitution of individual identities and the nature of the social link between human communities.

Our contribution intends to take account of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel in as much as it is essentially a philosophy of labour. The question of the relevance of this philosophy for our modern era is obviously important, but it cannot be examined here. Let us simply remember that in drawing upon and extending Kojève's framework, and in considering the social philosophy of Hegel, the social theoretician Axel Honneth (1995) brings out this aspect in exemplary fashion. The classical political philosophy which preceded Hegel was exclusively based on the anthropology of the self-interested individual. As a result, it was incapable of considering the human community except in the abstract and instrumental mode of associated individuals. From this viewpoint, the political contract (with the state as the instrument ensuring its permanence) becomes the sole means of putting an end to the incessant war of all against all. On the contrary, as Axel emphasises, a reconciled society should essentially be conceived as a community through which the ethical integration of free citizens is realized, one in which a dynamic unity of universal and individual liberty prevails. Against all instrumentalist reductionism, public life cannot be considered as the result of the mutual restriction of the spaces of private spheres of liberty, but rather the other way round, namely as the opportunity for the fulfilment of every single individual's freedom. [4] Yet while Honneth may have underlined the centrality of recognition, his understanding of it, expressed in the most operatory terms of modern social psychology, does not seem to have sufficiently insisted on the singular place of work at the heart of the idea of recognition for Hegel. The stakes involved in rectifying this oversight are high: to render explicit this aspect of Hegel's philosophy is also, in our view, to arrive at the heart of the modern experience of work, at a time, indeed, in which there are those who speak of the 'end' or 'crisis' of work. [5]

To be clear, the objective of this study is not a historical analysis of the socio-political dimension of our modern experience of work; instead, it is to outline the conditions of the possibility of such an experience, via the interpretation of Hegel by Kojève. Formulated in contemporary terminology, the main idea is the following. From the analytical point of view of this philosophical anthropology, work is an existential

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structure through which the two-sided process of subjectification and socialization unfolds. However, this process is not taken for granted: its possibility is understood in terms of the culmination of the conquest of the humanity of man, taking as its point of departure the relation of mastery to servitude and the undertaking to transform this relation precisely from within the perspective of servitude. We aim to reconstruct the conceptual framework of this philosophical moment, which we consider an indispensable precondition for the apperception of the functioning of our modern societies at their most fundamental level, to the extent that they consider themselves to be 'work based societies.'

## Struggle and work as competing existential attitudes

Let us begin by observing that the question of work in Hegel is subject to diverse treatment. The challenge is to establish coherence between the exploration of the master-slave dialectic (*Phenomenology*) and the elaboration of the system of needs in civil society (*Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*). How can we make the transition from servitude to an idle master, on behalf of the servant who masters nature, to civil society where the needs of all are satisfied via the work of each individual? We are aware of the response developed in the *Principles of the Philosophy of Right*: the system of needs in civil society constitutes the middle term between the first phase, the struggle to death for recognition, and the third phase in which the state is conceived as the place of this reciprocal recognition. [6] We see the passage from the first phase to the second phase as essential to an understanding of Hegel's philosophy of work, in which work is conceived fundamentally in terms of the process of universal education. This process is in no way natural and continuous. In effect, it is marked by an inaugural rupture, one which sets us on the path towards the construction of an authentically human order. This rupture is, as we see it, accomplished by the *Phenomenology's* dialectic of master and slave.

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### *Struggle for recognition*

