



The paradoxical anchoring of Kojève's philosophizing in the tradition of Russian religious philosophy

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Abstract

The subject of this paper is Alexandre Kojève's relationship to Russian Religious Philosophy, which is characterized by a paradoxical contrast between Kojève's openly critical judgment of it, on the one hand, and the hidden, implicit influence of this philosophical tradition on his own atheistic philosophizing on the other. The hidden influence of Russian Religious Philosophy, Kojève's engagement with the philosophical ideas of Vladimir Solovyov and Fyodor Dostoevsky, will be shown by two case studies. The first case is about Kojève's "reshaping" and reevaluation of Solovyov's principle of evil. The second case is about Kojève's defense of Dostoevsky's Man-God ideologues against their creator by critically rethinking Man-Godhood. The connection between these two cases is the question, if Kojève, while opposing Solovyov's difference of Man-God and God-Man with something third, has actually moved beyond the Man-God ideology, or did he develop his own Man-God ideology. The essay concludes, with the assertion that Kojève remains with a revised Man-Godhood. This defense-revision is an important philosophical contribution to the polemics with Russian Religious Philosophy, but it is, at the same time, intimately connected with Kojève's ideological agenda.

Keywords Man-God · God-Man · Russian religious philosophy · Atheism

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Alexandre Kojève's relationship to Russian Religious Philosophy is characterized by a paradoxical contrast between Kojève's openly critical judgment of this philosophy, on the one hand, and the hidden, implicit influence of this philosophical tradition on his own philosophizing on the other. The roots of Russian Religious Philosophy, which is neither a philosophy of religion in the usual sense, nor a purely academic philosophical trend, go far back into Russian intellectual history. The works of

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Vladimir Solovyov and Fyodor Dostoevsky (who is perceived in Russian discourses not only as a novelist, but also as a philosopher), which build on this tradition, are considered the point of reference for a renaissance of this philosophy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This philosophical renaissance represents an attempt to place post-idealist,¹ post-classical philosophizing on a religious foundation, and thus to offer an alternative to atheism—the worldview of the progressive Russian intelligentsia at the time. Solovyov’s and Dostoevsky’s ideas were further developed in various directions by religious philosophers, including Sergei N. Bulgakov. (For more details about this see: Zen’kovskii 1991.)² Kojève’s examination of these ideas, which is the subject of this essay, differs from the adaptations by religious philosophers from the outset by its critical approach.

In his judgment, Kojève kept his distance from this religious philosophical tradition, even expressing himself somewhat condescendingly; for example, in a comment regarding Vladimir Solovyov, whom, according to Kojève, one could by no means call a great philosopher (cf. Koschewnikoff 1930, p. 1). In Kojève’s philosophy, however, Solovyovian themes—such as the much-discussed, famous *End of History*—can be found, as well as a philosophical style that could be described as entering the space of Dostoevsky’s ideal-typical late novel.

How can this paradox be explained? Most likely, by realizing that Kojève was involved in a hidden dispute with Russian Religious Philosophy, even after his turn towards Hegel. In his German dissertation,³ he had already critically examined Solovyov’s work. Later, when he began to give his lectures on Hegel’s *Phenomenology* in Paris, his dispute with religious philosophy takes place on a *side stage*, not necessarily hidden, but *poorly lit*; just so that one notices it if one is interested in it but overlooks it—seemingly without loss—if one is not. In fact, however, this half-hidden dispute, which continues, on a philosophical terrain, a dispute among the Russian intelligentsia—between religious worldview and atheism—had a great impact on the formation of Kojève’s own philosophy. This impact deserves closer examination, to which this essay would like to contribute.

What Kojève’s engagement on a side stage actually means for this philosophizing will be shown by two case studies. The first case is about Kojève’s reshaping and reevaluation of Solovyov’s principle of evil. The second case is about Kojève’s defense of Dostoevsky’s Man-God ideologues against their creator by (partially) identifying with them, but not parroting or adopting their philosophical discourse, but critically rethinking it.

¹Idealism here means the German idealism of the nineteenth century. The reference point for Solovyov’s philosophical development was the philosophy of the late Schelling.

²Zenkovsky on Dostoevsky in the context of the history of Russian thought: Zen’kovskii 1991, vol. 1, part 2, 220–244; on Solovyov: *ibid.* vol. 2, part 1, 7–71; on the Metaphysics of All-unity (various philosophers in the tradition of Solovyov): *ibid.* vol. 2, part 2, 144–226.

³Alexander Koschewnikoff, *Die Religiöse Philosophie Wladimir Solowjews*. Dissertation an der Universität Heidelberg. Berlin: 1926 [Maschinenschrift].

First case study: the principle of evil in Vladimir Solovyov and Alexandre Kojève: a cultural translation

As is well known, Kojève held the “Short Story of the Anti-Christ” (which is a part of Solovyov’s work *War, Progress, and the End of History: Three Conversations, Including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ* (cf. Solowjow 1961), first published in the year of Vladimir Solovyov’s death (1900), in particularly high esteem. His final judgment on this was: if Solovyov had been able to continue along the path he had taken here, then perhaps the real essence of the historical would have been revealed to him, which, in Kojève’s opinion, Solovyov had missed in his work until then.⁴ In fact, in this late work, Solovyov makes a radical turn in his religious philosophy of history. In the *Lectures on God-Manhood*, he had still regarded history as an immanent human-divine process that strives towards the transcendent God-Man process and merges seamlessly into the latter. In a word, history ended here with the victory of the good. In the *Short Story*, on the other hand, it ends with the triumph of the Anti-Christ, that is, with the victory of evil; and only a transcendent intervention finally leads to redemption.

