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В сборнике статей, созданном на базе НУЛ Трансцендентальной философии НИУ ВШЭ (Москва) представлены работы широкого тематического спектра, в которых авторы обращаются к аппарату трансцендентальной философии. Смысловое ядро сборника составляют исследования, посвященные непосредственно теории Канта и проблематизирующие содержание кантовской эпистемологии, этики и натурфилософии. Рассматриваются вопросы, связанные с кантовским пониманием трансцендентального субъекта и метафизики, а также с особенностями трактовки Кантом логики и применимостью разработанных им аргументов к описанию истории и веры. В других статьях раскрывается философский потенциал трансцендентальной методологии в области антропологии, философии искусства, феминистской теории, философии психиатрии, теории постгуманизма.

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## A. Kojève: Subject is an Action – Labor and Struggle<sup>1</sup>

А. Кожев: Субъект как действие. Труд и борьба<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

Alexander Kozhevnikov or Alexander Kozhev, who still makes us proud of his Russian origin, belongs to the category of philosophers of the past century, who can be called the embodiment of the dialogue between the culture of Russia and the West. The French philosophical community of intellectuals did not favour German classical philosophy too much and rather wondered whether it should follow the path of emerging positivism or choose another path, the path of new humanism. It was during this period of uncertainty and the search for its own way that French philosophical society was almost blown up by Kozhev's brilliant lectures on Hegel. Kozhev, who never speaks openly about his Russian identity in the context of his philosophical views, brings a completely new and unusual perspective on European consciousness, inspired by the piety before Hegel and Shelling that was so prevalent in Russia. He is no longer afraid of the revolutions he caught up with in the 1905 revolution, but even openly calls for them. And what seems twice as revolutionary here is that he calls for a prosperous Western society. We know from history that this prosperity will soon begin to collapse. Leather will be the first to explain the approaching catastrophe. In this article, we will trace the logic of his reasoning, the history of divergence with Hegel's phenomenology, as well as the motive of man's exaltation, which is important for the whole of his philosophy and retains its relevance up to the present day, and ironically in Russia.

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**Key words:** A. Kozhev, negativity, anthropology of negativity, action, person.

### **Аннотация**

Александр Кожевников или Александр Кожев, до сих пор побуждающий нас гордиться его русским происхождением, относится к той категории философов минувшего столетия, которых можно назвать воплощением диалога между культурой России и Запада. Французское философское сообщество интеллектуалов, не слишком благоволило немецкой классической философии и скорее размышляло над тем, идти ли ей по пути нарождающегося позитивизма или избрать иной путь, путь нового гуманизма. Как раз в этот период неопределённости и поисков своего пути, французское философское общество оказалось почти взорванным блестящими лекциями Кожева о Гегеле. Кожев, никогда открыто не говорящий о своей русскости в контексте философских взглядов, привносит совершенно новый и необычный ракурс на европейское сознание, вдохновляясь тем пиететом перед Гегелем и Шеллингом, которые были так распространены в России. Заставший революцию 1905 года он уже не боится революций, но даже открыто призывает к ним. И вдвойне революционным представляется здесь то, что к революции, он призывает благополучное западное общество. Из истории мы знаем, что уже скоро это благополучие начнёт рушиться. Кожев будет первым, кто даст приближающейся катастрофе свое объяснение. В этой статье мы проследим логику его рассуждений, историю расхождения с феноменологией Гегеля, а также мотив возвышения человека, важнейший для всей его философии и сохраняющий свою актуальность вплоть до наших дней, причем по иронии судьбы именно в России.