The analysis of human activity, [7] as presented in the *Principles*, is concerned with the development of the free will recognized within the framework of the state. The analysis of Chapter IV of the *Phenomenology*, however, preceding as it were the emergence of states, depicts the original figure of such activity and the elementary tensions which at first animate it. In 349 of the *Principles*, Hegel situates the struggle for recognition before the beginning of real history—'before' understood here in a logical sense, as a condition of possibility. For Hegel, there is an 'initial action' without which the subsequent development of human activity could not take place. This is the movement of the absolute abstraction of self-consciousness, in which all immediate being, existing in a confused state with the still simple consciousness of object, is extirpated from the self. This takes place so that the self may become no more than the pure negativity of a consciousness equal to itself. Without entering into the long evolution of the subject in the history of western philosophy, it would be useful, nevertheless, to clarify that which Hegel opposes. To put it briefly, until Hegel, classical rationalism had held to a passive conception of consciousness, according to which the latter was bound to certain laws governing its emergence and determining the conditions of the possibility of its functioning. [8] For Hegel, what his predecessors had not understood is that this consciousness, via the process of self-reflection, emancipates itself absolutely from its object by detaching itself from the very conditions of its own exercise. To be clear, Hegel does not contend that we can entirely escape the consciousness of the object in general. The latter, after all, is bound to the universal relations of the world of phenomena. Yet this is what is specifically untrue of self-consciousness, for which 'work' consists precisely in extracting itself from this world and discovering within itself the capacity to deny everything. There is nothing which escapes its relativizing gesture, neither the things of the world, nor others, nor indeed itself. The ability of consciousness to reflect upon itself and thereby to gain independence with regard to things and other consciousnesses threatening to objectify it represents its most fundamental attribute. With Hegel, man discovers himself essentially as a being in possession of initiative, an agent, and not simply a passive recorder or accountant of the laws of nature (including those especially of 'human nature') within which he would find the model for his own behaviour.



It is important to recognize the extent to which the reflection of consciousness upon itself takes place in the constitutive presence of the other as an essential stage in the process of the construction of self as pure subjectivity. Indeed, this movement of absolute abstraction involves a struggle, in the course of which consciousness extracts itself from all manner of being given as a thing amongst other things. Consciousness must show itself in each situation as being free from any determinate 'being-there,' or indeed, to be more precise, capable of detaching itself from it at any given moment, capable indeed of detaching itself from the life which holds it to the world. The goal for consciousness is to make known how absolutely other than all object-hood it is: in brief, it is to become objectively subjective through a radical negation, one which is incessantly repeated, of all determination. In reflecting upon itself, it realizes that it aims towards a unique mode of being, unprecedented within the world of the mere 'being-there' of simple things. It aims, that is, towards subjective freedom, the mode of being which requires the recognition of the other as guarantee of its own permanence. [9] Only a freedom can recognize a freedom, which is to say, allow it to emerge as a freedom through this recognition.

This project is rendered inherently problematic by the fact that consciousness of self has an absolute need of the other as the means of attaining itself; and yet the other is precisely that which it cannot master. We hereby arrive at a crossroads. One possibility is that consciousness takes on the role of becoming the master of the other in order to make it into 'its thing.' Accordingly, it will freely run the risk of death, since it aims to take hold of that which the other will risk his own life to protect, namely his subjective liberty. It may succeed, becoming master and living from its domination of the world of the other. Alternatively, it may fail, which is to say abdicate (become a slave), not to say die [10] or, indeed, it may choose from the start not to risk dying and, thus, consign itself to servitude in recognizing the freedom of the other, the master, without reciprocity.

What is a master? From the point of view of Hegel's philosophical anthropology, the response is simple. The master is the one who succeeds in forcing upon the other the recognition of himself as possessing an inherent validity, independent of all worldly determination. Once he has succeeded in this endeavor, the elementary activity and initiation of the combat for recognition takes on two distinct aspects. On one hand, the master's activity becomes pure command, the immediate suppression of the thing and

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its enjoyment. On the other hand, the slave's activity becomes obedience and work (strictly speaking) for the master. The victor in this struggle for recognition, the master, is, henceforth, the one who is capable of mediating all, the world of things as well as individual servants, from the sole perspective of his own desire. Henceforth, all is reduced to the status of an instrument for the expression of his own inherent meaning, of which he has just gained possession/the constitution of which he has just gained possession: all, that is to say, with the exception of his own being for-itself. Let us be clear on the nature of the master's perception: refusing to mediate his own being for-itself, the master is limited to immediate enjoyment. Consequently, he is cut off from the preparation and implementation of the means of this enjoyment. It is via this fundamental shift that work will progressively appear as an alternative, slower and more patient path towards subjective self-construction. At stake is not only the emergence of a form of objectifying subjectivity as an alternative to struggle, but above all the emergence of an inter-subjective bond at the heart of the human community now pacified. What the servant discovers is that the struggle for recognition is ultimately not a viable existential attitude.