How then is Kojève’s postulate to be understood, that the *victory of evil* is closer to the true essence of history than Solovyov’s original philosophy of history? If Kojève considered Solovyov’s final path of paying greater attention to the principle of evil to be fruitful, might not Kojève himself have followed this path? And what would Kojève’s “sympathy for the (d)evil” then mean and have to do with his own philosophy?

Kojève’s praise for Solovyov’s late work was anything but casual or accidental. It is precisely the motif of the reign of evil, which Kojève translated⁵ in a rather idiosyncratic way from Solovyov’s religious philosophy of history into his own work, that forms the central nerve of his atheistic theory of history.

By translating metaphysical evil into the dialectical principle of negation, the religious-moral value judgment about history is transformed into a methodological principle of historical observation. This fundamentally changes the character of the discourse of the philosophy of history. It no longer has religious and moral-philosophical connotations. Since both the expectation of salvation and that of disaster are erased from it, it appears as the product of a radical secularization that frees the philosophy of history from its last religious remnants. At the same time, however, this discourse ceases to be a philosophical one, without becoming a social-scientific one. The aim of the following considerations is to define the peculiar character of this discourse in more detail.

The starting point of these reflections on Kojève’s translation is the particular character of evil in Solovyov’s anti-utopian *Short Story of the Anti-Christ*. The personification of evil in this story is the President of the United States of Europe, a confederation of more or less democratic states (cf. Solowjow 1961, p. 207), who is at the same time the new Roman Emperor, a kind of global ruler in the Solovyov-drawn world of the twenty first century. He owed his election as president to the notoriety he gained by proposing to the public a solution of problems, still unsolved in the story’s

⁴See: Koschwenikoff 1930, S. 19–20.

⁵Translated in a metaphorical sense. With translation here no translation proper is meant.

world of material and scientific progress. After he proclaimed eternal peace to all peoples and successfully conquered hunger, the emperor turns to the religious question. He is particularly interested in Christianity, which has dwindled in quantity but is growing in quality. In all three churches, there are almost only sincere believers, no longer nominal Christians. The emperor suspects that they could become dangerous for him—apostolic texts proclaiming the coming of the Anti-Christ are read carefully and commented on by them—and therefore wants to clarify the matter as quickly as possible. He convenes an ecumenical council under his chairmanship, where he addresses the Christians of all denominations in a long speech to ask them what the most important thing for them about Christianity is. As among them is probably no unity on this issue, he would give to each denomination what is most dear to it. The only thing he expects in return is that they accept him as their only protector and benefactor. To the Catholics, for whom spiritual authority is most dear, he promises the re-establishment of the papacy in Rome; to the Orthodox, for whom the sacred tradition is most important, he promises the establishment of a Christian archaeological museum in Constantinople; and finally, to the Protestants, for whom personal conviction and free biblical research are most important, he promises the establishment of an International Institute of Free Biblical Research. The majority of the representatives of the respective denominations welcome the proposals and go along with them, only a small part of the representatives of each denomination hold back and rally around a respective spiritual leader of their denomination. To this remaining group of upright Christians, the emperor once again asks the question of what they consider to be the most important thing about Christianity. He receives the answer that this is Christ; and is challenged to confess Christ. Thereupon the emperor feels an inhuman rage rising within him and strikes dead by magic power two of the spiritual leaders.

The last Christians gather around the third, surviving leader. He leads them into the desert to await the arrival of the true Christ. The reader is shown then an apocalyptic scenery, including Armageddon, until finally Christ appears and, together with the righteous—the Christians and Jews persecuted by the Anti-Christ—begins the 1000-year reign.

The content of this narrative, it concludes, is not the end of the world, but only the end of our historical process, which consists in the appearance, the glorification and the collapse of the Anti-Christ (cf. *ibid.*, 250).

Solovyov's Anti-Christ does not appear at all as a direct incarnation of evil, but first as a good man, a benefactor of humanity. He creates world peace, defeats hunger and poverty. He is an animal rights activist and vegetarian. Expressed in the language of contemporary political programs, one could say that he pursues a green and a social democratic or socialist agenda. Thus, *the lady* (one of the characters in the *Three conversation*, the frame story of the *Short story*) says in the subsequent conversation about the story that she does not understand what is wrong with this Anti-Christ— isn't he good in principle? That's just it, the narrator replies, that *in principle* he is not. The proverb "All that glitters is not gold" would apply to him. Thus, the good that the Anti-Christ brings into the world is stigmatized as a false or counterfeit good; and this false good is evil. The Anti-Christ is the false, counterfeit Christ, a perverse imitatio Christi, whose aim is not to emulate and resemble Christ, but to put himself in his place, in the place of the God-Man. He is the embodiment of blasphemous

hubris, which Dostoevsky called “Man-God” (the inversion of the God-Man), and for which Solovyov uses the concepts *Übermensch*⁶ and “Anti-Christ.”

According to a religious world view, this train of thought seems immediately plausible. But does it also open up to us if we look at it from a philosophical perspective?