**Ключевые слова:** А. Кожев, негативность, антропология негативности, действие, человек

Alexandre Kojève (1902–1968) belongs to the generation of three “H” (Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger) – the times of reception of Hegelian philosophy and phenomenology in France in the 1930s. After leaving Russia in 1920, Kojève settled in Germany, where later, under Jaspers’s guidance, he defended his thesis on the end of history and the unity of the divine and the human nature of Christ in Vladimir Solovyov’s philosophy. Thanks to Alexandre Koyré, Kojève acquainted himself with Hegel’s philosophy, which influenced him a lot. As a

result of him studying the system of the German thinker, the course devoted to the interpretation of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* was prepared, which the French philosopher delivered from 1933 until 1939. The abstracts of the lectures in the version of one of the people attending the seminar, Raymond Queneau, were published in 1947 – in the very same year as the French translation of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* was published; which cannot but lead to the idea that Kojève, in essence, introduced Hegelianism to the French intellectuals of the period. An explosion of interest in the system of the great German thinker led to the fact that from the 1930s until the 1960s dialectics ‘became such a lofty concept that it would have been offensive to request a definition. For thirty years it was almost the God of negative theology – beyond formulation, it could only be approached through the explanation of what it was not’. The Russian Revolution and Lenin’s recommendation to become familiar with Hegel’s works also had a great impact on the appearance of Hegelian Renaissance, as these works were considered to be fundamental for the formation of Marxism. Afterwards, when the intellectual landmarks changed, and three other thinkers came on the French stage – Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, representing the ‘school of suspicion’, – the admiration of Hegel changed for the criticism of dialectic reasoning; but even those thinkers that expressed the disapproving attitude to dialectics, could not be free from it because they were connected to it by the subject ties.

The anthropological interpretation of Hegel suggested by A. Kojève divided the world into two opposing spheres: the kingdom of negativity, where the human being exists, and the kingdom of identity, or the natural dimension of existence. And if history is dialectical, nature has nothing in common with dialectics.

Vincent Descombes, however, noticed that such an ontology is not in fact dualistic insofar as existence and nothing are two meanings of existence, at the intersection of which we can find dialectics: In the long run, as Descombes puts it, we make an assumption regarding existence, where it is defined by “the logical meaning of identity” (Descombes, 1981, 39). Therefore, there is no more “ontological dualism”. This idea is confirmed by Kojève’s passage:

The negating being negates its identity to itself and becomes its own opposite, but it continues to be the same being. And *this, its* unity within opposition to itself, is its *affirmation* in spite of its negation or “dissolution”, or, better, “transformation”. It is as this negating affirmation of itself, as reaffirmation of its original identity to itself, that the being is a “speculative” or “positively rational” entity. Thus Being

which reaffirms itself as Being identical to itself, after having negated itself as such, is neither Identity nor Negativity, but Totality. And it is as Totality that Being is truly and fully dialectical. But Being is dialectical and not tautological Identity because it is also Negativity. Totality is the unifying-unity of Identity and Negativity: it is affirmation by negation (IRH, 202).

Nevertheless, irrespective of how we describe Kojève's ontology, its upshot is the elevation of the human above all nature, as it is human beings and only human beings, this hole in existence, as Sartre put it, that are capable of negation. The negation of present givenness becomes the synonym of freedom: Freedom does not comprise of the choice between two entities: it is the negation of the given as something which is "in-itself" (as animal or an "embedded tradition"), also of what it is not part of (natural and social World)" (Descombes, 1981, 78–79). The same equation of negativity and freedom can be found in Sartre: "Negation tears us free of being" (Sartre, 1955, 183–190). Moreover, negativity as a concept includes the idea of dialectic becoming in itself; in other words, time is a sort of entry into the world of creation. The privilege of a person as a being negating existence lies in their ability to create history. This idea is directly connected to the pragmatic conception of truth as negation. Descombes characterises it in the following way: "Today's error will turn out to be the future truth: "dialectic feat" that will perform the action" (Descombes, 1981, 22).

Therefore, for Kojève concept of truth is not theoretical, it is quite literally the result of a completed action. Truth is not to be "found", it is proactively implemented to world, destroying all the obstacles in the process. Successfully implemented truth becomes objective reality and justification for sin (negation) that was committed in the process. The question is, how can this recognition of the truth be measured? Complete recognition, he proposes, is only possible at the end of the history (Descombes, 1981, 21), which is the product of negating activity; struggle and labour, drive the mechanism of history.