### *Servile labour or the discovery of the universal*

The activity of the slave for the master does not exhaust its meaning in the mere production of things (for the master) as distinct from the operation which first brought them into being. [11]

Admittedly the activity of the Hegelian servant has the appearance of lacking intrinsic value. Its goal is outside of itself: the transformation of exteriority for the enjoyment of another who has nothing to do other than to negate without further process. The slave is the one whose own desire has been suppressed by the necessity with which he is confronted of exclusively satisfying the master's desire. This structures the world of the servant: the totality of the servant's existence, all of his particular talents, only acquire value from the point of view of the one who is served. For Hegel, servile labour is the activity which permits the master to 'be done with the thing,' which is to say to take enjoyment of it through direct negation. As the self-consciousness which the slave carries to the master, recognition translates into the activity which bestows upon the thing-like character of the transformed object the form of the master's desire.

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Ultimately, the latter confirms for himself each time via consumption the meaning he had originally sought in risking death: which is to say, existence takes on value for him in terms of pure negation, to the exclusion of all else. Outside of the original struggle and its ever-recurring simulacra, the master represents no more than the singular desire which repeats itself brutally and incessantly without progress. In this sense, the master projects upon humanity an unstable existential attitude which leads ultimately to a collective impasse. 'The master struggles as a man (for recognition), yet consumes as an animal (without working). This is the essence of his inhumanity. He cannot go beyond this stage because he is idle. He can die as a man, but he can only live as an animal.' (Kojève 1947, p. 55)

For the servant, the foreignness of himself to himself, this consumption of his work and as it were of himself, is to say the very least of an ambivalent character. In the most immediate sense, it amounts to everyday suffering. However, to be glimpsed within the latter, this usage of self for other is also an opportunity. Via the logic of his condition, the slave assumes a distance with regards to the order of the immediacy of desire, whereas the master remains in this order. What this means is that in being perpetually brought back to his obligation to act for the other, in being constantly confronted with the demand to better understand the other's expectations, the slave succeeds in perfecting himself in the study of the difference between what the master wants (desire) and what the servant himself does (work). As such, the servant develops his own work of negativity, which engenders from within itself its own virtues and talents.

This discovery of work by the servant is well known, yet how should we interpret it? Do we leave the relation of mastery to servitude to the merely continuous process of development of the servant's technical competence? The Hegelian issue is more complex than that of a simple progressivist-technicist conception of work, because the consciousness of self which the servant attains is ultimately merely that of an efficient executor of a heteronymous end. If the success of his technique permits the servant to take account of his power over things, to realize, thus, a certain self-consciousness, the principle of his action and, therefore, the orientation of the latter remains no less determined by the desire of the master and his satisfaction. In playing 'devil's advocate,' assuming, thus, indeed a somewhat Sadean perspective, one could also say that the master, by virtue of the work of the slave, develops the possibilities for

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enjoyment all the more and progressively heightens his awareness of the nature of his desire; the servant, on the other hand, in his condition of servitude, loses the sense of what it is to desire all the more: the ultimate end of the formation of the object, enjoyment, recedes all the more from the slave's viewpoint. Yet given this, why does the slave, finally conscious of his competence and of his power, not leave the service of the master in order to work for his own enjoyment? Why, that is, does the slave not finish by becoming a master, installing himself in power? To answer this question, we would need to measure the degree of competence on the basis of which an end to servitude becomes possible. Yet even after coming to an appreciation of this degree, would we have really thereby authentically exited from the relation of domination to servitude? Would it be a desire disciplined through service that the servant would be led to satisfy? Or would the servant merely appropriate the content of that which contributes to the master's enjoyment, an enjoyment with which the slave ultimately identifies, having as a merely industrious technician not been able to develop and express his own possibilities for enjoyment?

## Work and liberation

In pursuing the relation between desire and work further, it is certainly the servant's point of view which we will have to adopt. To this end, we must leave behind us the problematization of desire inherited from the master, desire in the singular, in order to appreciate that what ultimately emerges from the servant's activity, beyond simple desire, is essentially the universal will. Above all, what Hegel highlights in the activity initially understood as service is the obedience to another will, the exercise in discipline as an experience which allows the slave, and only the slave, to disassociate the universal will from singular desire.