The key moment for such a consideration is the Anti-Christ's assumption that he can satisfy not only all material but also the remaining unconquerable spiritual interests of the last true believers—a minority within the narrative's mostly atheistic post-modern world. It bothers the Anti-Christ that a small minority remains, whom he cannot reach and who escapes the total control he exercises as world emperor. He thinks he can not only give the true believers of all religions what they most long for, but also be the only one who knows what they desire. The true Christians, at the climax of the narrative, counter that for them the most important thing about Christianity is not what the Anti-Christ intends to give them but Christ himself, a retort that sends the Anti-Christ into indescribable rage and leads to the unveiling of his true, evil face, thereby destroying the last faithful followers of Christ.

The Antichrist had thus assumed that certain cultural *institutions*—the papacy, for him de facto no more than an episcopal seat, a research center and a museum—would satisfy the spiritual aspirations of these last, hitherto still unsatisfied people. So, he denied or did not understand that there are spiritual interests that go beyond material and even institutionalized spiritual culture, that there is something in every single human being that is ultimately greater and more comprehensive than all the achievements of human beings.

It is thus a matter of what Hegel calls the difference of objective and absolute spirit; of the *objectified productions* of the human spirit (mind)—cultural institutions—in contrast to this *mind (spirit) itself*, which reaches beyond them and is therefore absolute. The traditional name for this greater and more encompassing spirit is “soul.” Without going into the complicated and entangled history of the philosophical concepts of “soul” and “spirit” here, we can say that for Hegel this greater one is the human spirit (mind) itself. The Anti-Christ is preparing to castrate the human soul or spirit by deceiving and blinding it with surrogates and buying it with cheap gifts, that is, chaining it to the status quo of human civilization and imprisoning it in the golden cage of an all-round carefree culture, in which we easily recognize our present consumer culture. Let there be no misunderstanding: The point of Solovyov's story is by no means a superficial critique of consumer culture. Rather, the point is that here a human being or a human institution—in the story it is the president of the United States of Europe and world emperor, the world government—believes it knows what each individual human being strives for, what each individual human being needs and desires; and thinks it can give it to them. Instead of creating a state in which every human being can strive for the perfection he has in mind, the alleged benefactor gives people a pattern of perfection and asks them to conform to this pattern. He pretends to know what is good for everyone and everything—this formula of control, containment, moral paternalism, and spiritual subjugation is what the Anti-Christ ultimately boils down to. With this containment, the Anti-Christ ends history by literally *closing* it: it becomes a dungeon, in which people are locked up and from which there

⁶In its philosophical essence Solovyov's *Übermensch* is similar, but not identical with Nietzsche's *Übermensch*.

is no escape by their own efforts. History freezes. Rigidity and stagnation—this is ultimately the evil in Solovyov, which grew out of the denial of Christ, the God-Man, and thus of the transcendence of the human soul.

Does Kojève's secularization-translation of this evil principle undo the confinement of the human soul or mind (spirit)? Yes and no.

In his commentary on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Kojève opposes the Anti-Christ/Man-God not with the God-Man, who is denied by the Man-God and vouches for the transcendence of the human soul, but with an *immanent transcending*, the creative power of the human spirit to negate, which Hegel calls dialectics, and which allows man to grow beyond his own creations again and again and to create something new. For the theistic tradition, Kojève says, the spirituality of man manifests itself in the beyond, and the spirit in the proper sense is God, an infinite, eternal being. Man is spiritual insofar as he is eternal too; he is immortal as spirit. According to this tradition, man has an immortal soul (the spirit within him) that belongs to a transcendent world. This transcendent world is not actually human, and the historical world is only its reflection. It is a divine, otherworldly, non-natural world, and its totality—the spirit—is not man, but God. According to Hegel, Kojève says, however, spiritual (dialectical) beings are temporal and finite. Spirit cannot be infinite, as the Judeo-Christian tradition holds—only nature, the static being identical with itself, is infinite; dynamic, historical being, on the other hand, is finite. Free individuality, Hegel concludes according to Kojève, must be finite and temporal, mortal. Man is real only in the womb of nature; outside it he is nothing. This denial of survival is at the same time the denial of God. Man negates nature by his deed, but outside the natural world there is nothing. The so-called transcendent, divine world is only the transcending of human existence, which, however, does not transcend the natural world in time and space. All this leads finally to the conclusion, that the absolute spirit or substance-subject is not God (cf. Kojève 1996, p. 227). This, according to Kojève, is Hegel's break with the theistic tradition. Spirit's creative power of negation, of immanent transcending, is reminiscent of Goethe's Mephistopheles, who confesses to "that power which eternally wills evil and eternally works good." And yet also Kojève, like Solovyov, lets history end. It has to end; historical existence is finite. Does it end with the creation of the good? Does it end good?