The problem of human being is predominant in Kojève's works. He stated that the essence and novelty of Hegel's philosophy is expressed in foreword to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: "In my opinion, which should be justified only by the narration of the system itself, the matter is to understand and express the truth not only as a *substance*, but equally as a subject" (IRH, 172).

However, while sharing the Hegelian view on the dialectic identity of the subject and the substance, Kojève voids it of objectively idealistic content. For Hegel, the subject-substance is spirit under-

stood as “a particular real entity taken *separately* but understood as an *integral element* of Totality” (Ibid, 174). *By separating and then returning to itself in the process of history, spirit represents the self-consciousness of the absolute idea performing the dialectic and ascending to the absolute knowledge.* Kojève writes: Man is Self-Consciousness. He is conscious of himself, conscious of his human reality and dignity; and it is in this that he is essentially different from animals, which do not go beyond the level of simple Sentiment of self. Man becomes conscious of himself at the moment when – for “the first time” – he says “I”. To understand man by understanding his “origins” is, therefore, to understand the origin of I revealed by speech (Ibid, 3).

Kojève unites Hegelian atheism with its anthropology, replacing the absolute spirit, creator of history through the human activity by the self-sufficient human spirit. Therefore, Kojève emphasizes the comprehension of human activity and existence.

The ontology of his anthropology is inherently dualistic: “identity and negativity are two primordial and universal ontological categories” (Ibid, 199). Kojève provided numerous synonyms for each of these two concepts in his works. The “identity” is also mentioned as “present-given existence”, “substance”, “self-identity”, “thesis”, “object”, “nature” etc.

The *anthropogenesis* is the historic evolution of human subjectivity. Hegel provided anthropogenic transition from consciousness to self-consciousness<sup>1</sup>. Here, the interpretation of Hegelian concept of *Desire* (Begierde) becomes central for Kojève: “Begierde... is directed toward another Desire (and thus is Desire for Recognition) and that realizes itself through Action (*Tat*) negating given-Being. But, once more, this “a priori” construction can be carried out only after the fact” (Ibid, 166). Thus, Desire is the consequence of human being negativity that is directed at changing the surrounding reality. Desire can be also defined as struggle for recognition (Ibid, 166). In particular, in the form of destruction and the appropriation of the object of negation.

The emergence of human desire presupposes anthropogenic transition from desire for a natural thing. The human being is characterized by Desire that “is not transformed into a thing”, Desire towards a Desire. Thus, natural instinct of self-preservation serves the primordial desires of the animal; it is always present-given. The “human desire” is desire for the non-existent in the natural world, something

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<sup>1</sup> PS (Ch. ‘Independence and dependence of self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage’).



that is not related to his biological survival. Human reality, “being essentially Desire and action in terms of Desire ... can be born and maintained only within an animal life. But it is equally impossible when only one of the adversaries is killed ... This multiplicity, this “society” must in addition imply two essentially different human or anthropogenetic behaviours” (Ibid, 8).

Kojève implies that negation is the tool for human being to appropriate the reality, reality that is a source of infinite dissatisfaction for being. According to Hegel, the human being is not only what he is, but also what he can be, negating the fact that he is present. The human being is directed to the future and is not equal to himself at any point of the time. The human being generates the difference between itself-present and itself-future, while being “self-identical”. This identity is related to own negative entity, which is maintained by constant negating. However, according to Kojève, “Being that reaffirms itself as Being identical to itself, after having negated itself as such, is neither Identity nor Negativity, but Totality. And it is as Totality that Being is truly and fully dialectical. But Being is dialectical Totality and not tautological Identity because it is also Negativity. Totality is the unifying-unity of Identity and Negativity: it is affirmation by negation” (Ibid, 202).

The eventual implementation of “project” in reality is the end goal of the human being’s labour. In negating the present for the future, it transforms reality according to the idea, created by thought and speech and based on “knowledge of the Past”.

Consequently, human practice is inseparably connected with discourse (*logos*). Therefore the human being in Kojève is the subject for both activity and speech. For Kojève, the ability for abstract reasoning is manifested by speech. “We deal here, – as Kojève marks, – with the negation of present-given as it is given (by “natural” connection of entity and existence)”; in other words, creation (of concepts...); in other words, acting or work.