### *Work and objectivity*

Insofar as the fulfilment of another's desire, the obedience to discipline, educates and, thus, transforms the essence of activity by disassociating it from its immediate sensitive motivations, it renders possible and viable the process of humanization through education into the universal. This pivotal move remains somewhat underdeveloped in

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the *Phenomenology*, as well as in the *Encyclopaedia* and *Principles*. It is in the earlier texts from the Jena period (1803-1805), that Hegel gives it fuller attention in linking universality and objectivity within the framework of the notion of work, articulated here via a reflection on the evolution of political economy. It is this link which we must grasp if we are to perceive the foundation of the Hegelian conception of work rendered accessible by the adoption of the point of view of servitude. [12]

From the Jena period onward, Hegel interprets work as that which allows consciousness to take on an objective character, a process which culminates in the product. Via the product, the reality of the individual is entrusted to the power of objectivity, the product constituting his very being, projected henceforth as exterior to self. This exterior being is only what the individual has made of it; projecting himself in this fashion in terms of what he can perceive and show, he reveals his independence in relation to all givenness, which is to say he reveals himself as an independent being. Being for Hegel always produces itself within the sphere of the visible. The individual being is always that which is there at hand, that which proposes itself, 'produces itself,' under the light of objectivity. [13]

If objectivity perceives itself first of all in the product, it is all the more through the instrument, what Hegel calls the 'middle term,' that it truly binds itself to universality. The instrument appears as the very existence of consciousness, its real being, durable and effective, especially in opposition to the real and objective but still ideal being of the word in language. [14] 'The instrument confers upon work the permanence of being there at hand by situating it within the context of objective universality. Moreover, it is for this reason that Hegel says paradoxically that the instrument, for all that it is a mere means, has more value than an end: it constitutes not only the object of the activity but its objectification. It constitutes the activity itself as object, which is to say as a means of entry for each individual into the effective condition of objectivity.

The connection of work to objectivity in view of the universal is further reflected according to Hegel, in the necessity for work to be carried out according to a rule or method. An individual activity is only work insofar as it adopts a way of acting which consists of a succession of definite processes, one which is there for all to see, which is the same for all and to which we must all conform if we are to do anything. It represents a process which anyone can perceive and demonstrate. This universal

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method constitutes the essence of work as objective essence. [15] Admittedly, this rule gives itself to the individual who submits himself to it as to something external, as to something which subsists on its own account, as Hegel would say 'as inorganic nature.' This external being is precisely what the individual must learn, assimilate and become, that with which his activity must merge in order for it to become more effective and, as such, be recognized. There is in work an exceeding of the horizon of the individual who gives to his activity, and thus to his very being, the form and reality of the universal.

This objectivity comes into effect when work is not intrinsically oriented towards satisfaction (even if, de facto, this remains a possibility), which is to say the satisfaction of the individual, but in the first place to the needs of everyone — universal work in view of universal need. This work is not in essence what it is for the individual, but from the outset what it is potentially for everyone: it goes beyond the particularity of the product of the individual as well as the limitations of his method; placed within its most authentic horizon, it embodies a reality of universal vocation. What opens itself here is the way towards a reciprocal recognition of subjectivities, or more precisely a reciprocal objectification of subjectivities. [16]

### *The ambiguous conversion of the master to the universality of work*

Through the diverse connections between work and objectivity, the universal dimension which governs the emergence of the activity of work reveals itself. Therefore, it offers itself as a specific form of the constitution of subjectivity via objectification and, as such, as an alternative to struggle. It is precisely this dimension which the experience of the servant constitutes, insofar as he educates himself into the universal and constructs, thus, a humanity pacified by work. What then are we to make of the master? Is it a question simply of converting the latter, concerning whom we know only that he embodies an existential impasse, to the universality of work?