The End of History is the subject of Kojève's famous two footnotes to his commentary on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The first is in its 1947 edition, as a footnote to the 1938–39 lecture course (Kojève 1979, pp. 434–435); it refers to a reflection in the lecture text on "Sein" (in the original in German), more precisely on the Hegelian conception of reality, which is, according to Kojève, both ontological and metaphysical. At this point in the lecture, Kojève is concerned with the fact that the human being is a different being than nature. Nature, in a Hegelian conception, is independent of man. It is an eternal being (*étant éternelle*) that existed before man and will also exist after him (cf. *ibid.* 434); "Sein" or "Raum" (in the original in German) is eternal, indeed timeless nature (*ibid.*, 435). On the other hand, "... l'Homme qui est temps disparaît aussi dans la Nature spatiale. Car cette Nature survit au Temps" (*ibid.*, 434): "Man, who is temporal, also disappears from the space of nature. For this nature survives time." If man will disappear at the End of history (which Kojève believes has not yet occurred at this point), the footnote says, then he will not (yet)

disappear as a biological species. The disappearance as a biological species is what the quoted passage in the continuous text is about. The footnote text places a different emphasis; that at the End of History, man does not disappear as a biological species. What perishes is the self-consciousness, and with it the spirit (mind). Man remains alive as an animal that lives in harmony with its environment. Man in the real sense disappears in that his action, which nullifies the given, and error disappear. There is then no longer a free historical individual, all historical action (wars, revolutions) ceases. But everything else (art, love, play) that makes man happy will remain.

In his second footnote-to-the-footnote (Kojève 1979, pp. 436–437; immediately following the text of the first footnote), published in 1962 in the second French edition, Kojève exercises self-criticism of the inconsistency of his reflections in the first footnote. If man becomes an animal, Kojève's self-criticism suggests, then art, play, etc. cannot maintain themselves as human activities either, but must become natural again. Human work would cease to be human and would resemble animal work, as we find it in the building of birds' nests, the spinning of spider webs, etc.; that is, expressions of life that belong to the biological organization of the animal in question. The human beings who, at the End of History, live in a perfect final state, as Kojève states in his commentary on Hegel, and work for it, perform this work like bees in an insect state—instinctively.

At the End of History, negation ceases, the creative power of the human spirit dries up. The dialectic that Hegel had explored by examining (his own) human mind/spirit is not only a methodological principle of social-theoretical historical observation in Kojève. It also appears as a principle of history itself; as a motor built into history, as a quasi-objectified principle of the human spirit. One day this motor comes to a standstill, and with it history also ends. It freezes just as it did in Solovyov's story. Just as the Anti-Christ satisfies (almost) all people in the end, in Kojève's narrative people are also completely satisfied in the end and no longer negate. In this respect, Kojève's *posthistoire* differs fundamentally from Hegel's *new epoch* (cf. Hegel 2003, p. 460). The latter begins when the spirit has fully recognized itself; a moment at which, according to Kojève, the End of History sets in. For Hegel, however, something new begins here: from now on, the spirit circulates on its own basis, i.e., freely. This circulating, about which Hegel says nothing more, can again only be a permanent setting and negating; the spirit, unlike in Kojève, does not come to a standstill.

While in Kojève's End of History the *immanent transcending* comes to a halt, there is also no religious transcendence. The standard that, as in Solovyov's narrative, could expose the so called good as a false good, is thus missing. The secularized End of History shines in the opaque ambiguity of a "beyond good and evil"; there seems to be no one left who could examine it and pass judgment on it. Only a human spirit that becomes absolute—as in Hegel—could do that. But the human spirit remains enclosed in its objectifications at the End of History for Kojève—in contradiction to his fundamental characteristic of immanent transcending. Therefore, the question "Is it good, is it evil?" remains unanswered at the End of History.

History ends neither good nor bad in Kojève. But what also comes to an end is the creative principle of negation itself, into which Kojève had translated Solovyov's metaphysical principle of evil. Thus the human spirit ceases its activity, which Kojève apostrophizes as the "End of man." Although he opposes the opposition of Man-God (immanence) and God-Man (transcendence) with something third—immanent

transcending—by invoking Hegel, Kojève also arrives at an End of History that resembles that of Solovyov’s “Short story” about the Man-God/Anti-Christ, except for the missing value judgment.

Therefore, the question is justified whether Kojève has actually moved beyond the Man-God ideology. Or did he develop his own Man-God ideology? An answer to these questions could be provided by examining Kojève’s engagement with Dostoevsky’s Man-God ideologues, which takes place as his progressive inscription into the novel world of late Dostoevsky.

Second case study: Kojève’s defense of Dostoevsky’s Man-God ideologues against their creator

Dostoevsky’s most important contribution to religious philosophy is the philosophical-literary confrontation with positions, which he describes as “Man-Godhood.” He conducts this debate by involving protagonists from his novels, who are ideologues of Man-Godhood in dialogues, during which they put their positions up for discussion.

The category Man-Godhood—as an antithesis to the category God-Manhood—is Dostoevsky’s own religious-philosophical creation, which was taken up and further developed by his successors, especially by Sergei N. Bulgakov. Its meaning can be rendered as apotheosis, which is modeled on theosis, but opposite in content: here, man does not try to approach God in the footsteps of Christ and strive for the greatest possible earthly perfection. (For more cf. Ammer 1988.) Rather, he puts himself—without efforts of self-perfection and Christian work on his own self—in the place of God, whom he denies. In a word, man considers himself to be God. Man-Godhood is an expression of human hubris and blasphemy. It is a concept with the help of which Dostoevsky critically engages with the atheism of his time; with the aim of overcoming this atheism and advancing towards a new religious consciousness.