Through the concepts of time and death, “Phenomenology of Spirit” addressed the negativity of abstraction. Any conceptual understanding (*Begreifen*) “is equivalent to murder”, – Kojève interprets Hegel’s position in such a way. Developing his thought, he gives the following example: the word “Dog” reveals the essence of the dog, and without this word this essence would not be revealed to men; but the essence of the *dog* is what realizes the meaning of the word; the dog is what allows man to develop the word “Dog” into a judgment, saying: “the dog is an animal with four feet, covered with hair, etc” (IRH, 107). If a dog or any living creature in general or an object

did not change in time and in the end would not die, then abstraction would also be impossible as its essence as an object would always be equal to its existence. The influence of future negativity provokes constant changes of the object, shifting it from present to past, allowing the separation of the empirical experience (directed towards past) and essence.

The natural life of an animal is characterized by living here and now (*hic et nunc*) that represents the present-given existence. The animal is able to surpass its present-given experience through illness, which abstracts it by displacing its natural topos. Its singularity is left forfeit, and animal becomes a general concept. However, this difference will be eventually illuminated by this very illness (Ibid, 187). The animal essence on human being may turn sick and die, the human being is able to create individuality by dialectical synthesis of the singular and the general. Maintaining the natural essence of the present-given human being augments it with speech, struggle and labour (reasonable actions) of the Universal (Ibid, 187). Therefore, this interminable struggle of Singular and Universal is the reason for the very possibility for human freedom and individuality. This opposition is manifested through disease (disagreement between an animal and the natural world) and death of animal. This process also encompasses the animal essence in human being (Ibid).

Human being through the speech discloses the endless totality of existence. Kojève explains the process and structure of such disclosure by a finite creature:

The human being reveals separate parts of totality one by one, gradually, and in order to be able to do so, he *puts* it to pieces, only the total of speeches spread in time can reveal the total reality... As a matter of fact, these moments are not separated from that integral that they are part of, being connected between themselves by space and time ties, let us say material, which are inseparable. Their *separation* can *astonish*, and the power producing them can be called “absolute”. This is “a separate solitary unit by giving him direction for his entire life (Ibid, 174).

The present reality as the “absolute essential-Reality” (Ibid, 175) is therefore real-revealed-by-speech. This is what Hegel calls “Spirit” (Geist)”. Whereby the human being as the subject of speech cognizing the reality becomes a part of that reality. In the synthetic totality of discourse, the subject of speech is identical to its object – the person-in-the world. The category “person-in-the world” can be understood as a substance transformed by the human being itself. Therefore, the spirit is born and is seen as the unity of the subject and

object, the subject and substance. However, the spirit has purely human negativity at its basis and is deprived of any objective-idealistic content. The integrity of all philosophical discourses disclosing the separate fragments of the total reality, generates a discursive totality or, in other words, the absolute knowledge of Hegel's philosophical Science (Selcer, 2000, 181–191).

The human subjectivity was eventually destroyed by the appearance of absolute knowledge. The ultimate appeasement of insatiable hunger for recognition leaves the person without its driving force, no longer in the opposition to the subject. Such a person loses its negating potential, until it disappears as negating present action and eventually loses its connection to negativity. This leads to the literal standstill, absence of any action or in Kojève terms disclosure of their philosophical discourse and the “disappearance of wars and bloody revolutions” (Sinnerbrink, 2007).

Therefore, the history, which led to the creation of Hegelian Science, is exhausted. As the result, every citizen of such universal homogenous state is devoid of human capability to negate, becoming no more than just a happy animal. Kojève characterises this post-historical period by an appeal to Marx's philosophy: “proper History, where men (classes) fight among themselves for recognition and fight against nature by work, is called in Marx “Realm of Necessity” (*Reich der Notwendigkeit*); *beyond (jenseits)* is situated the “Realm of Freedom” (*Reich der Freiheit*) in which men, mutually recognizing one another without reservation, no longer fight and work as little as possible (Nature having been definitively mastered – that is, harmonized with Man)” (IRH, 159). Nevertheless, this post-historical person is not free as freedom presupposes a connection with negativity and death. That post-historical person is mortal; however, he lives and dies as an animal, as he does not negate the present-given existence. The being freed of negativity loses its freedom.