The universality of needs, referred to above, does not refer necessarily to the historical situation of the development of the social division of labour as we encounter it in the outlining of the system of needs in the *Principles*. This aspect is already present in the relation of mastery to servitude and finds its most natural expression in terms of

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philosophical anthropology. Through work, the servant not only perceives the life of the master; he also perceives his own life which he must conserve. In effect, we have here the beginnings of a community of needs: in what is produced and in the way in which it is produced a certain de facto compromise emerges from the outset between that which is desired by the master and that which is necessary for the servant's conservation. This initial community of needs leads, through the application of the means of satisfaction, to the drawing up of general solutions binding for both master and servant, solutions which are stripped of both the arbitrariness of the servant's initial desire (that which precedes servitude), and of the natural character of the master's will (during service). What is vital to understand is that the servant, when he is working for the master, works at the behest of another; and, in a certain way, one could say he sets an example. The emphasis here is placed not on the negation by the servant of his own desire, but on expanding the horizons of this desire. Going beyond the simple realization of the master, the slave's activity accordingly represents the drawing up of solutions to vital problems, both universal (de jure), and collective (de facto) in character. In this embryonic sense, this subjection of the servant's egotistical drive marks the beginning of the true freedom of man. We have here the rudimentary beginnings of a process of education into the universal since it is through observing the conduct of the servant that the master converts himself to the universal, not thereby under the constraint of a servant aiming to bend the master's will to his own ends. Nevertheless, it remains the case that the continuous transition between a state of nature and civil society remains difficult to conceptualize from within the perspective of Hegel's philosophy. On this point, Kojève provides no additional clarifications. Especially opaque is the transition from the moment of domination and servitude, where it is essentially the desire of the master which is satisfied by the slave, even if by his work the servant conserves his life, to the moment of civil society and the reciprocal satisfaction of needs within the framework of the mutual recognition of property owning workers.

Indeed, the servant's point of view may allow the emergence of a social solution to the problem of recognition, or in other words a mode of subjectification other than that provided by struggle. However, it is still true that the conversion to reciprocal recognition of all society via participation in collective work constitutes a radical rupture. The process of humanization which emerges through it must always be reinitialized; in reality, it can never be taken for granted. We shall conclude our

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enquiry into the philosophical import of the Hegelian concept of work by insisting on this point.

## Conclusion

The servant distinguishes himself from the master through his work and what he discovers in it, bringing into being a new form of subjective freedom, or to be more precise a new way of relating to this freedom. The freedom which he realizes or, more precisely, the freedom which the servants realize together, [17] will no longer be recognized as subsisting in-itself as a title that we can attribute to the one or withdraw from the other, but as exercising itself collectively in and upon the world. In brief, it will be recognized as a process of liberation. The problem of the original relation to the other is resolved via a displacement, which is to say the collective appropriation of the world, creating the foundation upon which our condition and habitat rest, and constituting the arena within which our humanity is expressed. Henceforth, each one is to recognize himself and, by this very process, all others, as participants in this process of appropriation and expression. Man is never purely vital (in terms of a natural being), nor completely independent of life as the master believes who nevertheless ultimately allows himself to be reduced to it. What the servant discovers is that man transcends his given existence in and through life itself. Kojève places a particular emphasis on this point in his exposition of what he calls the 'dialectic of master and slave.'

The master can never free himself from the world in which he lives, and if this world perishes, he will perish with it. Only the slave can transform the given world (under the yoke of the master) and not perish. Only the slave can transform the world which forms him and keeps him in servitude, creating a world formed by him in which he will be free. The slave succeeds in so doing only through the labour carried out under duress in service to the master. Of course, this work on its own will not liberate him. Yet, by transforming the world through this work, the slave transforms himself and creates, thus, a new set of objective conditions which allows him to recommence the liberating struggle for recognition which he had at the start refused through fear of death. (Kojève 1947, p. 34, our translation).



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To conclude this process, we are sufficiently equipped to support our position on the initial problem, the status of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel. Can he be satisfied with simply repeating Hegel's remarks— even if dramatically reformulating them in a flamboyant fashion? Definitely not. A repetition that would only allow one voice to be heard is clearly not viable. Kojève's voice, blending with that of Hegel, sometimes makes it better heard, and sometimes imbues it with his own distinctive sound. Overall, it is our conviction that any great philosophical interpretation is never simply a repetition, but always a debate in which we hear two voices, that is, precisely both a duo and a duel. Indeed, 'what Hegel wanted to say' only appears to he who himself has something to say, as is the case for Alexandre Kojève, whose philosophical work is itself very important, and distinct from that of Hegel (Aufret 1992; Pirotte 2005; and Filoni 2010).