In the great novels of Dostoevsky’s late work, three characters appear who can be described as ideologues of Man-Godhood. They come from an urban, progressive, and science-loving milieu that is open to progressive ideas from the West. They are students or professional revolutionaries. As brooding intellectuals, they obsess over a particular idea that they have taken from a liberal background or breeding ground in order to radicalize it. Two of them take action to realize the idea; one of them remains in the Hamlet pose of hesitation and procrastination, but has to watch as another takes up his idea and implements it.

Rodion Raskolnikov, the main protagonist of the novel *Crime and Punishment*, worships Napoleon as a Superman (similar to Nietzsche’s Übermensch). For comparison, Kojève characterizes Napoleon as a Man-God (*homme-dieu*; cf. Kojève 1979, pp. 266–267). According to Raskolnikov, everything is permissible for a Superman, even the sacrifice and killing of inferior life in order to reach his goal. “Raskolnikov” is the first, still sketchy draft of a Man-God ideologue. Already more elaborate is the Man-God ideological figure of Alexei Kirillov from *Demons* (another translation of the novel title is “The Possessed”). He has developed a theory according to which a person can prove that he does not actually fear God—i.e., does not believe in him—by committing suicide. In this way, he proves that a transcendent God does not exist

and sets himself up as an earthly Man-God. Here, the concept of Man-God, which is already hinted at in Raskolnikov's Superman, appears explicitly in Dostoevsky's language for the first time. Finally, Ivan Karamazov, the *accomplished Man-God ideologue*, undergoes a development. As a very young man—i.e., in the pre-past of the novel plot *The Brothers Karamazov*—he wrote a “Fragment on the Geological Upheaval.” It would amount to a “geological upheaval” if people one day gave up their belief in God and realized that they themselves were man-gods. At the time of the novel's plot, however (i.e., a few years later), Ivan tells his brother Alyosha the “Poem about the Grand Inquisitor,” which he created and which is a reckoning with his own former Man-God ideology, a document of disillusionment.

Ivan is, in a sense, the sum of the other two Man-God ideologues. With Rodion Raskolnikov he is united by moral nihilism, the idea of being able to decide, like a god, on the value or unvalue of another human life. With Alexei Kirillov he is linked by theoretical atheism, the idea of a fundamental spiritual liberation that is supposed to go hand in hand with liberation from the idea of God. Unlike Kirillov, however, he does not proceed to action—to the implementation of the Man-God ideology—but thinks it through to the end, to an end of disillusionment.

It seems that Kojève, in his engagement with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, like Ivan, has gone all the way along the path of the Man-God ideologue. Is Kojève's path a mere reenactment of the Man-God ideological transformation imagined by Dostoevsky, or is it more than that?

First of all, Kojève's discourse is a struggle with Dostoevsky. Kojève defends the literary Man-God ideologists against their creator and critic Dostoevsky; and this defense is at the same time a critical revision and reformulation of the Man-God ideology in three steps:

1) Alexei Kirillov and Kojève

In Chapter IV of his Commentary on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (“The Dialectic of Reality and the Method of Phenomenology”), Kojève emphasizes that no animal can commit suicide out of mere shame or out of mere vanity, as Kirillov wanted to do in Dostoevsky's “Possessed” (cf. Kojève 1996, p. 187). Kojève's discourse on suicide in an early text unpublished during his lifetime (Kozhev 2007, pp. 50–174, see pp. 132–136) is not dissimilar to Kirillov's thinking on suicide. In the context of Kojève's thought, Kirillov has been discussed as a “theorist of suicide” (Love 2018, p. 51) by Jeff Love (Love 2018, pp. 50–56). In his early text entitled “Ateizm” (“Atheism”) (Kozhev 2007, pp. 50–174), written in 1931, Kojève was already beginning to inscribe himself in Dostoevsky's ideal-typical late novel by partially identifying himself as a philosophizing subject with one of Dostoevsky's Man-God ideologues. This *inscription* finds its continuation in his later commentary on Hegel. In this commentary Kojève writes, Kirillov wants to take his own life only to prove that man can do so freely—without necessity. His suicide, Kojève explains, is meant to prove man's absolute freedom, i.e., his independence vis-à-vis God (cf. Kojève 1996, p. 323, footnote 36). According to Kojève, Dostoevsky contradicts Kirillov's thesis, by trying to show that man cannot commit suicide as a proof of his absolute freedom, because he would in fact shrink from death. But finally, Kirillov

commits suicide out of shame that he cannot do it. His shame is greater than Kirillov's fear of death. Thus, Kojève argues, the character Kirillov wins over his creator Dostoevsky, because no animal can feel shame; and suicide out of shame is also a free act. By committing suicide, therefore, Kirillov has indeed, just as he wanted, abolished the omnipotence of the transcendent (by dying before the hour of death set for him) and limited infinity or God.

Kojève here explicitly defends the atheistic reasoning in the discourse of this character against the theism of its creator Dostoevsky; thus, he takes sides with the Man-Godhood that Dostoevsky wanted to reduce to absurdity. Whoever overcomes the fear of death becomes God himself, Kirillov preaches. By killing himself for no reason, he wants to demonstrate his autonomous will. This, he says, is the attribute of divinity he has long sought.