Thus, the human being manifests through actions as the subject of negativity. The concept of “amazing power of reason” should not be criticized despite the fact that human history is the history of death, destruction or war caused by the limitless power. The ultimate goal is the state of universal recognition, and this progression is supported by the phenomenological agents of the essence of the human being, such as power, violence and death. Therefore, Kojève regards any action and exercise of negating power, however scary and bloody, just as a necessary stage of historical development. The history will end as a totality, utopian world of universal recognition with no space for

contradictions. This concept shows that Kojève's atheistic eschatology is both ruthless and optimistic (Selcer, 2000, 181–191).

Thus, Kojève draws our attention to the fact that Hegel holds an ambiguous position with respect to negativity and its immediate connection with the subject. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* he appears to assume that the source of negativity in existence is the human being itself, whereas in the rest of his works, he presents dialectic as universal characteristic of the whole world: the world (existence) is dialectical not because there is a human being in it but because there is time that encompasses both the world of nature and the world of person – the world wholly deploys itself in time. Kojève draws our attention to the contradiction (or to be precise to the “fantastical character”) of the second approach and will insist that it is in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* that Hegel expresses his true opinion. But whatever the case, Kojève himself agrees only with the “anthropological” explanation of negativity. And it is this thought that will become the key for subsequent post-Hegelian thought (French, in particular).

How does the *anthropological* version of the explanation of negativity differ from the so-called “natural-philosophical” one? The matter concerns the area in which negativity occurs and the scale at which it spreads. If we believe that it is not only the person but also *nature* that is implicated in negativity – which means it can cancel itself dialectically and negate itself by destructing some of its states in order for others to come in their place – then we are essentially *natural philosophers*. The *anthropological* version, envisages that there is nothing negative in the world apart from the person (his practical activity). From the anthropological point of view, there is no negativity in nature at all: taking into account all apparent changes, it is always *the same*. Any natural thing, for example a birch tree, is only its nature dictates. It is unable to change so dramatically as to change its substantial identity – the existence of being a birch. In spite of any transformation, the birch remains a birch or is simply destroyed altogether. The objects of nature are as such, that they always only *reproduce* themselves (the birch will give life to another new birch, puppies will be born from a dog, and kittens from a cat). We may mistake this simple substantial reproduction for negativity by, but it is not. By contrast, the natural philosophical approach includes these features, attributing dialectic properties to nature itself: an ability to change, to stop being itself, to transform into other state etc. Kojève will try to convince his audience (and he will succeed in this) that “the right dialectics” should give up the temptation of natural philosophy: nature should be regarded as the

offspring of identity and only the human being is the true embodiment of nothing<sup>1</sup>. If nature only duplicates itself in the world, then the person is capable of radical transformations. Only the person can cancel himself in dialectical manner: by not being what he is, and by being of what he is not (IRH, 231).

How does the human being manage to do this? And what is its radicality? It lies in the unique capability for *Action* (Hegel himself says as much, and not only in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*). It is by action that a person can *bring something new into the world*, in its broad sense; that is, something that was not existence in any shape or form before. Only the human being can introduce a *new event* into the world. Kojève presents this as follows: if *da- Sein* corresponds to the Nature, from the point of view of ontology, then it is Tat that represents a person as a Human Being. The Human Being as such is not present-in Existence, but represents creative Action. By acting, he implements and reveals Negativity or its Difference from this natural Existence (Ibid, 231). In this way the human being establishes a direct connection with nothing (negativity), accessing an almost mystical power (attributed by classical metaphysics to nothing more but a transcendent God) to create something from nothing. Therefore, a person is someone who literally creates the world *ex nihilo*, which is possible insofar as he exists as embodied negation. The human being is the only creature in the world that can totally transform itself, to the point of destruction, and this will be completed by a person and not by external reasons and circumstances. For example, only the human being can commit suicide, which no other living creature is capable of. This ability for deliberate self-destruction reveals the true connection to nothing. The human being is therefore humane when it denies any facticity in itself, that is either animal or human, but which is defined by a certain historical or social environment. In spite of the radical self-negation, the person remains in existence. In this way, human existence is defined by a “negative”