To settle the problem of the status of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, it is vital that we not lose our footing on this slippery slope; it is precisely because it is not innocent that his reading is profoundly [18] enlightening! In returning to some considerations of social theory, we may finally dare to reformulate the core of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel in the following fashion. The master is only a necessary moment in the realization of the project of freedom via the trajectory of work, liberation henceforth understood as the progressive, collective, autonomous and viable construction of an objectively human world. In his seminal work on the division of labour, Durkheim places the latter beyond mere functionality, at the very heart of our moral life. He does this insofar as the division of labour leads to the emergence of a comprehensive system of rights and obligations which brings men together in peaceful and durable fashion. The Hegelian anthropology of work seizes and renders explicit the ethical essence of this process of integration which Durkheim hints at in sociological terms but fails to develop to a point of conceptual clarity.

While certainly not immune to criticism, [19] we have no reason to believe that such an ethical project today constitutes any less the privileged horizon within which the goal of humanity is to be realized. Hegel, as reinterpreted by Kojève, established for future generations the definitive framework within which the exigencies of this project can be expressed. It is our responsibility together to re-invent for it historical and socio-political modalities adapted to our era.

## Endnotes

[1] Indeed, few commentators present Kojève's interpretation of Hegel as stemming essentially from an approach grounded in the philosophy of work. What is advanced is basically the philosophy of history. Kojève is presented as the contemporary thinker—in the continuation of Hegel— of the 'end of history.' Please see Fukuyama (1992).

[2] To remove any ambiguity, let us indicate that this is an article on Kojève interpreting Hegel as a labour philosopher, and not an article on Hegel and the concept of work and, of course, even less an article on the philosophy of Hegel in general. This stance deliberately leads us to make two choices in the management of our argumentation: (1) Not to draw upon any critical apparatus directly concerning Hegel's work, which we use here only from Kojève's perspective; in his intellectual biography of Kojève, Dominique Aufret (1992) shows that Kojève read Hegel directly in German, with no critical filter; and (2) In the body of our article, to only quote Kojève's text, offering here an English translation of the extracts we use. While Kojève's interpretation of Hegel has given rise to some research (particularly in the English language (Butler 1987 or Roth 1988)), to our knowledge, no study has been devoted to Kojève's interpretation as basically a philosophy of labour, which we believe could place him in the great tradition of philosophers of labour, from Locke to André Gorz, by way of Marx or Simone Weil. The dominant vision is to make of Kojève a neo-Hegelian philosopher of history, similar to Fukuyama (1992).

[3] With Kojève, this notion arises less from a faithful reading of the Great Logic of Hegel than from the Heideggerian notions of finitude and being-towards-death. 'The key to deciphering the logic of Kojève,' as Pierre Macherey (1991) puts it, 'is appreciating the extent to which he succeeded in selling under the name of Hegel the child which Marx could have given to Heidegger.'

[4] *Ibid.*, p.13

[5] It is, in our opinion, high time that we fundamentally rethink the place of Hegel in these debates, if only in order to avoid following in Hegel's footsteps without being aware of it, as is often the case, for example, in certain exercises in 'sociologising.' At the very least, we should accord him greater importance than that accorded by Dominique Méda (1995) in his work, in response to Jeremy Rifkin (1993).

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[6] On this point, please see the renowned commentary of Eric Weil (1950; and 1956).

[7] We shall allow a certain opacity to remain at this stage, in expectation of the outlining below of the characteristic features of work according to the Hegelian model.

[8] On this point, please see the first chapters of the *Phenomenology*, I Sense Certainty II Perception, III Force and Understanding.