With his suicide, he wants to prove that he has recognized his divinity—in the form of the divine attribute, the all-encompassing free will. By making use of it and killing himself, he sets a sign for the future human beings who will realize the human divinity, as he believes. This realization will consist in an uncharacterized physical transformation of man and the world; in the creation of an earthly paradise. Kirillov wants to redeem people by proclaiming to them this doctrine of salvation of the Man-God.

From Kirillov's ideology, Kojève only picks out the moment Kirillov proves that there is no God; and that man can be without God. He does not address Kirillov's idea of the deification of man at all, but refers to him only in the point of denying a God as an absolute Lord on whom man is dependent, and as a totality that limits man. In another context in which Kojève refers to Kirillov, it is also clear that he excludes the idea of deification from his partisanship of Kirillov. Suicide in the manner of Kirillov, Kojève says, limits the omnipotence of all those who are not the one who kills himself; and thus also the omnipotence of God who thus ceases to be divine (cf. Kojève *ibid.*, 329, footnote 4). For divine, according to Kojève, can only be something that can act on me without my being able to act back in an adequate way—that is, a being that is more powerful than I am and on whom I am completely dependent. Kojève's train of thought is different from the one Dostoevsky gives his character Kirillov. If God ceases to be this all-powerful being endowed with an all-encompassing will, this does not at all mean that now man becomes the owner of such an all-encompassing will, as Kirillov postulates. Rather, the fact that God is not, means, that the "natural place" of human beings "after their death" is not, i.e., there is no resurrection (cf. Kojève *ibid.*, 281). Obviously, then, the loss of God's divinity does not at all mean for Kojève that man becomes divine. Kojève does not follow Kirillov precisely with regard to his central, fixed idea, which is, that the human being, who realizes that there is no God, must at the same time become aware of his own divinity. This compulsive nexus does not exist in Kojève.

Kojève accepts Kirillov's very special proof of man's freedom through suicide, and he explicitly defends its plausibility against Dostoevsky, who doubts it. However, explanations of a utopian divinity of the *new man* aspired to by Kirillov are completely absent in Kojève. In Kojève, only the first part of Kirillov's human divinity remains: the human god is free of God. The Man-God, however, is not a god-like-man, as Kirillov thinks; he is not a man-as-god. The "A" in atheism here does not stand for

an “against” but for a “without.” With Kojève, Man-God becomes man-without-God. In this way, Kojève professes a revised Man-God ideology. Although it is also based on the insight (gained by Kojève with Hegel's help) that God is not; it lacks blasphemy and hubris. Since man lacks divine traits here, Kojève's Man-God cannot be characterized as a kind of God.

For Kirillov in *Demons*, Man-God was at first simply the one who can live without God, without the hope of an eternal life beyond, who is no longer a *slave* of God and, to prove this independence, is even prepared to die by suicide. But independence from God is, for Kirillov, only one moment of Man-Godhood. Man-without-God at the same time becomes God himself, whose essential attribute is self-will, the full possession of willpower. Kirillov can only prove his freedom as negative; his suicide proves that he is free *from* God. But free *for* what? That, he thinks, will only be demonstrated by the future Man-Gods for whom Kirillov has sacrificed himself. We learn more about this positive freedom through Ivan Karamazov, the next prototype of the Man-God ideologue.

2) Ivan Karamazov and Kojève

Ivan Karamazov had written in his early youth that a geological upheaval will occur when belief in God is eradicated. The old worldview and with it the old morality will perish and something new will begin. People will live in the here and now, for their happiness and joy in this world. Man will rise in the spirit of divine, titanic pride and Man-God will appear (cf. Dostoevskii 1970, vol. 2, p. 376). Thanks to his willpower and science, man will finally conquer nature, and this will give him such satisfaction that he will forget all promises of heavenly joys. The belief in a resurrection will no longer be needed, for this human being, who already realizes himself perfectly in this world, will calmly accept the knowledge of his own mortality.

This Man-God is also a man-without-god. He, too, is characterized above all by his outstanding willpower; he has no need of an afterlife, and he calmly accepts his own mortality. But in Ivan's description, the positive traits of the future Man-God already emerge more clearly than in Kirillov's manic circling of thoughts. Man-God is characterized as a titan, who transforms nature with the help of science, and is boundlessly creative.

At Kojève's End of History, humans also live in a completely tamed nature—but not as creators and builders of this world. They are not will-people, not titans, but work little or not at all and spend most of their time as consumers. These subjects are reminiscent of Nietzsche's *last men*. As Taubes states, in Kojève, the End of History reveals its Medusian face in Nietzsche's perspective of the 'last man,' who invented happiness (cf. Taubes 2007, p. 48).

With regard to Ivan Karamazov's titanic Man-God utopia, Kojève's posthistoire narrative thus bears clearly sarcastic traits. This sarcasm is aimed at the utopian elements of “Geological Upheaval”; it is Kojève's way of stating the failure of utopia a good 70 years after Dostoevsky. The utopian element has been eliminated from the idea, reducing it to something simple: Man-God is not a titan, not a new, godlike man, but, quite laconically, a man-without-god.

But Ivan Karamazov, Dostoevsky's novel character, already knew about his failure as a Man-God ideologist. Not for nothing did Dostoevsky call him (outside the novel)

an atheist suffering from his unbelief (cf. Dostoevskii 1991), i.e., his Man-God ideology. The parable of the Grand Inquisitor he created, especially the description of a gloomy end-time regime from the mouth of the figure of the Grand Inquisitor, imagined by Ivan, is an expression of this disillusionment. If Kojève's posthistoire relates parodically and sarcastically to Ivan's human-god utopia, how can we characterize his relationship to the end-time regime of the Grand Inquisitor?