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<sup>1</sup> The weakest point of this seemingly convincing argumentation is the attitude to *time*. If we accept the statement on identity of nature, then it will come out that in the nature there is no time. Kojève will say that time (history) is real only for the human world. The nature does not have any history. This proposition might seem not convincing enough and in many aspects as counter-factual. Kojève’s logic, as a matter of fact, is so as to say: ‘the time’ of nature is structured according to Aristotle, – strictly speaking, it is cyclical. The time of the person is structured dialectically on the contrary. But in this respect, the question regarding their correlation and synchrony remains open. Kojève would respond that no synchrony is required—nature is always at rest, it *exists*, the overall dynamics occurs on part of a person and history. As far as nature is concerned, it is involved in this process only as an inert material.

ontology in which existence includes action, which gives existence its dialectical structure.<sup>1</sup>

The human being is a creature capable of negation of present-given in the true dialectic sense. As he cancels and retains himself in this movement of establishing, one would assume that the human being in its essence is a *historical* creature. However, all of this is accessible to him only to that extent that he is an *active* and *productive* condensate of negation in the world. “Generally speaking, Negation, Freedom, and Action do not arise from thought, nor from consciousness of self or of external things; on the contrary, thought and consciousness arise from Negativity which realizes itself and “reveals” itself (through thought in Consciousness) as effective free action” (IRH, 223).

How does all this relate to the *transformation of fundamental ontology into fundamental anthropology*? The approach suggested by Kojève (and partly by Hegel) contributes directly to the development of this transformation by virtue of what I have called the *anthropologization of negativity*. First of all, just as we see in Heidegger, the question concerns the nothing in the depths of existence. The picture that Kojève actually offers to us depicts not of two parallel Existences (existence of nature/identity and existence of human action/negativity), but rather what might be called the structural embeddedness of Nothing in Existence. In this connection, Kojève gives his famous example of a gold ring.

“Let us consider a gold ring. There is a hole, and this hole is just as essential to the ring as the gold is: without the gold, the “hole” (which, moreover, would not exist) would not be a ring; but without the hole the gold (which would nonetheless exist) would not be a ring either. But if one has found atoms in the gold, it is not at all necessary to look for them in the hole. And nothing indicates that the gold and the hole are in one and the same manner (of course, what is involved is the hole as “hole”, and not the air which is “in the hole”). The hole is nothingness that subsists (as the presence of the absence) thanks to the gold which surrounds it. Likewise, Man who is Action could be a nothingness the “nihilates” in being, thanks to the being which it negates” (IRH, 214–215).

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<sup>1</sup> Action, according to Kojève, is condensed in two spheres: in the first, the human being is opposed to the nature, by transforming it, and this transformation represents *labour*, and in the second one, the human being is opposed to another human being, antagonizing him, and this counteraction is the *struggle*. These additional connotations of Action, which are introduced by Kojève, help one better to understanding the revolutionary potential of quite an extensive part of neo-classical philosophy, which was most directly influenced by Kojève’s interpretation of Hegelianism.

And a few pages further on he writes that by acting man “realizes and manifests Negativity or his Difference from natural given Being” (Ibid, 222). As we see, it is the human being that is responsible for there being negation in the world. But here he is involved not by virtue of existing and being able to question existence, but by virtue of active practice – negating the present reality by bringing something *new* into the world. Thus, existence has the appearance that it has due to human being. The philosophical scheme here is similar to that in Heidegger: the human being is presented as a modality of existence, and this modality is then specified as “negativity”, that is, emptiness in existence, to which Kojève then attributes an active practice: “If the “objective reality” of Nature is its real existence, that of Man properly so-called is his effective action” (Ibid, 221). This treatment of the person, the human being, leads to the transition from fundamental ontology to fundamental anthropology, presented here as we find it in Kojève’s work.

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