[9] In order to dispel any possible ambiguity concerning the archetype of 'the dialectic of master and slave' so often presented in overly schematic form, let us note that Hegel does not speak so much of master and slave as of domination and servitude, and above all of the dependence and independence of self-consciousness. The struggle in question here does not necessarily imply several individuals; it may indeed involve a single individual in a struggle with his own duality or, as Hegel puts it, with the doubling of his own consciousness in its reflection upon itself. This other who in recognizing me guarantees my own subjective existence may certainly be exterior to me; yet he may also constitute an aspect of my interiority. In psychoanalytical terms, we would speak today of the Father, the Law or Society. Under the influence of Hegel via Kojève, and following the Lacanian theory of the subject, please see Elisabeth Roudinesco (1993).

[10] This would also be to miss his goal and, as such, the paradoxical necessity emerges that, in order for recognition to take place, the struggle should not be pursued until its end, the death of the other, but should rather remain poised in the tension of this threat.

[11] This is true insofar as Hegel subverts, through his notion of work, which is to say via the activity of the servant, the Aristotelian opposition between action and production: 'since everyone who makes makes for an end, and that which is made is not an end in the unqualified sense (but only an end in a particular relation, and the end of a particular operation)-only that which is done is that; for good action is an end, and desire aims at this.' (Aristotle 1962).

[12] The Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations became known to Hegel upon its translation into German at the end of the eighteenth century. Within this text, Adam Smith determines the true essence of production and of the New World which it has brought into being, namely that of work. Yet the conceptual framework of the nascent political economy is not here subject to radical interrogation, in the sense

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of an interrogation on the very being of work as it emerges within capitalist societies in universal form.

[13] For more development on this point, please see Michel Henry (1990), in particular, pp. 863-906.

[14] Let us remind ourselves once more that Hegel is not directly concerned with the concept of work, but with tracing the life of consciousness through an inquiry into its conditions of possibility. Language is the first of these conditions. Immediate consciousness is represented in the first place by sensitive consciousness. Yet the sensitive dimension is marked by an inescapable evanescence from which consciousness escapes only to the extent that it speaks. Language puts the word in the place of the evanescent sensation, the former serving to stabilize the existence of the latter. Yet even if empirical intuition filtered through the word acquires thereby the transparency of the universality which extracts it from its original obscurity, it leads ultimately only to a form of doubling up which in essence leaves it unchanged. It is as such that self-perception through work represents progress. These initial remarks on consciousness will be later developed in the first chapters of the *Phenomenology*, although its implications for the concept of work will receive more summary treatment due to the priority given to the outlining of the position of servitude.

[15] It is at this point that the definitive rupture takes place between the objective philosophy of work, as explored in the philosophical anthropology of Hegel, and the subjective philosophy of work outlined by Michel Henry in his interpretation of Marx.

[16] We will not further develop this point, which originates from within the philosophy of right and, as such, formalizes that which is acquired via the philosophy of work. To do this, we would need to integrate within the notion of work, thus understood, its natural prolongation, which is to say possession. Work can be seen as the taking hold of nature through which the process of the objectification of subjectivity unfolds. Hegel conceives work as a concrete development of the essence of the object (whether constructed or directly drawn from being-there), distinct from the individual and separable from him, and this essence signifies the presence of the infinite will in-itself and for-itself of each individual. Therefore, the recognition by another of an individual as possessing free will is recognition of his possession. The political form which follows from this universalization is in some sense to ratify this process of generalized recognition of all individuals as property owners. We have no

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problem here appreciating the difficulties involved in imagining the concrete forms of this recognition in a society driven by a capitalist economy; in such a society work is marked by the societal extension of the salaried relation as a vehicle for the economic domination of capital which validates itself precisely through the exploitation of work (Castel 2002).

[17] This idea receives treatment, heavily under the influence of Kojève, at the hands of Eric Weil in *Philosophie politique* (Vrin), in particular the second part, 'la société,' pp. 62-128.

[18] In the sense that it offers no partial clarification as a particular commentator (historian, sociologist, economist, epistemologist, or political theoretician) might do, but confronts that which constitutes the heart of this philosophy, what it identifies—rightly or wrongly, that is another question— as its roots and asks that it be perceived and discussed at this radical level (from *radix* or root in Latin), in other words according to the question of labour.

[19] We will limit ourselves to citing the 'conservative' critique of technology by Heidegger which sees in this perversion of work the accomplishment of the obscuring of the being of beings corresponding to our contemporary form of the forgetfulness of being and, therefore, of inauthenticity.

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