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## **The Notion of Authority (A Brief Presentation) by Alexandre Kojève (review)**

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*The Notion of Authority (A Brief Presentation)*. By Alexandre Kojève. Edited by François Terré. Translated by Hager Weslati. London: Verso, 2014. Pp. xxxiv + 107. Cloth \$24.95. ISBN 978-1781680957.

In the 1930s, Alexandre Koyré gave a regular seminar on G.W.F. Hegel at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris. Koyré was born in Russia but left as an adolescent to study with Edmund Husserl in Germany. After a few years he left in turn for Paris. In 1936, Alexandre Kojève—younger than Koyré by a decade but following a similar trajectory from Russia through German universities to Paris—took the place of his older colleague at the head of the seminar, which became a paragraph-by-paragraph reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). This seminar became legendary and remains the thing for which Kojève is best known today. Rather than enter the university, Kojève spent the postwar years working in the French ministry of foreign economic relations. He was among the technocrats responsible for setting the course of European economic integration. There is a great deal more to Kojève's body of philosophical work than the famous seminar, a few polemical or provocative essays—such as the famous exchange with Leo Strauss (reprinted in recent Chicago editions of Strauss's *On Tyranny*)—and whatever meaning one might assign to his role in building the European Union. In recent decades, Kojève's voluminous manuscripts and papers, held at the Bibliotheque nationale in Paris, have become available to researchers. Hager Weslati, translator of the book under review here, is among a new generation of scholars busily exploiting this material.

Kojève wrote *The Notion of Authority* in the spring of 1942 in Marseilles and sent it to acquaintances in the Vichy government from whom he received an appreciative note to confirm receipt. It was never intended for publication. The previous year, Kojève had delivered a large manuscript to the Soviet vice-consul in Paris to be forwarded on to Stalin. He later published a book making recommendations for French foreign policy in the Cold War world and has recently been accused of having spied for the Soviet Union. This is, if nothing else, engaged philosophy.

For Kojève, Authority (which, like other concepts internal to his system, he capitalizes) is the free and conscious assent of one person to the command of another. A gramophone cannot possess authority, nor can a subject under hypnosis be said to respond to it—both examples are Kojève's. Authority requires that consciousness and freedom of will be present but, as it were, muted. There are, Kojève tells us, four pure types of authority. Kojève pursues "analysis" of them on what he calls the phenomenological, metaphysical, and ontological levels; he then presents "deductions" on political, ethical, and psychological applications. The four varieties of authority are associated with ideal social roles as well as previous philosophies of politics. They are also temporally oriented (28–29). The Father represents the sort of authority that rests on the past and was imagined by the scholastic tradition. The Master was analyzed

by Hegel and is associated with risk of death in the present. The Leader formulates projects for the future and is best understood through Aristotle. The Judge, finally, stands for Platonic justice and takes the perspective of eternity. Martin Heidegger's name does not appear in Kojève's text but is doubtless in the background. Authority as it exists in the world is always a combination of types. Kojève suggests, for instance, that from the perspective of stability "F-LM-J" is the most desirable: political society based on the authority of the Father, with a governing structure of Leader-Master that makes it mostly forward-looking, checked by the Judge, which is to say the perspective of eternity (87–91). The authority most likely to predominate today, however, is that of the Leader, especially the revolutionary leader—Stalin (49).

Readers who arrive at this text through Verso's catalogue will find a challenging opponent for anything conventionally thought of as left theorization. The book, like much political philosophy of the interwar, treats democracy as hardly worth thinking about. One could argue that, despite its apparent conservatism, there is an underlying revolutionary message to observations such as: "the destruction of the Authority of the Father is . . . fateful [*funeste*] to political Authority in general" (70). Discussions of Jacques Rousseau's notion of the general will, the division of powers, the problem of tradition, and the impossibility of the political trial will all be stimulating for any political theorist. Interpreting the book's two appendixes—one on the Authority of the Marshal, Philippe Pétain, and the other examining the content, or lack thereof, of the *Révolution nationale* led by Pétain in Vichy France—will be decisive in any overall evaluation. Particularly in regards to the analysis of the Marshal's Authority, Kojève sounds less like a political theorist—probing, one might think, behind the obvious—than like an advertising man evaluating propaganda on the surface of perception and reaction.

The publisher suggests that Kojève's account of Authority is as significant as the writings of Max Weber or Hannah Arendt on the same subject. A more useful comparison might be made to Carl Schmitt, with whom Kojève corresponded in the 1950s (*Schmittiana* VI, 1998). Schmitt's critique of liberal democracy has become central for some on the left, and one can imagine Kojève's analysis of political authority—including its critique of majority-rule government—as a similar, double-edged weapon. Some passages do have immediate contemporary resonance (76). In any case, *The Notion of Authority* will surely be worth reading for anyone engaged in conceptual investigation of this topic, but also for those working in German, French, or indeed European philosophy, concerned with conceptual responses to the political turmoil of the twentieth century.

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