3) *The Grand Inquisitor and Kojève*

The parable *The Grand Inquisitor*,⁷ called "Poem" by his author and character within the novel *Ivan*, contains a long monologue in which the titular Grand Inquisitor is confessing before Christ. In this monologue, one moment is of particular importance for our subject.

I would call it the "prophecy" of the Grand Inquisitor, which develops out of a question, asked by him. Christ had rejected the temptation to win people over by turning stone into bread, saying that man does not live by bread alone. But, the Grand Inquisitor asks him, do you not know that in the name of this earthly bread the spirit of the earth will rise up against you and defeat you, and all will follow him? (cf. Dostoevskii 1970 [1], p. 296). Centuries will pass, the old man prophesies, and humanity, in the guise of its sages and scientists, will proclaim that there is neither crime nor sin, but only starvation. This will be the slogan with which they will oppose Christ and destroy his temple. In its place they will build a new Babylonian tower, but this one will fail just as the first one did. The Babylonian tower thus stands for the attempt of an atheist regime to solve the social question (which arose during Dostoevsky's lifetime).

After they have struggled with their tower for 1000 years and have not managed to finish it, they will come to us, the Grand Inquisitor continues. They will look for us in the catacombs, because we will be persecuted again. They will beg us: Give us food! For those who promised us fire from heaven have not kept their promise. (Prometheus, the Titan and bringer of fire, is a central metaphor of Man-Godhood.) Then, says the old man, we will finish building their tower, and we will make them full, supposedly in your name. Never will they solve the hunger problem without us. No science will satisfy them as long as they remain free, for they are incapable of sharing.

People, says the Grand Inquisitor, will only be happy when we lead them again like a flock. And in the name of authority we will finally unite people globally and thus realise an age-old dream of humanity, the dream of all the conquerors, the Timurids and Chingiz-Khans, we will unite them in an unquestionable (*besspornyi*), i.e., alternativeless, overall (*obshchii*), i.e., universal and concordant (*soglasnyi*), i.e., homogeneous anthill. We will give them a quiet, modest happiness, the happiness of the weak beings that they are. This happiness of children will be sweeter than any other happiness. Yes, we make them work, but in their free time we organise for them a life that resembles a child's play, with children's songs and round dances, innocent

⁷The parallels in content between the "Grand Inquisitor" and the "Short Story of the Antichrist," and thus also between the two title characters as two figures of the "Man-God," are unmistakable. They point to the question of Dostoyevsky's influence on Solovyov. On this, see Lauth (1954).

dances. We also allow them to sin, for they are weak; and they will love us for the fact that any sin that takes place with our permission is atoned for in advance. They will have no secrets from us. We will allow or forbid them to live with their wives and lovers, to have children or not. Thus we will free them from the present terrible torments of personal free choice. Their lives will be happy and end in death, for if there were anything in the world beyond, it would certainly not be for such as they are. I too, the old man confesses, was in the desert and fasted, I too tried to live like an ascetic, I too placed freedom, which you wanted to bring to mankind, above all else. But I came to my senses and no longer wanted to serve madness. So I joined those who are correcting your project, and our kingdom will come.

Important is Ivan's complicated positioning as the author of the poem and vis-à-vis its title character, the Grand Inquisitor. Ivan loves Jesus but does not believe in him. The Grand Inquisitor's secret is also that he does not believe in God, as Alyosha states—and Ivan agrees with him. And the last confession of the old man is actually Ivan's confession as well: Finally, he must realize that miserable rebels will never become those titans who are able to finish building the tower. Understanding all this, he turned back and joined the ... Ivan pauses for a moment, obviously searching for the right word ... wise people (cf. *ibid.* 305–306). Seen in this way, the contrast between Jesuan piety and theocratic rule, emphasized by Carl Schmitt,⁸ does not exist as an absolute: the Jesuan rebel himself very often becomes wise in the course of his life and turns into a grand inquisitor. Ivan anticipates his own transformation into a grand inquisitor (which he wants to avoid by planning to take his own life at the age of 30), when he suggests that unbelief means great suffering for a person like the Grand Inquisitor, who gave his life to emulate Christ as an ascetic, and who is still not cured of love for humanity. In order to help weak people, he has to deceive them and betray the ideal he has believed in all his life—is that not a misfortune, Ivan asks. Again, Ivan, not the Grand Inquisitor he imagined, is an atheist suffering from his unbelief, as Dostoevsky emphasized in the preface to a public reading of the story (cf. Dostoevskii 1991). The Grand Inquisitor is one perspective of Ivan. Do not look for a historical model for the discourse of the Grand Inquisitor, Bulgakov also says, for in the fantastic image of the medieval Inquisitor one finds only the grieving and restless soul of Ivan (cf. Bulgakov 1991, p. 207).

There are various readings of the poem, as the now unmanageable multitude of artistic, literary, and philosophical interpretations that have grown up to the present-day shows. I read the poem as a document of the disillusionment of a Man-God ideologue, with the *prophecy* of the Grand Inquisitor marking a specific layer of meaning. It touches on the opposition of faith and atheism, or, in the terminology of the discourse thematized here, of God-Man and Man-God.

The Grand Inquisitor *prophesies* that his present medieval theocratic regime (set in the time of the poem's action, that is in the sixteenth century) will be replaced by an era of Man-Godhood, i.e., atheism—this is modernity (Dostoevsky's present), which for today's readers extends further; to the upheavals of the twentieth century that actualize modernity; including the communist or socialist revolutions and the political systems that emerged from them and have since fallen again in Europe. These

⁸For more see Meuter 1994, p. 488.

upheavals began to emerge during Dostoevsky's lifetime, which at times created a gloomy mood of doom among him and his contemporaries (such as Solovyov, as was shown not least in his *Short story* about the Anti-Christ).

This era—meaning modernity—will, according to the Grand Inquisitor, come to an end and will eventually be followed by a new God-Manhood, a New Middle Ages, a new theocratic rule, which will be exercised by a priestly caste that is itself atheistic. This priestly caste will herd people like a flock and provide them with a religion (or ideology) to free them from the burden of free conscience. It will then be sufficient to follow the prescribed patterns of thought and speech in order to live quietly and comfortably.

It may be, Ivan replies to Alyosha's objection, that the infidel rulers of this theocratic regime are in truth driven only by base material interests and greed for power. But if there were among them, at the head of their army, even one such person, as the Grand Inquisitor he conceived, an idealist who loves the weak people and will lead the flock out of love for them, then a real guiding idea will eventually be found; a higher idea of this whole thing. Cynicism and opportunism thus prove to be the reverse side of his pure, honest idealism in Ivan himself; a sinister-ambient trait that corresponds to his role in the novel-fable as an idealistic youth on the one hand, and as the spiritual author of a murder on the other.

Kojève's resemblance to this image of the Grand Inquisitor conceived by "Ivan," in which, as Sergei Bulgakov noted, Ivan's soul is enclosed, is striking. For Kojève is the one who actually invented a "guiding idea," "a higher idea for this whole thing": It is he, who actually developed a leading idea or ideology for the epoch that followed modernity, which in Dostoevsky is a new Middle Ages marked by the end-time regime of the Grand Inquisitor. This guiding idea is Kojève's concept *posthistoire*.

Thus, while on the one hand the *posthistoire* behaves like an ironic-affirmative, mildly sarcastic parody of the Man-God utopia, on the other hand it looks like the further development of the ideological design of the Grand Inquisitor prophecy. It appears as a legitimizing ideology of the post-modern positive state; that is, as a "higher idea" masking simple power interests and material greed. The most important points of connection between *posthistoire* ideology and *prophecy* are the keywords homogeneity and universality, and the image of the ant. Kojève states that history will thus come to an end when man is fully satisfied by the fact that he is a citizen recognized by a homogeneous world state; or by a classless society encompassing the whole of humanity (cf. Kojève 1996, p. 288). Global unification, according to Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, will transform humanity into an alternativeless, universal and homogeneous anthill. On the End of History, according to Kojève, people still work, but their work resembles that of bees—one might as well say "of ants."

But the most important common feature of the end-time regime on the one hand and *posthistoire* on the other is the liberation announced by the Grand Inquisitor from the "terrible torments of personal free choice," i.e., the fundamental unfreedom that we find again in Kojève's concept of *posthistoire* in the subject position of the unfree spirit that no longer criticizes and negates.

Therefore, the temptation is great, to balance Kojève's engagement with Man-God as a progressive inscription in Dostoevsky's text: While the still young Kojève appears in his discourse in the pose of a *Russian youth* from Dostoevsky's novels, the

ideas of the 60-year-old Kojève resemble those of Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor." Symbolically, both positions correspond with the starting and end points of the path that the novel figure Ivan Karamazov travels as a still very young man—before his 30th birthday, which he had set as the deadline for committing suicide—from the Man-God utopia of the "Geological Upheaval" to the idea of the post-historical administration of the human herd in the "Poem of the Grand Inquisitor." In contrast to *Ivan's Way*, however, Kojève's path does not exhibit the tension of disillusionment. Kojève was never an idealistic youth. Just as his ironic Man-Godhood is not a utopia, his posthistoire is not conceived as a dystopia. Rather, his ironic Man-Godhood is a mildly sarcastic parody of the Man-Godhood in Dostoyevsky's novels; and his posthistoire is an ideology of legitimization for the exercise of power in the anticipated postmodern age. As such, it then also made a career for itself.

The essay showed in detail, how Kojève's paradoxical anchoring in a current within the Russian religious-philosophical tradition is shaped by an implicit dispute with this philosophy; and what this engagement on a *side stage* (next to the main stage of western philosophy) actually means for Kojève's philosophizing. In this dispute, Kojève defends the concept of Man-Godhood (i.e., atheism) against the theism of Solovyov and Dostoevsky, modifying it in the light of the theistic critique, but without returning to theism. He remains with atheism, or more precisely with a revised Man-Godhood. This defense-revision is an important philosophical contribution to the argument against religious philosophy. But this philosophical debate is intimately connected with Kojève's ideological work. As a result, his revised ideology of Man-Godhood takes the form of a parody of the old Man-Godhood, as drawn by Dostoevsky, on the one hand, and of a legitimizing ideology of post-modern exercise of power on the other.

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